

# CHAPTER 4: Industrial relations and youth employment

*This chapter gives an overview of the role of industrial relations in promoting schemes to help young people enter the labour market. It focuses on topics for discussion between the social partners and the actions taken and initiatives put in place to try to address the problems associated with youth unemployment.*

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## 4.1. Introduction

The labour market situation of young people has deteriorated as a result of the economic and financial crisis, with possible long-term consequences<sup>(1)</sup>. Policymakers and social partners at all levels are taking steps to avoid a lost generation and to improve young people's access to the labour market.

The chapter begins with a short overview of the labour market situation of young people and the European response. It then looks at industrial relations and young people, in particular collective bargaining and social dialogue on issues such as apprenticeships, traineeships and pay. It also looks at relevant actions in the context of the EU cross-industry and sectoral social dialogue and national social dialogue, before outlining the main trends and the way forward. We include those aged 15–24 when referring to young people and using statistics relating to young people.

The impact of the financial and economic crisis on the labour market situation can be measured in different ways as described below, with results varying between Member States but a deterioration overall<sup>(2)</sup>.

In 2013 the EU-28 youth employment rate (the proportion of the population aged 15–24 in gainful employment) was 32.2%. The rate is significantly

higher in the Netherlands (62.3%), Austria (53.8%), Denmark (53.7%), Germany (46.9%) and the UK (46.3%) and Malta (46.0%). Greece (11.8%), Croatia (14.9%), Italy (16.3%) and Spain (16.8%) and Hungary (19.8%) have the lowest rates. These differences partly reflect the differences in the general labour market conditions of Member States. In certain Member States the youth employment rate is higher because many young people combine (full-time) education with a few hours of employment. These people are registered as 'employed' in labour force statistics.

The unemployment rate is the proportion of unemployed in the labour force<sup>(3)</sup>. Among young people aged 15 to 24, it increased from 19.9% in 2009 to 23.5% in 2013. The situation seems to have improved in most Member States in the first half of 2014 however.

Over the past five years (2009–13), the youth unemployment rate has significantly increased in Bulgaria (16.2% to 28.4%), Croatia (25.1% to 50.0%), Cyprus (13.8% to 38.9%), Greece (25.7% to 58.3%), Portugal (20.3% to 38.1%) and Spain (37.7% to 55.5%). It decreased in Austria, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta and Sweden, ranging from 7.8% to 23%.

The youth unemployment ratio is the proportion of young unemployed people in the total population of the same age. It was 9.9% in the EU-27 in 2013, up from 8.7% in 2009. Less so than the youth unemployment rate, it varies between EU Member States, ranging from 21.0% in Spain and 16.5% in Greece to 4.0% in Germany and Luxembourg, 5.4% in Austria and 6.0% in the Czech Republic.

The proportion of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) is also causing increasing concern in the EU. The proportion of young NEETs is increasing throughout the EU, from 12.4% in 2009 to 12.9% in 2013 in the EU-27 and from 12.4% to 13.0% in the EU-28, with a significant increase in some Member States. Italy (22.2%), Bulgaria (21.6%) and Greece (20.6%) had the highest proportion of young NEETs in 2013. Luxembourg (5.0%), the Netherlands (5.1%) and Denmark (6.0%) had the lowest proportion.

Schemes such as dual training, combining theory and work-based learning, traineeships and apprenticeships help young people to gain work experience and establish the contacts they need to get access to the labour market. In its consultation on a quality framework for traineeships (2012), the Commission noted that 'there is a shortage of such placements due to weak links between educational systems and the labour market, and the difficulties of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in mobilising internal resources in order to manage and mentor trainees'. That said, half of the 18–35 year olds who responded to a 2013 Eurobarometer survey on traineeships had done a traineeship. There are also concerns that some training schemes (see below) exploit young people.

Eurofound (2012) notes that, regardless of their professional status, most young people work in retail and manufacturing. Many also work in the construction sector. The crisis had a major impact on the employment of young

<sup>(1)</sup> See Chapter 1 of *Employment and Social Developments in Europe 2014 on the legacy of the crisis*.

<sup>(2)</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all figures given in this chapter are based on Eurostat data. [data extracted January 2015].

<sup>(3)</sup> The active population includes those who are employed or available and actively seeking work (unemployed), but excludes the economically inactive. Among young people, the latter category includes many full-time students who are not seeking work. See also: [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics\\_explained/index.php/Youth\\_unemployment](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Youth_unemployment)

people in manufacturing and construction. Eurofound notes: 'The number of young people employed in the manufacturing sector decreased from 3.6 million in 2008 to 2.7 million in 2011, while the number working in the construction sector decreased from 2.2 million to 1.6 million'.

When young people do find work, they are more likely to do atypical forms of work such as temporary and fixed-term contracts, often low-paid training contracts. Of those aged 15–24, 42.1% were temporary employees in 2012. Because of their comparatively weak labour market position, young people often have more limited options, leading to more precarious forms of work. This makes them more likely to be made redundant in a crisis situation or economic downturn. This is because employers tend to deal with economic difficulties first by ending temporary and fixed-term contracts or by not renewing them. Young people are also more likely to do involuntary part-time work (32.0% of young workers in part-time employment in 2013).

For many years now, there has been much focus on flexicurity and its effects on the labour market as a whole. Madsen et al (2013) consider the role of flexicurity in the labour market transitions of young workers in Nordic and southern European countries. They note that the crisis has led to increasing divergence in the position of young workers in southern Europe and the Nordic countries. They highlight part-time work as a way of providing more opportunities for training early on in a young person's career, while simultaneously reducing precariousness. They also note that apprenticeship systems and traineeships integrated into education will also make it much easier for young people to integrate into the labour market. These factors are likely to affect young people in the medium and long term.

Nevertheless, Dietrich (2013), in his analysis of youth unemployment between 2001 and 2010, finds that the ratio of youth unemployment to the

corresponding adult rate increased up to 2007, but stagnated or decreased slightly during the crisis years. He notes that 'the development of this ratio seems only to be weakly connected to the business cycle in the 2000s'.

## 4.2. The EU response

With the development of the financial and economic crisis, EU policymakers increasingly recognised the need to tackle the growing problem of youth unemployment. (Table 4.1)

The implementation of the Youth Guarantee is monitored as part of the European Semester. In the 2014 European Semester package of draft Country-Specific Recommendations, the Commission recognised that Member States are making 'substantial efforts' to implement the Youth Guarantee.

The European Commission has underlined the key contribution social partners can make to implementing the Youth Guarantee in the Member States. 'Trade unions can play an important role in ensuring that a Youth Guarantee scheme can be offered in Member States. Employers, particularly the SMEs that have been the main job creators over the past decade, are key to open job opportunities for young people who would not necessarily be the first choice in a normal process of recruitment. Developing the cooperation between employment services and employers should be seen as a long-term investment and as a relationship that grows and matures over time'<sup>(4)</sup>.

Almost all Youth Guarantee implementation plans the Member States have submitted refer explicitly to social partners' involvement in implementing the Youth Guarantee<sup>(5)</sup>.

<sup>(4)</sup> Commission staff working document accompanying the *Proposal for a Council Recommendation On Establishing a Youth Guarantee* (COM(2012) 729 final).

<sup>(5)</sup> See: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1090&langId=en>

The first findings report<sup>(6)</sup> on a set of EU-financed Youth Guarantee pilot actions carried out in 2013–14 underlines that the involvement of employers' organisations has been a key success factor in countries in which such organisations are well represented locally or regionally. It also highlights the mutual benefits of Youth Guarantee actions to young people and social partner organisations. An example is the Vilnius pilot project aimed at helping young people find a first job and increasing membership of trade unions and youth organisations.

The European Union provides funding opportunities to promote youth employment in different policy areas. For instance, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) can support young farmers who are setting up their activities, providing them with better conditions and support for their investment. The European Commission has supported research projects addressing youth unemployment. Two large scale projects started early 2014<sup>(7)</sup> and under Horizon 2020 a call for proposals was launched in 2014 on "Early job insecurity and labour market exclusion". Two new research projects for a total EC contribution of EUR 5 million will start in 2015.

Young people will be among the first to benefit from policies that stimulate job creation such as those called for in the Annual Growth Survey 2015<sup>(8)</sup>. The European Union plays an important role in this regard, through policy coordination and country specific recommendations (the European Semester); by providing financial support and by promoting best practices.

<sup>(6)</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=12614&langId=en>

<sup>(7)</sup> STYLE "Strategic Transitions for Youth Labour in Europe", EUR 5 million EC contribution, 24 partners in 20 EU countries, <http://www.style-research.eu/> – CUPESSE "Cultural pathways to Economic Self-Sufficiency and Entrepreneurship: Family Values and Youth Unemployment in Europe", EUR 5 million EC contribution, 11 partners in 10 countries, <http://cupesse.eu/>

<sup>(8)</sup> COM(2014) 902 final. See also *Employment and Social Developments in Europe 2014 on job creation, productivity and more equality for sustained growth*.

Table 4.1. Main initiatives on youth employment at EU level

May 2009	Member States of the Troika of Presidencies (the Czech Republic, Sweden and Spain), together with President Barroso, Commissioner Špidla and the social partners discuss the effects of the crisis on employment during the <b>Employment Summit</b> (Prague). They stress the need to increase the number of high quality apprenticeship and traineeship places.
June 2009	Under the heading 'Helping young people now', the Commission Communication <b>A shared commitment for employment</b> <sup>(1)</sup> contains actions for that purpose. They aim to increase the number of apprenticeship places, reduce early school leaving and offer 15-19 year olds training or work one month after they become unemployed.
March and June 2010	The European Council endorses the <b>Europe 2020 Strategy</b> <sup>(2)</sup> . It contains two targets of particular relevance for young people: to reduce the number of early school leavers to 10% and increase the number of higher education graduates to 40% by 2020.
September 2010	The Commission launches <b>Youth on the move</b> , a Europe 2020 flagship initiative focusing on education and employment measures.
January 2011	For the first time a unit responsible for youth employment is set up in the Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.
December 2011	The Commission launches the <b>Youth Opportunities Initiative</b> <sup>(3)</sup> setting up action teams, made up of national and Commission officials, in the eight Member States with the highest levels of youth unemployment: Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, Slovakia and Spain. Action teams were given the task of using EU structural funding still available in the 2007-13 programming period to help create job opportunities for young people and facilitate SME access to finance.
December 2012	The Commission proposes a <b>Youth Employment Package</b> , including a recommendation to launch a <b>Youth Guarantee</b> , as well as a European Alliance for Apprenticeships and a Quality Framework for Traineeships.
February 2013	The European Council agrees to set up a dedicated <b>Youth Employment Initiative (YEI)</b> to make more EU financial support available to the regions and individuals struggling the most with youth unemployment and inactivity. The initiative has funding of EUR 3 billion from a specific EU budget line dedicated to youth employment, and at least another EUR 3 billion from the European Social Fund national allocations.
April 2013	The Council adopts the <b>Recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee</b> <sup>(4)</sup> . It calls on Member States to ensure that all young people under 25 receive a good quality offer for a job, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed. It includes guidelines for setting up such schemes, covering in particular the need for stronger partnerships between all stakeholders concerned, early intervention and activation and making full use of EU funding.
June 2013	The Commission launches a <b>Call to Action on Youth Unemployment</b> <sup>(5)</sup> including implementing the Youth Guarantee, using the ESF, frontloading the YEI, supporting intra-EU mobility through European Employment Services (EURES), supporting SMEs and implementing measures to ease the transition from education to work through apprenticeships and traineeships.
July 2013	Launch of the <b>European Alliance for Apprenticeships</b> , a platform that brings together public authorities, business and social partners, vocational education and training providers, youth representatives and other key actors to coordinate and upscale successful apprenticeships and related schemes and promote national partnerships for dual vocational training systems. In October 2013 Member States confirmed their commitment to the alliance in a Council Declaration.
July and November 2013	High-profile <b>youth employment conferences</b> in Berlin and Paris attended by Heads of State and Government.
March 2014	The Council adopts the <b>Quality Framework on Traineeships</b> .
April 2014	<b>Youth Guarantee: Making it Happen</b> – conference under the aegis of former President Barroso on implementing the Youth Guarantee.
October 2014	<b>Milan Employment Summit</b> , focusing on youth employment.
February 2015	Commission proposal to <b>increase the Youth Employment Initiative pre-financing rate</b> in 2015 from 1-1.5% to up to 30%

(1) COM(2009)257 final of 3.6.2009.

(2) [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm)

(3) COM(2011)933 of 20.12.2011.

(4) Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 On Establishing a Youth Guarantee: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2013:120:0001:0006:EN:PDF>

(5) COM(2013)447 final of 19.6.2013.

## 4.3. The social partners and youth employment

While social dialogue can play a key role in addressing issues related to the high level of youth unemployment, the social partners face specific challenges in trying to address the difficulties young people are facing.

### 4.3.1. Social partner organisational structures

One way of trying to ensure that the social partners advocate the interests and voice the concerns of young people is to include young people in their representational structures and to create specific groups or sections to deal with issues relating to young people.

#### Employers

Employer representative organisations tend not to have specific sections for young people, although they often have sections for entrepreneurs, including young entrepreneurs. They see these young entrepreneurs as future employers and therefore encourage them. The Commission tries to support organisations representing young entrepreneurs. The European Confederation of Young Entrepreneurs, representing around 40 000 young entrepreneurs around Europe, aims to help improve the economic and social performance of young entrepreneurs in Europe. Its members include the major national associations of young entrepreneurs in industry, trade and services. It currently has four strategic goals: enabling entrepreneurs to access capital; enabling them to access markets; boosting entrepreneurial culture, including through improvements to the education system; and overcoming legal barriers to entrepreneurship.

#### Trade unions

Trade union density rates for younger workers are lower than those for older workers. Membership tends to be low among younger workers, increases with age and falls again as workers near retirement (Ebbinghaus et al, 2011). Union density has been in steady decline in many developed countries. It is therefore not always clear whether young workers are less inclined to join a union because they are still young (age effect), or part of a generation less likely to join a union (cohort effect). Both explanations are valid for a number of countries (see Schnabel 2013).

Changes in the composition of the workforce have also made it difficult for trade unions to recruit younger members. Young people employed mostly in the less well regulated service sectors and in smaller companies will have less opportunity to organise themselves or be organised in trade unions. It is also more likely that young people will be employed in atypical, insecure jobs, not conducive to trade union membership (Pollert and Tailby, 2009)

Pascual and Waddington (2000) note in addition that 'there is evidence of some change in attitudes among young people, which involve a move away from the collectivism that underpins trade unionism. Trade unions were slow to respond to the changes experienced by young people and failed to formulate an agenda that attracted young people in sufficient numbers to replace the traditional membership lost from the manufacturing heart lands of trade unionism'.

Another potential issue for trade unions is how to represent trainees who, not classed as workers, are arguably even harder to reach than young workers and apprentices. One way around this could be for trade unions to implement parts of the quality framework for traineeships. This could include drafting model contracts for traineeships and model qualification certificates, and advocating incorporating the terms of the framework into terms and conditions.

Pedersini (2010) points to a range of strategies that national trade unions around Europe have used to attract young members. These

include building networks among young people, focusing on recruitment in vocational training establishments and at career information fairs and getting in contact with young people working in summer jobs. Targeting students is a good way of attracting young members. It has been particularly successful in Finland. Many national trade unions now also have youth sections that offer young people help and advice. Young workers are often put together in a separate section or branch of a trade union.

Vandaele (2013) has looked in detail at how youth structures at trade union confederal level influence the trade union agenda on tackling youth unemployment. He focuses on Ireland, the Netherlands and Sweden. He observes a pattern of coalition-building between youth structures and student organisations to help the next generation of young workers make the transition from school to the labour market. However, he also notes that there are differences between the unions' strategies in the three countries, based on tradition and the country's economic situation. For example, in Ireland trade unions have focused more on the company level, due to the breakdown of social partnership and social dialogue at higher level. Trade union youth structures in the Netherlands were re-established in reaction to a new organisation presenting itself as an alternative to the trade unions following the largest union demonstration in Dutch history against the government's pension reforms in 2004. Trade unions in Sweden have focused on the transition from school to work and ways of tackling the decline in membership, particularly among younger members.

However, Vandaele (2012) reports on a survey among representatives of the youth structures of national confederal unions of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), showing that youth representatives feel their confederations are not doing enough to attract and mobilise young workers. Although most confederations have groups representing young workers, the survey notes that they do not have the financial resources or the staff they need to make the voice of young workers heard within the confederation structures. Vandaele warns: 'If

unions continue to fail to connect with young people, it will be very challenging to reverse the de-unionisation trend; and other organizational forms might well come to replace unions for the representation and service of the next generation of workers.'

Bailey et al (2009) say that unions need to focus on adopting the communication technologies young people use, such as social media, and communicate using 'language, visuals and messages that resonate with young people'. They quote Visser (2002), who says that because workers join a union within the first few years after entering the labour market, or they do not. This gives unions a very strong incentive to market themselves to young workers when they are in their first job, and to devise ways of tracking members when they move around within the labour market.

At EU sectoral level, many main European trade unions have youth sections. For example, the European trade union *industriAll*, representing workers in industry, has a youth network that meets regularly and organises seminars and conferences on issues relevant to young workers. It also has a youth working group. UNI Europa also has a youth section that held a youth seminar in Athens in March 2014 and recently launched a regular newsletter. It also organises regular winter and summer schools for youth activists. The European Federation of Food, Agriculture and

Tourism Trade Unions (EFFAT) has a youth committee that has a Facebook page. In October 2013, the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF) elected a youth committee, continuing a process that began in 2009 to involve young workers more in ETF policy-making. With this aim, the committee elected two co-chairs and three young workers to become youth representatives in the ETF Executive and Management Committee.

In the services sector, UNI Europa Youth, the youth section of UNI Europa, has a Facebook page. It aims to bring young people from across the world together to assess common issues and concerns, to develop focused action plans and to put them into practice in the democratic framework of their trade unions. In the public sector, the European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU) also has a youth network that meets regularly to discuss issues relevant to young workers.

### 4.3.2. Social partner strategies to promote youth employment

#### Employers

BUSINESSEUROPE (2014) underlines that structurally high levels of youth

unemployment show that there are barriers to the smooth labour market integration of young people that already existed in better economic times. It (2013) focuses on general labour market reform and issues such as the need to match skills demand and supply, and the need to design and implement efficient education and training systems focusing on stronger partnerships between education and training providers and businesses and their representative organisations in designing and implementing school, vocational education and training (VET) and university curricula and providing career guidance.

Expressing the views of small businesses, in March 2013 the European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (UEAPME) issued a position paper endorsing Commission initiatives to help young people gain a foothold in the labour market.

Employer strategies focus broadly on ensuring that education and training systems provide young people appropriate labour market skills and lobbying for deregulation of the labour market. They believe it will help young people by making it easier for employers to recruit them (Simms 2011).

#### Box 4.1. Promoting young entrepreneurship in Italy

The project *Il Talento delle Idee* is a start-up project launched by Confindustria Young Entrepreneurs and Unicredit Bank to support young entrepreneurs who have innovative ideas. In cooperation with the economic actors in each territory (universities, banks, entrepreneur organisations, investors), the project is a competition with national and local prizes. In 2012, 436 projects were proposed at national level, 70 of which were regarded as having high potential.

A second project, *Latuaideadimpresa*, is a business idea competition for students. The *Sistemi Formativi Confindustria* are coordinating the project in cooperation with the Young Entrepreneurs, with the support of the Italian Ministry for Education, University and Research. Each group of students must develop a competitive business plan. The entrepreneurs belonging to the participating associations evaluate the plan. The winners from each area are allowed to participate in the national competition, at the end of which the three best business ideas are awarded. So far there have been three national editions, with 17 industrial associations participating in the latest, 300 entrepreneurs having the right to vote, 2500 students from 130 schools, 10 000 young people joining the web community, 200 teachers involved in the project and 600 000 contacts made through the web platform.

Both of these projects are considered to have helped promote entrepreneurship, created job opportunities for the new generation and strengthened the dialogue between businesses and educational institutions.

Source: EU-level social partner framework of actions.

## Trade unions

At EU level, the ETUC campaigns on youth issues and has a dedicated Youth Committee<sup>(9)</sup>. It (2012) notes that the crisis has pushed young people in four main directions: inactivity; unemployment; return to school or emigration. In the long term, they will find it harder than previous generations to make life decisions such as buying a home and having a family. This is because they may be more likely to lack the financial means and work experience that come with secure employment. This may also reduce their social security eligibility in the future, including their pension entitlement.

The ETUC says that ‘the risk of a lost generation is real and young trade unionists are looking to European leaders to provide solutions’. In this context young trade unionists organised a Youth Summit for Quality Jobs in November 2013 on the occasion of the summit of European heads of states and labour ministers.

In 2012/2013 the ETUC organised a one-year European project called ‘Towards a European quality framework for apprenticeships and work-based learning: best practices and trade unions’ contribution’. The project’s aim is to analyse apprenticeships and work-based learning and the role of trade unions in designing and implementing such schemes in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Ireland, Italy, Spain, Germany, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Denmark and Estonia. The project provided the basis for an ETUC Resolution adopted in April 2014.

In March 2014 the youth organisations of the European trade unions industriAll, ETF, UNI Europa, EPSU, EFFAT and the European Federation of Building and Woodworkers (EFBWW) launched Back2OurFuture. It aims to encourage EU institutions and employers to put young people at the top of their agenda and to help their member trade unions better organise young workers. The campaign focuses on the creation of quality jobs; enforcing the right of young people to quality jobs and fair, respectful working conditions; ensuring respect for social partner agreements; presenting mobility as a choice and not a necessity for finding work; reducing the incidence of unstable work among young people; ensuring access to education and training as a universal right; making the recruitment of young people a key component of collective bargaining; the promotion of traineeships for fixed-term training, not as a substitute for permanent jobs; and promoting investment in new skills in line with the development of new technologies.

UNI Europa and UNI Europa Youth signed a charter for quality traineeships and apprenticeships in March 2014. The charter informs young people of their basic rights at work, informs employers of the elements of a quality work-training programme and advocates setting a minimum standard for traineeships and apprenticeships.

In 2013 the ETF ran the Transunion Youth project aimed at setting up a permanent youth structure and strategies in the transport sector, helping ETF affiliates to set up permanent

youth structures and develop long-term strategies and integrating the interests and concerns of young workers into sectoral social dialogue. This project was a follow-up to a project that collected good practices to better attract young workers to the sector and the trade unions.

In December 2012 the EFFAT adopted a Charter on Youth Employment and a roadmap for implementing it, involving the major stakeholders, including the social partners, at all levels.

## 4.4. Social dialogue and collective bargaining

The social partners agree on many points about how to boost youth employment. They include ensuring the provision of good quality training in the form of traineeships and apprenticeships. Employers’ organisations and trade unions at EU level have been trying hard to improve the provision of apprenticeships. The two sides of industry also agree that good quality apprenticeships can benefit both the young people who do them and the companies that offer them. The amount of resources organisations have varies greatly depending on their size. For example, multinationals have many more resources than SMEs.

Employers tend to focus on committing themselves to training young people and to job-matching. They do so in the belief that young people must have the right kinds of skills to be able to enter

<sup>(9)</sup> <http://youth.etuc.org/-en>

the labour market. Employers have been involved in promoting active labour market policies, such as extending or expanding the provision of training and apprenticeships for young workers. Trade unions have focused on campaigning for and negotiating with employers and governments on greater use of apprenticeship and training contracts and ensuring fair and adequate working conditions for young workers.

#### 4.4.1. Initiatives of European social partners at cross-industry level

At cross-industry level, European social partners have identified youth employment as a priority in their 2012–14 work programme<sup>(10)</sup>, stating: ‘With more than 22% of young people unemployed, there is an urgent need to remedy this unacceptable situation. The situation of young people will be assessed as a priority. We will focus on the link between education, young people’s expectations and labour market needs, taking into account young people’s transition into the labour market, in an effort to increase employment rates in general’.

The main cross-industry youth employment initiative is the joint framework of actions on youth employment. Concluded in June 2013, it aims to address the following three main issues:

- to create more and better jobs and attractive career opportunities for young people;

- to strengthen the quality and relevance of education and training at all levels to address skills mismatches;
- to optimise the role of industry, in particular SMEs, and of high-performing public services in Europe as drivers of sustainable and inclusive growth.

In their framework of actions, the social partners call on national social partners, public authorities and other stakeholders to act together to help increase youth employment levels. They note that ‘a multi-pronged approach is needed with measures and appropriate resources to secure high quality learning outcomes, promote vocational education and training, and create jobs’.

The framework contains four priorities, for which the social partners have set out short-term and long-term actions and recommendations. They are learning, transition, employment and entrepreneurship. The social partners have undertaken to promote this agreement among their members, including through regional seminars. The European Social Dialogue Committee adopted a first follow-up report in September 2014<sup>(11)</sup>. It presents the first actions the social partners have taken at national, cross-industry, sectoral and enterprise level. It highlights the impetus the framework has created for developing new youth employment initiatives and contributing to current national debates and policies. According to the report the framework’s main added value is to create an additional platform for national social partners to work together and to provide

a source of inspiration for their actions by giving examples of the priorities or good practices of other countries.

#### 4.4.2. Initiatives of European social partners at sectoral level

One example of a joint initiative involving sectoral social partners is the 2014 EFBWW – FIEC (European Construction Industry Federation) project to update their 2003 joint publication on tutorships and identify further examples of sectoral measures and initiatives to attract and integrate young people into companies.

Other sectoral social partner initiatives to help young people include a project to promote the tanning and leather sector as an attractive opportunity for young people and jobseekers. The social partners in the wood-working sector manage a project to create an inventory of best practices to attract young workers and retain more experienced skilled workers in companies. In November 2013, the social partners in the food and drink manufacturing and processing sector launched a research project on employment and skills. The project covers issues such as more innovative approaches to recruitment, apprenticeships, better succession planning, career development pathways, job enhancement techniques and lifelong learning in the sector.

Many joint texts on youth employment were also written in the context of the sectoral social dialogue. These are set out in table 4.2.

<sup>(10)</sup> Work programme of the European social partners 2012-2014: [http://www.etuc.org/IMG/pdf/SD\\_work\\_prog\\_2012-2014.pdf](http://www.etuc.org/IMG/pdf/SD_work_prog_2012-2014.pdf)

<sup>(11)</sup> <http://erc-online.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/1st-follow-up-report-FoA-Youth-Sept-2014-Final.pdf>

Table 4.2. Sectoral social dialogue joint texts on youth employment<sup>(1)</sup>

Sector	Signatories	Title	Date	Comments
Hospitality	HOTREC and EFFAT	Young people and the hospitality industry - Contribution to the European Youth Initiative	21 March 2005	Joint opinion setting out the sector's support for the European Youth Initiative. Since the sector is a major employer of young people, the text sets out recommendations centred on skills development for the industry.
Commerce	EuroCommerce and UNI Europa	Commitment to support the European Youth Initiative	16 March 2005	The social partners express their support for the European Youth Initiative and their intention to negotiate on integrating young people into the commerce sector of the labour market.
Industrial cleaning	EFCI and UNI Europa	European Youth Initiative - Letter to President Barroso	14 March 2005	Joint opinion in which the social partners make a commitment to focus on creating high quality, and fairly-remunerated jobs for young people.
Construction	FIEC and EFBWW	Joint statement of the European Construction Industry's Social Partners on Young People	4 March 2005	Joint statement in which the social partners reaffirm their commitment to working on a range of activities to support young people, focusing on training and continuing professional development.
Metal	CEEMET and EMF	Joint statement of the CEEMET-EMF Social Dialogue Committee Ad Hoc Working Group on Education and Training	2 December 2010	Joint statement on ensuring that VET is capable of attracting young people to the industry to ensure a future supply of well qualified workers.
Railways	CER, EIM and ETF	Employability in the face of demographic change - prospects for the European rail sector	24 February 2011	
Metal	CEEMET and EMF	Attracting people to the educational pathways that lead to the metal, engineering and technology-based industry	13 March 2011	This tool showcases examples of good VET practice in the metalworking industry in different countries.
Metal	CEEMET and EMF	Permeability between vocational education and training and higher education	27 October 2011	Joint opinion on VET in the metalworking sector in the context of ensuring a supply of suitably trained employees for employers in the sector.
Insurance	AMICE, BIPAR, Insurance Europe, UNI Europa Finance	Combating the demographic challenge in the insurance sector. A selection of initiatives in Europe	30 November 2012	A booklet showcasing good practices for ensuring age diversity in the sector. Initiatives relevant to young people include those relating to qualifications and lifelong learning, work-life balance and career progression.

Sector	Signatories	Title	Date	Comments
Electricity	EPSU, Eurelectric, IndustriAll Europe	Joint statement on a quality framework for traineeships	15 March 2013	Joint statement supporting the Commission's work on addressing youth unemployment and the consultation on a quality framework for traineeships.
Metal	CEEMET, IndustriAll	Rethinking Education	29 May 2013	Joint statement on the development of vocational education and training systems in EU Member States in the metalworking sector.
Local and regional government	CEMR and EPSU	Declaration supporting the EU framework of actions on youth employment	15 October 2013	Joint statement supporting the EU cross-industry framework for action on youth employment and setting out how this can be applied in the local and regional government sector.

Source: European Commission database of sectoral social dialogue texts <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=521&langId=en>

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#### 4.4.3. National collective bargaining

Collective bargaining can address a range of employment-related issues. However, Simms (2011) notes that few collective agreements have addressed the needs of young workers during the (early stages of the) economic crisis. The ones that do tend to focus on facilitating labour market transitions for young people and improving job

opportunities and training for young workers. Although some initiatives have been put in place at national level, Simms notes that the range of measures at sectoral and company level is extremely limited. There are only a few examples of innovation, in countries such as Belgium and France, in which youth employment had already been identified as a problem and the crisis has prompted an extension of existing initiatives. Simms also notes that in

countries more recently hit by growing youth unemployment, there are examples of national and sectoral initiatives. They mainly provide greater opportunities for apprenticeships and vocational training, together with measures, such as job matching, to facilitate labour market transitions.

Table 4.3. gives examples of collective national, sectoral and company agreements on ways of helping young workers.

**Table 4.3. Collective agreements containing provisions designed to help young workers**

Country	Level	Details
Austria	National	A set of labour market initiatives seeking to address the challenges facing young apprentices were negotiated two months before the onset of the crisis. Since 2008, more has been done to mitigate the negative effects of the crisis on young workers. A re-employment scheme set up following tripartite negotiations targets young workers who have lost their jobs in small and medium-sized enterprises or temporary agencies. The scheme requires the employer to contribute EUR 1 000 per person being made redundant. This extends the length of time young people can claim unemployment benefit and makes it possible to pay them a small monthly sum (EUR 100).
France	National	Bipartite negotiations in July 2010 led to the launch of a new internet-based jobs advice website aimed at young people. The website provides information and resources on training, occupations, job searches and lifelong learning. In 2009, two major national inter-sectoral agreements identified the need to support young people in the labour market, particularly by fulfilling their training requirements. An agreement on lifelong learning and vocational training acknowledges the need to better integrate young workers into existing training schemes. Another agreement on the consequences of the crisis on employment targeted young workers by encouraging the development of more apprenticeships and ensuring training for young people.

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Country	Level	Details
Hungary	National	Using bipartite and tripartite structures, a number of initiatives have been negotiated at national level. They include helping disadvantaged young people under 35 to return to education and funding for programmes to help young people find a job. Bipartite negotiations have also led to agreement on better vocational training for young workers in the construction and agriculture sectors.
Malta	National	Tripartite agreements have continued to draw attention to the difficulties young workers face and have strengthened the provisions for training. The 2009 Annual Progress Report monitored progress towards reaching the targets set out in the National Reform Programme 2008–10. It is clear from the report that social partners agree there is a need to invest more in this area.
Netherlands	National	A national agreement on tackling youth unemployment was concluded in 2009. Several factors have hampered its implementation however. They include a lack of data; a lack of clarity about the way sectoral agreements should be financed; differences in how regions implement sectoral agreements; disagreement between the parties on exactly where key responsibilities lie. For this reason, the national bipartite Labour Foundation (STvDA) proposed a budget to ensure that national funding mechanisms are in place to achieve the objectives set out in sectoral agreements.
Denmark	Sectoral	The 2010 pace-setting agreement in the manufacturing sector agreed a slightly higher pay rise for apprentices than for other groups of staff (2% in year 1 and 2.5% in year 2 compared with 1.1% and 1.7%).
Germany	Sectoral	In 2010, a sectoral agreement was concluded in the chemical sector creating and funding new apprenticeship places through a fund administered jointly by the social partners. An innovative agreement in the Bavarian metalworking sector provides that a job transfer agency be set up for young workers not employed on a permanent contract at the end of their apprenticeship training. The transfer agency will employ them and they will return to their former employer as a temporary agency worker. They will then be employed on a standard contract as soon as possible. The employment agency and the Bavarian State Ministry of Labour co-fund the system.
Netherlands	Sectoral	In autumn 2009, the collective agreement in the painting, finishing and glass-setting industry included a commitment to retain 500 young trainees in employment. In the 2010 agreement for the recreation sector, there was a clause committing employers to offering as many trainee positions as possible. In the woodworking industry, a budget was created for extra traineeships to attract more highly skilled young workers into the sector.
Poland	Sectoral	A 2008 agreement in the automotive sector in Poland provides for the transfer of employees on fixed-term contracts are transferred onto open-ended contracts, although the numbers targeted are small (around 100).
Sweden	Sectoral	Recent collective agreements have addressed the issue of youth employment, but unions and employers differ greatly in their interpretation of employment law and wage levels covering young workers. Some collective agreements contain provisions to recruit and train young people on lower terms and conditions than older workers. These are not widespread however and are aimed at particular sectors such as the private service sector. There is pressure from unions to extend agreements in the metalworking sector to help young workers move from education to training. Employers have tended to prefer less rigid employment law and greater wage diversification to help young people establish themselves in the labour market.
France	Company	An agreement between PSA Peugeot Citroën and four representative trade unions and the Group of European Automobile Unions (Groupement des syndicats européens de l'automobile, GSEA) committed the company to hiring 7 300 young workers in 2010, mainly as apprentices. French publisher Bayard signed a three-year agreement in 2010 with five unions on improving employment opportunities for older and younger workers by replacing older workers who leave the company with recruits under 30. The postal service signed an agreement in 2008 seeking to alleviate the difficulties of young workers, especially those from disadvantaged groups such as those living in areas of high unemployment.
Germany	Company	Deutsche Telekom has guaranteed apprenticeships and subsequent permanent employment for young workers. Volkswagen has agreed to expand its apprenticeship programme and guarantee standard employment at the end of training, subject to performance assessment.

### Box 4.2. Tripartite employment agreement for young workers in Belgium

The Flemish government and social partners signed a new employment agreement on 17 February 2012, titled 'Career Agreement'. It focuses on two groups of workers at risk in the Flemish labour market: young people leaving school without qualifications and workers aged 50 and over. It includes incentives for employers to recruit from these groups and areas such as career guidance and training for workers. It aims to provide EUR 25m worth of measures to help vulnerable groups in the Flemish labour market. One of its main aims is to ensure that as many young people as possible leave full-time education with some kind of qualification or degree.

More emphasis will be placed on targeting young people who leave school without a qualification. Employment offices will increase the number of guaranteed work experience places for young people with no qualifications who have been unemployed for over six months. Long-term employment strategies will be developed for young people who keep returning to unemployment after short periods of temporary agency work.

The agreement also encourages those involved in sectoral social dialogue to develop action plans on the quality of work, workability and on-the-job training. These action plans are expected to be a form of addendum to existing agreements that sectors have signed with the Flemish Ministry of Employment to encourage the employment of groups at risk and increase lifelong learning.

*Source: Van Gyes, G., Flemish tripartite agreement targets young and older workers, Eurofound, June 2012.*

#### 4.4.4. Apprenticeships and work-based learning

As outlined above, ensuring appropriate vocational and work-based learning is key to improving young people's chances of entering the labour market. The social partners can, and have been trying to, play a key role in helping to design and implement work-based learning schemes.

At European level, in 2012 and 2013 the ETUC developed a one-year project called 'Towards a European quality framework for apprenticeship and work-based learning: best practices and trade unions contribution'. The European Commission funded the project. The project looked at apprenticeships and work-based learning schemes and the role of trade unions in designing and implementing such schemes in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Ireland, Italy, Spain, Germany, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Denmark and Estonia. On the basis of the project, in March 2014 the ETUC adopted a resolution on improving the quality of apprenticeships and work-based learning. It says that 'apprenticeships schemes, when properly implemented, can significantly contribute to facilitating transition processes, to tackling skills

mismatches in the labour market and to encouraging employers to provide young people with fair and good jobs. However, we have also to recognise that in the current economic situation, with most of the countries still facing economic crisis or stagnation and few of them experiencing very slight recovery, not all employers are able to create new job opportunities or are ready to employ apprenticeships properly and fairly'. The resolution gives recommendations on issues such as the definition of apprenticeships, their content, the contribution of employers, training institutions, pay, working conditions, the working environment, mobility and governance by the social partners.

On the employer side, BUSINESSEUROPE issued a publication on apprenticeships in 2012 (BUSINESSEUROPE 2012). It said that 'there is evidence that well-functioning apprenticeship systems contribute to companies' competitiveness. And at the same time they seem to be correlated with low youth unemployment'. The publication contains 12 recommendations on improving the quality of apprenticeships. The recommendations are addressed to the European Union, to the Member States, to employers' organisations and to companies. They centre on the following areas.

- The European Union: to provide funding for Member States that wish to set up or reform dual learning systems (incorporating elements of theoretical and work-based learning); provide training for employers' organisations that wish to become involved in setting up a dual system; support national campaigns in favour of vocational education and provide an effective framework for discussions on apprenticeships.
- The Member States: to provide an efficient school system, put the framework conditions for dual apprenticeship learning in place and integrate work-based learning systems into the education system.
- Employers' organisations: to take part in the governance and design of dual learning apprenticeship systems and inform companies and motivate them to get involved in these systems.
- Companies: to ensure a high level of quality training for the workforce, conclude high quality apprenticeship contracts and encourage employers to share their own experiences of apprenticeships to motivate young people to take them up.

### Box 4.3. Selected initiatives on apprenticeships

#### **France: Apprenticeship Contract (*Contrat d'Apprentissage*)**

The French apprenticeship programme aims to enable young people aged 16–26 to follow a training course combining theory and practice, to obtain a recognised vocational qualification (typically the Vocational Baccalaureat; Diploma of Vocational Studies (*BEP*), Certificate of Vocational Aptitude (*CAP*), Higher Technical Diploma (*BTS*) or University Technological Diploma (*DUT*). The social partners are very much involved in the programme, with an obligatory role on the boards of governors of the Apprentice Training Centres (CFAs) and in the committees set up in the Accredited Organisations for the Collection and Distribution of Training Funds. The apprenticeship contract has been proven to offer a high level of entry into employment. This level is maintained (and increased) over time. On completing their studies, 61% of apprentices go directly into employment and six months after completing them 78% are in employment. 'Apprenticeship Developers' in the Chambers of Commerce have widely promoted the scheme, making contact with 140 000 businesses between 2009 and 2012. In France, the social partners are heavily involved in VET policymaking, with their role clearly enshrined in the Labour Code.

Source: Guidebook 'Apprenticeship and Traineeship schemes in EU-27' (Ecorys et al, 2013).

#### **Mears Construction: A holistic approach to apprenticeship in the UK**

Mears Construction, a private sector housing maintenance firm employing around 12 000 people nationally, offers apprenticeship schemes under the UK government's apprenticeship framework. Mears, the Construction Industry Trade Board (CITB) and Mears client companies jointly fund the framework.

Mears, which recognises and consults four trade unions, offers opportunities to young people from relatively deprived and difficult backgrounds. It tries to ensure that their apprenticeship experience is as rounded as possible, by teaching them technical, practical and general workplace and life skills. Since they can tailor their offer to the individual's needs, they can also offer driving lessons and refresher classes in maths and literacy. This is in line with Mears' general corporate social responsibility framework. Mears currently has 260 apprentices nationally, with the schemes designed by the firm's regional branches, in partnership with their local clients.

There is no upper age limit for apprentices at Mears, although the average age is 18–24. After initial selection, apprentices usually embark on a two-year course, based on a multi-trade apprenticeship or a specific trade such as carpenter, gas fitter or electrician. The schemes involve a mixture of work and training. In general, apprentices spend three or four days working at Mears and one or two days a week at college learning the theoretical side of their trade.

Apprentices have mentors throughout their contract and their training leads to a formal recognised qualification. They are paid based on experience. The government, the construction industry, the CITB and relevant unions in the Construction Industry Joint Council set the pay. It is a proportion of the UK's national minimum wage. After their apprenticeship, most trainees are offered a job with Mears. If none is available, they are given extra help and support finding a job elsewhere or becoming self-employed.

This case study shows how a company can change the lives of young people by offering something that goes beyond minimum statutory requirements. The advantage for the company is that, apart from giving something back to the community, it can train its own employees, which it says it will always do in preference to hiring staff externally.

Source: *Flexicurity: Actions at Company Level* (Eurofound, 2012).

#### 4.4.5. Traineeships

Traineeships can be a divisive subject. Trade unions have been campaigning against what they say are cases of exploitation of young people in low quality traineeships. For example, the ETUC has spoken out in public against young people's being trapped in successive traineeships for long periods on low wages or sometimes even unpaid, without any clear status, entitlement to social protection<sup>(12)</sup>. 'The role played by the demand side (private and public employers) is crucial in filling some of the gaps that the education systems fails (or is not meant) to do. Traineeships may be a good method if they are quality working experiences, limited in time and meant to really invest in youth skills and competences. Unfortunately, in some EU Member States, these on-the-job experiences have often been misused or considered as a substitute for flexible and cheap (or free) work' (ETUC 2012).

BUSINESSEUROPE has said it supports the idea of apprenticeships and work placements as a way of giving young people theoretical and practical knowledge and experience: 'Combining theoretical and practical training benefits both companies and graduates and can contribute to a smooth transition into employment for young people, for instance through work placements and internships. A work-based vocational education and training system where students alternate between being at school and working in a company should be promoted throughout Europe as a means to reduce unemployment among young people by equipping them with skills that companies need' (BUSINESSEUROPE, 2011).

The EU's quality framework for traineeships aims to resolve many of these difficulties, particularly in terms of the learning content, the working conditions and the transparency of traineeships.

#### 4.4.6. Pay

Pay for young workers is another potentially divisive issue for the social partners. Eurofound (2014a) notes that 13 EU Member States have different minimum wage levels for specific groups, mostly young workers. However, in countries such as Belgium and the Czech Republic, young workers' minimum wages are seen as contrary to the principle of equality and are being or have been phased out. Consequently, in January 2013 the social partners in Belgium agreed to gradually upgrade the lower minimum wages for young workers, to eliminate the age-based difference in 2015. Although the monthly minimum wage in Latvia is equal for all employees, the hourly minimum wage rate for young people is 14.3% higher than for other workers. This is because people under 18 are only allowed to work a maximum of 35 hours a week. Table 4.4 gives an overview of the minimum rates for young people in EU Member States.

<sup>(12)</sup> ETUC press release, 16 May 2012: <http://www.etuc.org/press/interns-should-not-be-regarded-employees-who-work-pittance#.U2tpm1dc98c>

Table 4.4. Minimum rates of pay for young people in EU Member States

Country	Group	Minimum wage level
Belgium	Workers aged 16 or under	
	Workers aged 17	70% of the minimum wage
	Workers aged 18	76% of the minimum wage
	Workers aged 19	82% of the minimum wage
	Workers aged 20	88% of the minimum wage
	Workers aged 21	94% of the minimum wage
	Workers aged 21.5 with six months of seniority	100% of the minimum wage
	Workers aged 22 or more with at least 12 months of seniority	103% of the minimum wage
Greece	Workers under 25	Before 14 February 2012, the minimum wage was EUR 751.39. Since 14 February 2012, it is EUR 510.95
France	Young workers with less than six months experience in the sector	Workers aged 15 and 16: 80% of adult minimum wage; workers aged 17: 90% of adult minimum wage
	Young people on professionalisation contracts	55%–100% of adult minimum wage depending on age and previous qualification
	Apprentices	25%–78% of adult minimum wage depending on age and seniority
Ireland	Workers under 18	EUR 6.06 an hour (70% of national minimum wage)
	Workers aged 18 or over in their first year of employment since the age of 18	EUR 6.92 an hour (80% of national minimum wage)
	Workers aged 18 or over in their second year of employment since the age of 18	EUR 7.79 an hour (90% of national minimum wage)
	Workers aged 18 or more doing structured training or directed study authorised or approved by their employer	First third of training course – EUR 6.49 an hour; second third of training course – EUR 6.92 an hour; final third of training course – EUR 7.79 an hour
Luxembourg	Workers aged between 17 and 18	80% of the national minimum wage
	Workers aged between 15 and 16	75% of the national minimum wage
Malta	Workers aged 17	The minimum wage was EUR 151.33 a week in 2012 and was increased by 2.7% to EUR 155.41 a week in 2013
	Workers under 17	The minimum wage was EUR 148.49 a week in 2012 and was increased by 2.75% to EUR 152.57 a week in 2013
Netherlands	Workers aged 15	30% of the national minimum wage
	Workers aged 16	34.5% of the national minimum wage
	Workers aged 17	39.5% of the national minimum wage
	Workers aged 18	45.5% of the national minimum wage
	Workers aged 19	52.5% of the national minimum wage
	Workers aged 20	61.5% of the national minimum wage
	Workers aged 21	72.5% of the national minimum wage
Workers aged 22	85% of the national minimum wage	
Poland	Workers entering the labour market (first year of employment)	80% of the national minimum wage

Country	Group	Minimum wage level
United Kingdom	Workers aged 18 to 20	GBP 4.98 (EUR 6.03) an hour from October 2011 to October 2013, when it was increased by 1% to GBP 5.03 (EUR 6.09) (80% of adult minimum wage)
	Workers aged 16 to 17	GBP 3.68 (EUR 4.46) an hour from October 2011 to October 2013, when it was increased by 1.1% to GBP 3.72 (EUR 4.51) (59% of adult minimum wage)
	Apprentices under 19 or over 19 in the first 12 months of their apprenticeship	GBP 2.65 (EUR 3.21) an hour from October 2012 to October 2013, when it was increased by 1.1% to GBP 2.68 (EUR 3.25) (43% of adult minimum wage)

*Source:* Developments in collectively agreed pay 2013, (Eurofound, 2014a).

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Minimum rates of pay for young workers were frozen in some countries during the crisis. In March 2012 for example, the UK Government decided to increase the adult rate of the national minimum wage, but freeze the young workers' rate. Employers welcomed this decision, saying that young workers should not be priced out of the labour market. Trade unions criticised it however, saying there was no evidence that minimum wages negatively affect youth employment levels (Carley, 2012). In Greece, the minimum wage for young people was decreased by 32% in response to the crisis, compared with a 22% decrease in the adult rate (Broughton and Welz, 2013).

## 4.5. Conclusions

The high level of youth unemployment and the difficulties young people have accessing the labour market are structural problems in the EU that have been exacerbated by the recent economic crisis. While EU policymakers can provide a framework within which stakeholders can try to take mitigating action, the social partners are in a position to use the structures available to them, such as social dialogue and collective bargaining,

to try to make a difference. The Youth Guarantee has given them an opportunity to do so because it encourages a partnership approach to implementation at national level.

However, the extent to which the social partners are involved in contributing to the development of policies and their implementation varies and the impact is difficult to measure. The EU-level cross-industry and sectoral social partners have made agreements with and recommendations for their member federations and other stakeholders and have encouraged debate and showcased good practice. However, the reach and impact of these measures, and the extent to which they can foster dialogue and collective bargaining in Member States, depends on many factors. They include the strength of social dialogue and collective bargaining traditions, the relationship between the social partners and crucially, the extent to which state backing and funding is available.

It is also probably too early to assess whether any of the social partner actions taken and initiatives put in place have been able to make a real difference. This is particularly because there is a recognised lag between economic and labour market developments. Nevertheless, the

youth unemployment rate in the EU has decreased since the final quarter of 2013. While the decrease is relatively small, it may signal a trend change. It is difficult to say whether targeted actions have contributed to this decrease, or whether it is due more to the economic recovery now making itself felt in some Member States.

There is no easy solution to the problem of youth unemployment, composed as it is of many interlocking issues that require coordinated action from different types of stakeholders. They include education providers, vocational training organisations, those involved in matching skills demand to supply and labour market policymakers. In Member States in which the social partners are in a position to do this it is vital to work closely with these stakeholders to find solutions that are as comprehensive as possible. Such cooperation is crucial to avoid creating a generation of young people who have missed out on vital early work and career opportunities. At the European level the efforts undertaken at national level are supported through coordination, country specific recommendations, peer reviews (as part of the European Semester) and with funding, in particular through the Youth Employment Initiative.

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