



EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY NETWORK (ESPN)

# Access to social protection for young people

## Slovakia

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young people**

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## SUMMARY

Young people in Slovakia do not face serious limitations on their access to social protection. In the unemployment benefit scheme, there are no gaps and obstacles that specifically concern young people. However, as access to the scheme depends on people's contributory history, young people with limited work experience (less than two years) have no entitlement to the benefit if they lose their job.

The same applies to maternity benefit, which is also an insurance-based, earnings-related benefit. Here again, women with a limited work history and short contributory period (including women without any contribution period at all) have no entitlement. This concerns, for example, students.

Access to sickness benefit is conditional on payment of sickness insurance contributions. Compulsory contributions are paid by people with standard employment contracts, self-employed people, and people with non-standard employment contracts – including part-time workers, people with fixed-term contracts, temporary agency workers, and people on work agreements outside regular employment contracts who have a regular income from work.

Universal and free-of-charge access to a basic package of healthcare services is guaranteed in Slovakia. All citizens are covered by the compulsory health insurance scheme. The state pays health insurance contributions on behalf of economically inactive people, including students, unemployed people registered at labour offices, and recipients of various social benefits.

The minimum-income benefit scheme includes explicit rules that make access difficult for young people. People aged under 25 who live in their parents' household, and have an income lower than the half of the monthly minimum wage, are considered to be members of the household. Thus, they have no separate entitlement to minimum-income benefit. The same holds true for people over 25 who attend vocational/professional training/education on a daily basis.

Housing benefit is part of the minimum-income scheme. It is provided to each household as a whole. Thus, the housing costs of young people who live with their parents are covered by housing benefit.

Recent reforms of social protection have rarely focused on young people as a specific category. It was only in 2020 that a measure aimed specifically at young people was introduced, in the form of pregnancy scholarships for young women. Pregnancy scholarships are a non-contributory cash benefit granted to students at universities, and students aged over 18 at secondary schools, after the 12<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy (until birth), regardless of the form of education and the type of school.

Another example of reforms that potentially affect young people is the changes to the unemployment benefit scheme in 2018, under which the definition of the qualifying period was changed, slightly improving young people's access to the benefit by extending the period within which two years of contribution payments are required.

# 1 KEY FIGURES ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE<sup>1</sup>

## 1.1 Distribution of young people (aged 15–29) by main activity status

**Table 1a: Main activity status of people aged 15-29 and 30-64 (2015-2020, EU-27 and Slovakia, % 15-29 and 30-64)**

	SLOVAKIA											
	15-29						30-64					
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
EMPLOYMENT RATE*	42.3	44.1	45.1	45.9	45.0	42.7	70.6	72.6	73.8	75.2	76.4	75.8
<i>Paid employment**</i>	90.1	89.3	89.5	89.9	89.4	88.2	83.8	83.7	83.9	84.4	84.2	84.7
<i>Self-employment**</i>	7.9	9.0	9.0	9.0	9.5	10.3	14.5	14.9	14.9	14.7	14.9	14.4
<i>Contributing family work**</i>	2.0	1.7	1.5	1.1	1.1	1.5	1.7	1.5	1.2	0.9	0.9	0.9
UNEMPLOYMENT***	17.6	15.5	13.3	11.1	9.6	12.3	10.0	8.3	7.0	5.6	5.0	5.7
INACTIVITY****	48.6	47.7	48.0	48.4	50.2	51.3	21.5	20.8	20.6	20.3	19.5	19.7
	EU-27											
	15-29						30-64					
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
EMPLOYMENT RATE*	45.0	45.9	46.9	47.7	48.2	46.1	71.4	72.4	73.5	74.5	75.3	74.9
<i>Paid employment**</i>	91.8	92.2	92.4	92.6	92.8	92.5	83.0	83.3	83.7	84.0	84.1	84.2
<i>Self-employment**</i>	5.3	5.2	5.2	5.2	5.1	5.4	14.6	14.5	14.3	14.2	14.2	14.1
<i>Contributing family work**</i>	2.9	2.6	2.4	2.2	2.1	2.1	2.4	2.2	2.0	1.8	1.7	1.7
UNEMPLOYMENT***	17.3	15.8	14.2	12.8	11.9	13.3	8.5	7.7	6.9	6.1	5.6	5.8
INACTIVITY****	45.6	45.4	45.3	45.3	45.3	46.8	22.0	21.6	21.0	20.6	20.2	20.5

Notes: (\*) The employment rate is expressed as a share (%) of the total population in the age group. The 3 categories of employment (paid employment [i.e. employees], self-employment and contributing family work) are expressed as a share (%) of the population in employment in the age group. Contributing family work is a form of labour (generally unpaid, although compensation may come indirectly in the form of family income) that supports another member of the family to run an agricultural holding or another business. (\*\*) The unemployment rate is expressed as a share (%) of the active population, i.e. the population that is either in employment or unemployed (not the total population), in the age group. (\*\*\*) The inactivity rate is expressed as a share (%) of the total population in the age group.

Reading note: In 2020, in Slovakia, 42.7% of people aged between 15 and 29 were in employment, compared to 75.8% of those aged 30-64. In the EU-27 as a whole, these figures were 46.1% and 74.9%, respectively. The share of people unemployed in the active population in Slovakia was 12.3% of the 15-29 age group and 5.7% of the 30-64 age group (EU-27 average: 13.3% and 5.8%). The shares of people economically inactive in Slovakia in the 15-29 and 30-64 age groups were 51.3% and 19.7%, respectively (EU-27 average: 46.8% and 20.5%).

Source: Eurostat, ESPN Network Core Team calculations based on LFS indicators [lfsa\_eegais], [lfsa\_egaps], [lfsa\_pganws] and [lfsa\_igan]. Data downloaded on 24 May 2021.

<sup>1</sup> Except where otherwise specified, the indicators presented in Section 1 of this report were computed by the ESPN Network Core Team on the basis of data coming from two data sources coordinated at the European level by the statistical office of the European Union (Eurostat: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>): European Union Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) and European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC). These indicators were computed for all the 35 ESPN countries for which the data needed were available. All these ESPN countries' estimates are presented in Annex B of the following Synthesis Report: Dalila Ghailani, Stéphanie Coster, Ramón Peña-Casas and Pietro Regazzoni (2021), "Access to social protection for young people. An analysis of policies in 35 countries", European Social Policy Network (ESPN), Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. This Synthesis Report can be downloaded [here](#).

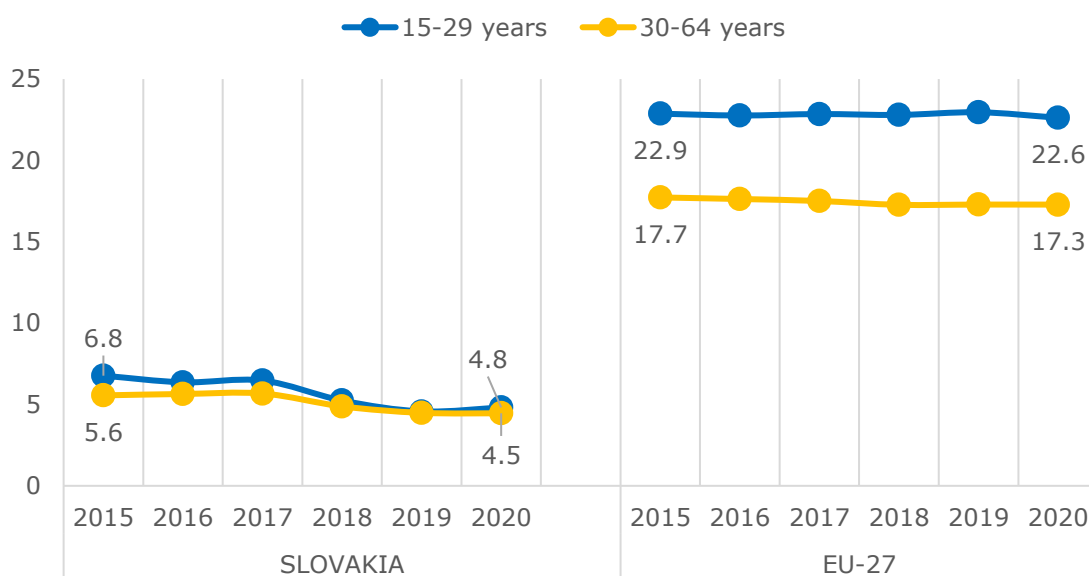
**Table 1b: Main activity status of people aged 15-29 and 30-64 (2015-2020, EU-27 and Slovakia, ratios 15-29/30-64)**

	SLOVAKIA						EU-27					
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
EMPLOYMENT RATE*	0.60	0.61	0.61	0.61	0.59	0.56	0.63	0.63	0.64	0.64	0.64	0.62
Paid employment**	1.08	1.07	1.07	1.07	1.06	1.04	1.11	1.11	1.10	1.10	1.10	1.10
Self-employment**	0.54	0.61	0.60	0.61	0.63	0.72	0.36	0.36	0.36	0.36	0.36	0.38
Contributing family work**	1.15	1.18	1.23	1.20	1.27	1.72	1.21	1.20	1.21	1.24	1.24	1.20
UNEMPLOYMENT***	1.76	1.87	1.91	1.98	1.92	2.18	2.04	2.06	2.06	2.09	2.10	2.29
INACTIVITY****	2.26	2.30	2.33	2.38	2.57	2.61	2.07	2.11	2.16	2.20	2.24	2.29

Notes: To obtain the ratio of 15-29 to 30-64, the 15-29 percentage is divided by the 30-64 percentage: a value below (above) 1 in a given activity status therefore means that 15-29-year-olds are proportionally less (more) numerous in that activity status than 30-64-year-olds. See also Notes to Table 1a above.

Reading note: In 2020, in Slovakia, 42.7% of people aged between 15 and 29 were in employment compared to 75.8% of those aged 30-64 (see Table 1a) – i.e. a 15-29:30-64 ratio of 0.56. In the EU-27 as a whole (see table 1a), these figures were 46.1 and 74.9% respectively (ratio 0.62).

Source: See Table 1a.

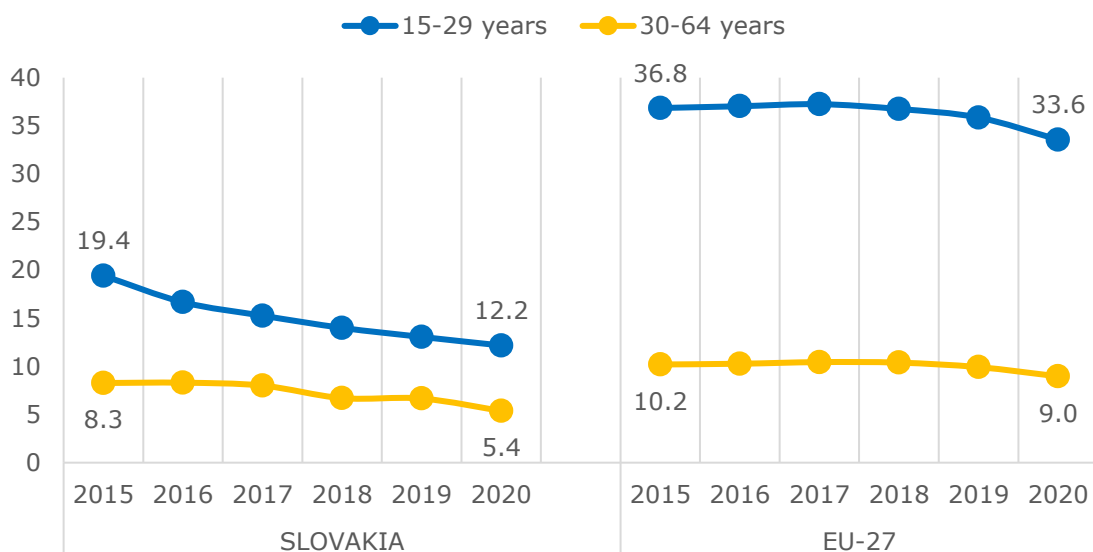
**Figure 1: Part-time employment as a share of the population in employment - comparison of the 15-29 and 30-64 age groups (2015-2020, EU-27 and Slovakia, %)**

Reading note: In 2020, in Slovakia, the share of part-time employment in total employment was 4.8% for the 15-29 age group and 4.5% for the 30-64 age group. For the EU-27 as a whole, these shares were 22.6% and 17.3%, respectively.

Source: Eurostat, ESPN Network Core Team calculations based on Eurostat LFS indicator [lfsa\_epgn62]. Data downloaded on 24 May 2021.



**Figure 2: Temporary employment as a share of population in paid employment - comparison of the 15-29 and 30-64 age groups (2015-2020, EU-27 and Slovakia, %)**

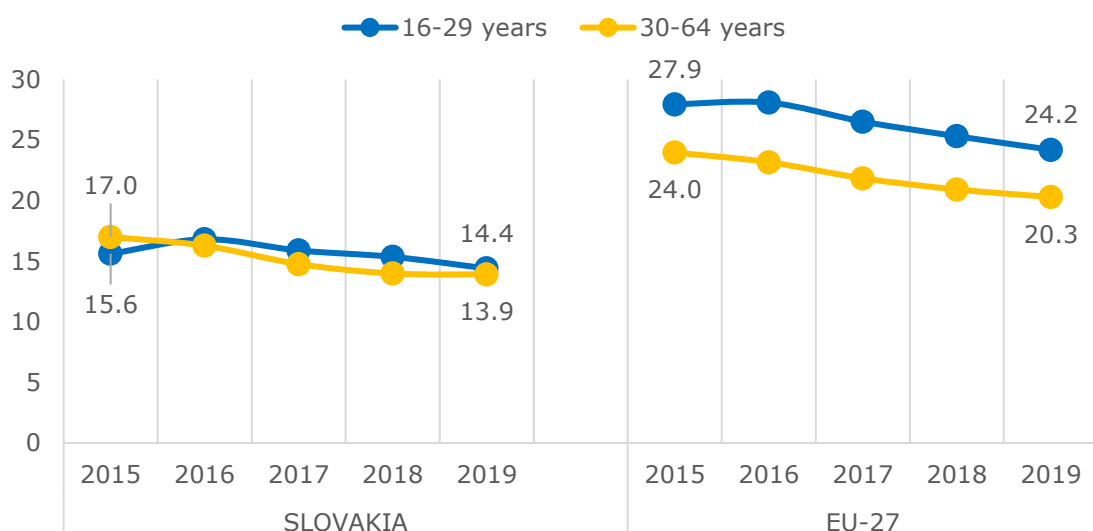


*Reading note: In 2020, in Slovakia, the share of temporary workers among employees was 12.2% for the 15-29 age group and 5.4% for the 30-64 age group. For the EU-27 as a whole, these shares were 33.6% and 9.0%, respectively.*

*Source: Eurostat, ESPN Network Core Team calculations based on Eurostat LFS indicators [lfsa\_epgn62] and [lfsa\_egaps]. Data downloaded on 24 May 2021.*

## 1.2 Young people (aged 15–29) at risk of poverty or social exclusion

**Figure 3: People at risk of poverty or social exclusion - comparison of the 16-29 and 30-64 age groups (2015-2020, EU-27 and Slovakia, %)**

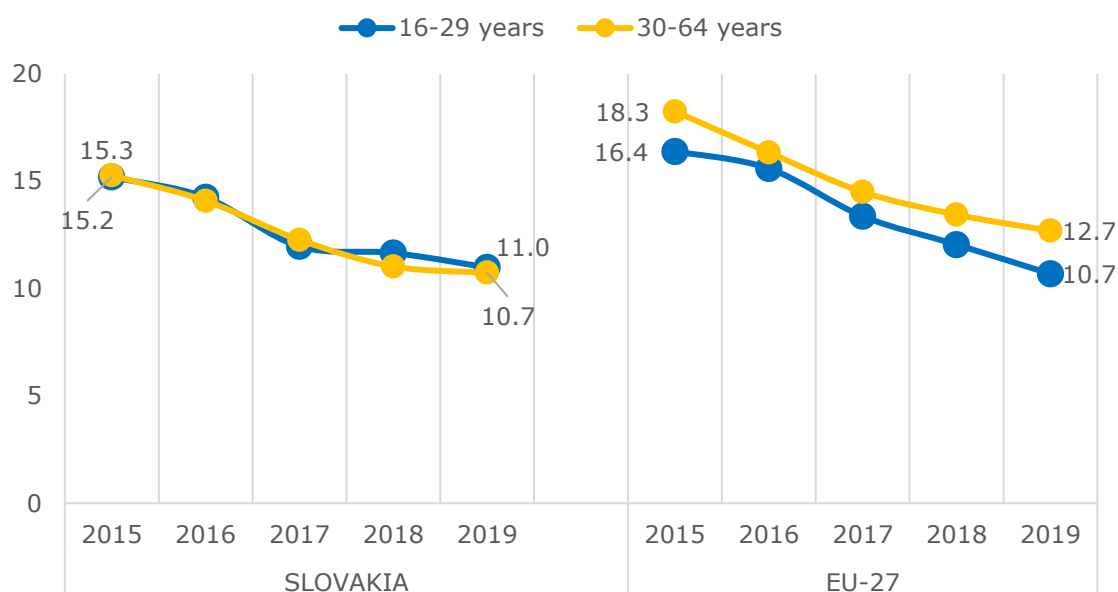


*Reading note: In 2019, in Slovakia, 14.4% of the 16-29 age group were at risk of poverty or social exclusion (i.e. they were living in a household that was at risk of poverty and/or severely materially and socially deprived and/or (quasi-)jobless according to the EU definition of these indicators) compared to 13.9% of the 30-64 age group. For the EU-27 as a whole, these figures were 24.2% and 20.3%, respectively.*

*Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC ad hoc extraction - indicator [ilc\_peps02]. Data downloaded on 24 May 2021.*

### 1.3 Young people (aged 15–29) materially and socially deprived

**Figure 4: People materially and socially deprived - comparison of the 16-29 and 30-64 age groups (2015-2020, EU-27 and Slovakia, %)**

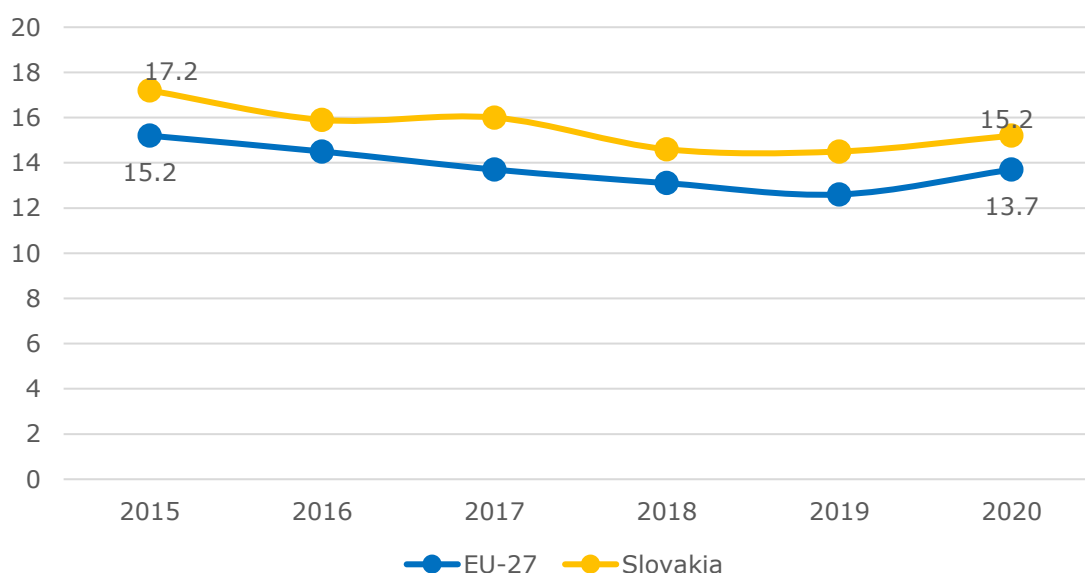


Reading note: In 2019, in Slovakia, 11.0% of the 16-29 age group were materially and socially deprived (according to the EU definition of this indicator) compared to 10.7% of the 30-64 age group. For the EU-27 as a whole, these figures were 10.7% and 12.7%, respectively.

Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC ad hoc extraction - indicator [ilc\_mdsd]. Data downloaded on 24 May 2021.

### 1.4 Young people (aged 15–29) neither in employment nor in education or training (NEETs)

**Figure 5: People aged 15-29 neither in employment nor in education or training (NEETs) (2015-2020, EU-27 and Slovakia, %)**

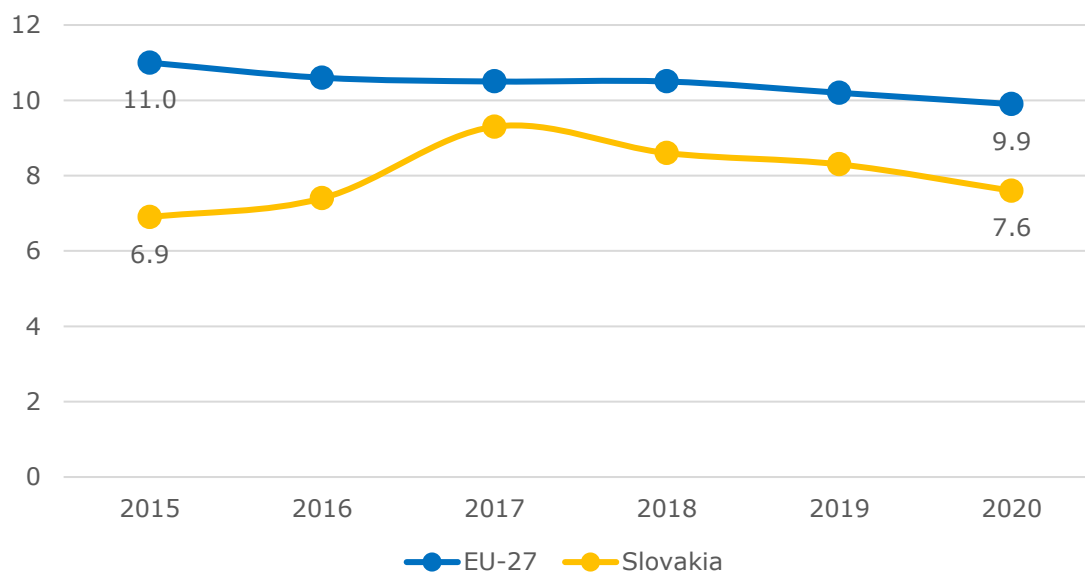


Reading note: In 2020, in Slovakia, 15.2% of the 15-29 age group were neither in employment nor in education or training (NEET) compared to 13.7 for the EU-27 as a whole.

Source: Eurostat, LFS - indicator [lfse\_20]. Data downloaded on 24 May 2021.

## 1.5 Early leavers (aged 18–24) from education and training

**Figure 6: Early leavers from education and training for the 18-24 age group (2015-2020, EU-27 and Slovakia, %)**

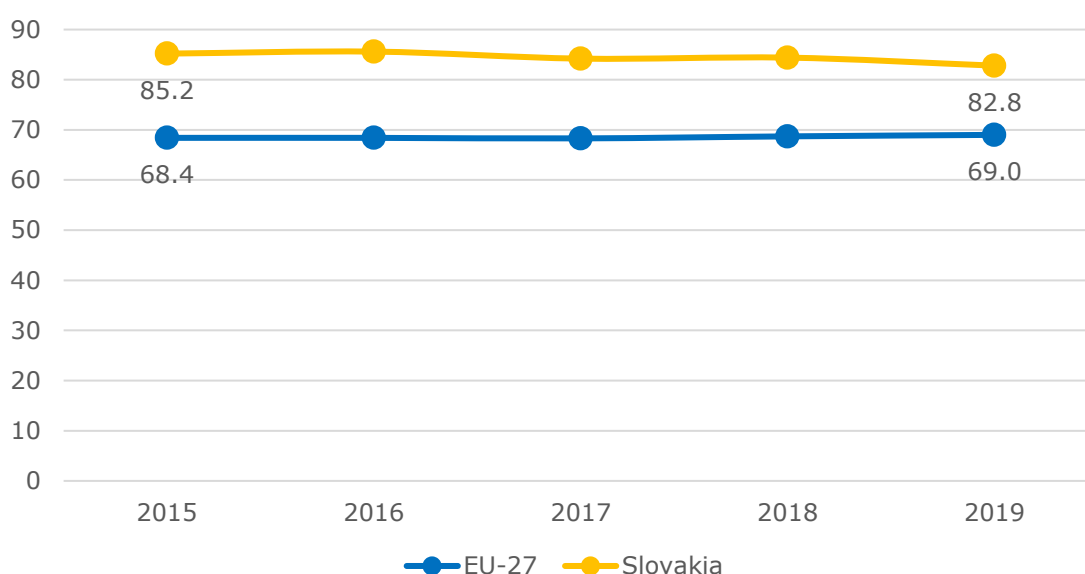


*Reading note: In 2020, in Slovakia, 7.6% of the 18-24 age group were early leavers from education and training – i.e. they had completed, at most, lower secondary education and were not in further education or training. For the EU-27 as a whole, this figure was 9.9%.*

*Source: Eurostat, LFS - indicator [edat\_ifse\_14]. Data downloaded on 24 May 2021.*

## 1.6 Young people (aged 16–29) living with their parents

**Figure 7: Young people aged 16-29 living with their parents (2015-2019, EU-27 and Slovakia, %)**



*Reading note: In 2019, in Slovakia, 82.8% of the 16-29 age group were living with their parents, compared to 69.0% for the EU-27 as a whole.*

*Source: EU-SILC - indicator [ilc\_lvps08]. Data downloaded on 24 May 2021.*

## 2 ACCESS TO UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

Unemployment benefit is an insurance-based, earnings-related transfer, provided within an insurance scheme financed by compulsory contributions from employers, employees, and voluntarily insured people (including self-employed and voluntarily unemployed people). To be entitled to unemployment benefit, people must have paid unemployment insurance contributions for at least two years out of the previous four and must be registered as job-seekers at labour offices. People have no entitlement to unemployment benefit during any period in which they are entitled to sickness benefits, nursing benefits, maternity benefit, and parental allowance.

### 2.1 Eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements

The main eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements that apply to the scheme in Slovakia as far as young people are concerned are the following.

#### a) Age

To be entitled to unemployment benefit, claimants must be 16 or over.

#### b) Activity status requirement

All young people aged 16 and over who have paid insurance contributions (on a compulsory or voluntary basis) have access to the scheme. All workers with standard and employment contracts are compulsory insured. This is also true for certain workers with non-standard contracts, including part-time and fixed-term contracts, and agency workers.

Contributions can be paid on a voluntary basis by self-employed people and specific categories of workers with non-standard employment contracts. People with work agreements outside regular employment contracts who have only irregular income from work also do not have to pay unemployment insurance contributions. Voluntarily unemployed people can also make contributions on a voluntary basis.

Trainees and apprentices are considered as being in education, and the state pays insurance contributions on their behalf. If they work as part of practical education (in firms) and receive income, they do not pay insurance contributions.

#### c) Contributory history required to access the scheme

In order to be entitled to unemployment benefit, people must have paid unemployment insurance contributions for at least two years out of the previous four.

The rule is the same for those aged 15-29 as for older people.

#### d) Waiting period

No waiting period required.

#### e) Replacement rate/benefit level

The calculation for young people is the same as that for older groups.

#### f) Duration

The duration for young people is the same as that which applies to older groups.

### 2.2 Gaps/obstacles in access for young people

The main gaps and obstacles in access for young people identified for this scheme in Slovakia are the following.

#### a) Main gaps in access for young people

There are no gaps that specifically concern young people.

## **b) Main obstacles in access for young people**

Young people are not excluded from accessing the scheme due to their age. However, as access depends on contributory history, young people with limited work experience (less than two years) have no entitlement to the benefit if they lose their job.

There is another general feature of the scheme that can affect the situation of young people. People who are voluntarily insured (including self-employed people and workers with irregular work income), pay higher contributions to the unemployment insurance scheme, compared with employees covered by the compulsory scheme. In the latter case, employees pay 1% of the assessment base,<sup>2</sup> and an additional 1% of the assessment base is paid by their employers. However, voluntarily insured people pay 2% of the assessment base themselves. There have been no analyses of the consequences of these arrangements for young people in Slovakia.

## **3 ACCESS TO SICKNESS AND HEALTHCARE BENEFITS**

### **3.1 Sickness benefits**

Sickness benefits are earnings-related social transfers provided on the basis of social insurance, which is compulsory for employees and self-employed people. Furthermore, all people over the age of 16 can be voluntary insured. There is no qualifying period for entitlement to the benefits for employees and self-employed people. They are entitled to sickness benefit from the first day of paying sickness insurance contributions, subject to having official confirmation of work incapacity from a general practitioner. Voluntarily insured people must have paid sickness insurance contributions for at least 270 days within the previous two years.

#### **3.1.1 Eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements**

The main eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements that apply to the scheme in Slovakia as far as young people are concerned are the following.

##### **a) Age**

To be entitled to sickness benefit, claimants must be 15 or over.

##### **b) Activity status requirement**

Access to sickness benefit is conditional on payment of sickness insurance contributions. Compulsory contributions are paid by people with standard employment contracts, self-employed people, and people with non-standard employment contracts – including part-time workers, people with fixed-term contracts, temporary agency workers, and people on work agreements outside regular employment contracts who have regular income from work.

##### **c) Contributory history required to access the scheme**

The rules for sickness benefit are the same for those aged 15-29 as for older people.

##### **d) Waiting period**

There is no waiting period.

##### **e) Replacement rate/benefit level**

The calculation for young people is the same as that for older groups.

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<sup>2</sup> The assessment base refers to employees' taxable income, i.e. gross wage.

**f) Duration**

The duration of sickness benefit for young people is the same as that for older groups.

**3.1.2 Gaps/obstacles in access for young people**

The main gaps and obstacles in access for young people identified for this scheme in Slovakia are the following.

**a) Main gaps in access for young people**

No gaps have been identified.

**b) Main obstacles in access for young people**

No obstacles have been identified.

**3.2 Healthcare benefits**

Universal and free-of-charge access to a basic package of healthcare services is guaranteed in Slovakia. All citizens are covered by the compulsory health insurance scheme. If working people fail to pay contributions, they are only entitled to emergency care. The state pays health insurance contributions on behalf of economically inactive people, including students, unemployed people registered at labour offices, and recipients of various social benefits.<sup>3</sup>

**3.2.1 Eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements****a) Age**

Age is not a criterion for this scheme.

Age is a criterion for setting a maximum limit for co-payments for prescribed pharmaceuticals, and the provision of some healthcare services. However, young people are not targeted by these measures: old-age pension recipients and children under the age of 6 benefit from the reduced co-payments.

**b) Activity status requirement**

All working people, including self-employed and non-standard workers, are obliged to pay health insurance contributions. All working people, unemployed people, and trainees/apprentices have equal access to healthcare. The same applies to young people under 18.

Students do not benefit from reduced co-payments.

**c) Contributory history required to access the scheme**

Universal and free-of-charge access to a basic package of healthcare services is guaranteed in Slovakia. All citizens are covered by the compulsory health insurance scheme.

**d) Waiting period**

There is no waiting period.

**e) Replacement rate/benefit level**

Healthcare is provided according to patients' needs.

If co-payments are required (for example, for some pharmaceutical products), the same rules apply to those aged 15-30 as to older people (except for old-age pensioners).

**f) Duration**

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<sup>3</sup> Recipients of old-age pensions, invalidity pensions, minimum-income benefits, parental allowances, sickness benefits, maternity benefits, and benefits for carers of sick relatives, care-givers/personal assistants of disabled people, and people caring for pre-school age children.

Healthcare is provided on the basis of patients' needs.

### **3.2.2 Gaps/obstacles in access for young people**

The main gaps and obstacles in access for young people identified for this scheme in Slovakia are the following.

#### **a) Main gaps in access for young people**

No gaps have been identified.

#### **b) Main obstacles in access for young people**

People living in marginalised Roma communities face obstacles in accessing healthcare services. Although the coverage by health insurance is comparable to that for the majority population, the use of healthcare services is significantly lower (Bednarik et al., 2019). In particular, young Roma people use healthcare services less frequently: among Roma men aged 5-29 it is 40% lower than among non-Roma men of the same age (Bednarik et al., 2019; Bojko et al., 2018). The factors contributing to this disparity include information barriers, language barriers, and related costs, but also discrimination (*ibid.*).

## **4 ACCESS TO MATERNITY, PATERNITY AND PARENTAL CASH BENEFITS**

There are two main schemes that cover maternity and parental cash benefits in Slovakia. Whereas maternity benefit (and maternity leave) is a contributory scheme, parental allowance is non-contributory. In addition, there is financial support for pregnant women, including an insurance-based pregnancy benefit and non-contributory pregnancy scholarships.

### **4.1 Maternity benefit**

Maternity benefit is funded through sickness insurance, which is a compulsory social insurance scheme for employees and self-employed people with earnings-related benefits. All other people aged over 16 can enter the sickness insurance scheme on a voluntary basis.

Maternity leave lasts for 34 weeks: six to eight weeks of prenatal leave, and 26-28 weeks of postnatal leave. It is extended to 37 weeks for single mothers, and 43 weeks in the case of multiple births. In the case of foster care, the leave lasts for 29 weeks (31 for single people, 37 weeks for those caring for at least two newborn children). Maternity leave benefits are financed from sickness insurance contributions: employers and employees pay 1.4% of earnings, and self-employed people pay 4.4% of declared earnings. To be eligible for maternity leave benefit, an employee must have contributed to the sickness insurance scheme for at least 270 days during the two years before the birth.

#### **4.1.1 Eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements**

The main eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements that apply to the scheme in Slovakia as far as young people are concerned are the following.

##### **a) Age**

Age is not a criterion for this scheme. However, children aged under 16 are not entitled to the benefit.

##### **b) Activity status requirement**

Access to the benefit is conditional on payment of sickness insurance contributions (either compulsory or voluntary). Employees (including part-time workers, people with fixed-term contracts, temporary agency workers, and people on work agreements outside regular employment contracts who have regular income from work) and self-employed people pay

compulsory contributions. Other people can pay contributions on a voluntary basis, including people on work agreements outside regular employment contracts who have irregular income from work, students, informal carers, and voluntarily unemployed people. The rules are the same for those aged 15-29 as for older people.

**c) Contributory history required to access the scheme**

The rules are the same for those aged 15-29 as for older people.

**d) Waiting period**

There is no waiting period.

**e) Replacement rate/benefit level**

The calculation for young people is the same as that for older groups.

**f) Duration**

The duration of the benefit for young people is the same as that for older groups.

#### **4.1.2 Gaps/obstacles in access for young people**

The main gaps and obstacles in access for young people identified for this scheme in Slovakia are the following.

**a) Main gaps in access for young people**

No gaps have been identified.

**b) Main obstacles in access for young people**

As maternity benefit represents an insurance-based, earnings-related benefit, women with a limited work history and contributory period (including women without any contribution period at all) have no entitlement. This concerns, for example, students. In 2021, pregnancy scholarships were introduced in order to help pregnant students financially (see Section 4.2).

### **4.2 Pregnancy benefit and pregnancy scholarships**

Pregnancy benefit and pregnancy scholarships represent new social benefits that were introduced in 2020. Whereas pregnancy benefit is a contributory scheme, pregnancy scholarships are a non-contributory benefit.

Entitlement to pregnancy benefit is based on the contributory period (270 days within the previous two years), whereas pregnancy scholarships depend on activity status (being a student) and age (being older than 18). Both the benefit and scholarships are intended to cover part of the expenses related to pregnancy.

Pregnancy scholarships are a non-contributory benefit granted to students at universities, and students aged over 18 at secondary schools, after the 12<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy (until birth), regardless of the form of education and the type of school. They are funded from general taxation and amount to €200 per month. The scholarships are granted on the basis of decisions by university rectors or directors of secondary schools.

#### **4.2.1 Eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements**

The main eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements that apply to the scheme in Slovakia as far as young people are concerned are the following.

**a) Age**

Age is not a criterion for pregnancy benefit.

Pregnancy scholarships are granted to students at universities and students aged over 18 at secondary schools. Young women represent the main target group.



**b) Activity status requirement**

Access to pregnancy benefit is conditional on payment of sickness insurance contributions. The rules are the same for those aged 15-29 as for older people.

Pregnancy scholarships are a non-contributory benefit granted to students at universities and students aged over 18 at secondary schools.

**c) Contributory history required to access the scheme**

Access to pregnancy benefit is conditional on payment of sickness insurance contributions. The rules are the same for those aged 15-29 as for older people.

As regards pregnancy scholarships, no contributory history is required.

**d) Waiting period**

There is no waiting period.

**e) Replacement rate/benefit level**

The calculation for young people is the same as that for older groups.

**f) Duration**

The duration of the benefit for young people is the same as that for older groups.

**4.2.2 Gaps/obstacles in access for young people**

The main gaps and obstacles in access for young people identified for this scheme in Slovakia are the following.

**a) Main gaps in access for young people**

No gaps have been identified.

**b) Main obstacles in access for young people**

No obstacles have been identified.

**4.3 Paternity benefit**

There is no paternity benefit in Slovakia. However, fathers can benefit from the maternity benefit. To be eligible for maternity benefit, fathers must have paid sickness insurance contributions for at least 270 days during the two years before the birth. Fathers can claim the maternity benefit after at least six weeks from the birth. They can stay home with the child on maternity benefit for 28 weeks until the child reaches the age of 3.<sup>4</sup> Since 2019, both parents can take maternal leave, provided that they care for two children under the age of 3 (each parent can take maternal leave for one child). As of May 2021, an important administrative burden was abolished: fathers are no longer obliged to submit a written agreement with the mother regarding the care of a child when they want to change care arrangements.<sup>5</sup> However, these changes do not focus specifically on young people.

**4.3.1 Eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements**

As far as young people are concerned, the benefit conditions and entitlements are the following.

**a) Age**

Age is not a criterion for this scheme.

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<sup>4</sup> In 2016 changes were made to the design of maternal benefit and maternal leave that increased its attractiveness for fathers (Dančíková, 2020), including an increase in the replacement level and in the maximum amount of the benefit. This resulted into an increasing number of fathers taking the leave.

<sup>5</sup> <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/22649226/maternity-leave-will-be-easier-from-may-1.html>

**b) Activity status requirement**

Access to the benefit is conditional on payment of sickness insurance contributions (on a compulsory basis in the case of employees and self-employed people, and on a voluntary basis for other people). The rules are the same for those aged 15-29 as for older people.

**c) Contributory history required to access the scheme**

The rules are the same for those aged 15-29 as for older people.

**d) Waiting period**

There is no waiting period.

**e) Replacement rate/benefit level**

The calculation for young people is the same as that for older groups.

**f) Duration**

The duration of the benefit for young people is the same as that for older groups.

**4.3.2 Gaps/obstacles in access for young people**

The main gaps and obstacles in access for young people identified for this scheme in Slovakia are the following.

**a) Main gaps in access for young people**

No gaps have been identified.

**b) Main obstacles in access for young people**

As maternity benefit paid to fathers is an insurance-based, earnings-related benefit and requires a contributory period of 270 days, young fathers with a short work history and contributory period might not be eligible.

**4.4 Parental allowance**

Parental allowance is a universal scheme that provides a flat-rate non-contributory benefit. Parental allowance is provided as a monthly benefit until the child reaches the age of 3. If the child has a long-term health problem or disability, it is extended to the age of 6. Parents can work part time or full time while receiving parental allowance.

**4.4.1 Eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements**

The main eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements that apply to the scheme in Slovakia as far as young people are concerned are the following.

**a) Age**

Age is not a criterion for this scheme. However, children under 16 are not allowed to receive parental allowance.

**b) Activity status requirement**

Parents of children aged up to 3 (up to 6 in the case of disability or serious health problems) are entitled to the allowance, regardless of their activity status. This means that unemployed people, inactive people, trainees, and apprentices also have access to the allowance.

**c) Contributory history required to access the scheme**

Parental allowance is a non-contributory benefit. The rules for the allowance are the same for those aged 15-29 as for older people.

**d) Waiting period**

There is no waiting period.

**e) Replacement rate/benefit level**

Parental allowance is granted as a flat-rate amount. The amount for young people is the same as that for older groups.

**f) Duration**

The duration of the benefit for young people is the same as that for older groups.

**4.4.2 Gaps/obstacles in access for young people**

The main gaps and obstacles in access for young people identified for this scheme in Slovakia are the following.

**a) Main gaps in access for young people**

No gaps have been identified.

**b) Main obstacles in access for young people**

No obstacles have been identified.

**5 GUARANTEED MINIMUM INCOME SCHEMES**

Guaranteed minimum income arrangements in Slovakia take the form of the “assistance in material need” scheme. This consists of a “benefit in material need” and several allowances. It is provided to households.

**5.1 Eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements**

The main eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements that apply to the scheme in Slovakia as far as young people are concerned are the following.

**a) Age**

People under 25 who live in their parents’ household, and have no income or an income lower than the half the monthly minimum wage, are considered to be members of the household. Thus, they have no separate entitlement to the benefit in material need. The same holds true for people over 25 who attend professional training/education on a daily basis.

If, however, young people are registered job-seekers and are entitled to unemployment benefit, or they are doctoral students, they are not considered to be members of the households claiming minimum-income benefit.

**b) Activity status requirement**

When assessing the income of households that claim the minimum-income benefit, any earnings of students at secondary schools and universities, not exceeding three times the subsistence minimum, are not taken into account. As a result, these earnings can be combined with the minimum-income benefit. This rule also applies to trainees and apprentices.

**c) Other eligibility conditions**

There are eligibility conditions, but these are not different for young people.

**d) Benefit level**

The benefit is provided to households, not to individual members. The benefit level for young people’s households is the same as that for the households of older people.

**e) Distinctions between different groups of young people**

There are differences concerning whether young people aged 25 or under are considered to be members of households or not (see above). Young people over 25 do not face such constraints.

**5.2 Gaps/obstacles in access for young people**

The main gaps and obstacles in access for young people identified for this scheme in Slovakia are the following.

**a) Main gaps in access for young people**

Young people under 25 are considered to be members of their parents' households. As a result, they do not have access to a separate minimum-income benefit despite the fact that they are adults with their own needs and responsibilities.

**b) Main obstacles in access for young people**

No obstacles in relation to young people have been identified.

**6 HOUSING BENEFITS**

Housing benefit is part of the minimum-income scheme. It is provided only to recipients of the minimum-income benefit.

**6.1 Eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements**

The main eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements that apply to the scheme in Slovakia as far as young people are concerned are the following.

**a) Age**

Age is not a criterion for this scheme.

**b) Activity status requirement**

Only recipients of minimum-income benefit are entitled to housing benefit.

**c) Other eligibility conditions**

There are eligibility conditions, but these are not different for young people.

**d) Benefit level**

The benefit level for young people is the same as that for older groups.

**e) Distinctions between different groups of young people**

There are no distinctions between different groups of young people.

**6.2 Gaps/obstacles in access for young people**

The main gaps and obstacles in access for young people identified for this scheme in Slovakia are the following.

**a) Main gaps in access for young people**

No gaps have been identified.

**b) Main obstacles in access for young people**

No obstacles have been identified.

## 7 REFORMS, NATIONAL DEBATES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 7.1 Reforms implemented since 2015

Recent reforms of social protection have rarely focused on young people as a specific category. It was only in 2020 that a measure aimed specifically at young people was introduced: this took the form of pregnancy scholarships for young women (see Section 4.2). Pregnancy scholarships are a non-contributory cash benefit, introduced hand-in-hand with a new pregnancy benefit, which is an earnings-related benefit conditional on sickness insurance payments.

Until recently unemployment benefit represented a part of social protection in Slovakia that had not been reformed for a long time. In 2018, the definition of the qualifying period for unemployment benefit was changed, which slightly improved access for young people. Until 2018, people had to have paid unemployment insurance contributions for at least two years out of the previous three, but since 2018 the contributory period has been defined as at least two years out of the previous four. This relaxation benefits people with limited work experience, including young people.

Maternity benefit, which is aimed at mothers (and fathers<sup>6</sup>), is also implicitly targeted at a significant section of young people. It has undergone recent changes that have increased the benefit level. In 2016, the ceiling on the amount of maternity benefit was raised from 1.5 times to twice the national average wage. From May 2017, it was set at 75% of the daily assessment base (daily earnings), calculated based on the previous year, meaning that mothers receive maternity benefit in proportion to their earnings.

In 2019, a significant increase in the parental allowance was introduced, accompanied by the introduction of two different levels of the allowance. As of January 2020, a higher parental allowance of €370 was granted to parents who had been employed before becoming parents (and who paid social contributions and thus were entitled to maternity benefit). A lower amount of €270 was paid to parents who did not work and did not pay social contributions. The current allowance levels are €378.10 and €275.90 respectively.

In their response to the COVID-19 crisis, policy-makers paid particular attention to the education of young people. But in the field of social protection, age was not taken into account as a criterion or basis for specific measures. As a result, young people were not the specific target of social protection interventions.

### 7.2 National debates

Recently, a lively debate on family policy and its ability to mitigate demographic ageing has started in Slovakia. It is these long-term demographic trends, rather than the COVID-19 pandemic, that has triggered an intense debate on young people's access to social protection, and won an increased interest among policy-makers. The aim is to reverse the negative trends in the fertility rate and to establish the conditions for an increase in the number of newly born children.

The Minister of Finance has recently presented a plan to significantly increase support for families, including an increase in child benefit (from €25 to €200 per month).<sup>7</sup> This plan has caused stormy debates about the role and design of family policy in Slovakia, involving experts from academia and universities, trade union representatives, and policy-makers. In particular, the ability of the state to influence the family aspirations of young people has been widely discussed. As result, there is a growing consensus that young people who want to start a family should attract significantly more attention from public policy-makers.

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<sup>6</sup> Maternity benefit can also be claimed by fathers: see Section 4.3.

<sup>7</sup> <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/22654388/matovic-introduces-tax-reform.html>

### **7.3 Good practice and recommendations**

Pregnancy scholarships, which improve the living conditions of young pregnant students, can be mentioned as a good practice. Unlike social protection policies, employment and labour market policies target young people. Several measures have been introduced to promote labour market entry for young people, allowing them to gain experience after completing education, and improving the match between their skills and those needed by employers.

Recommendations relate to young people who have left the labour market. When claiming unemployment benefit, people with a short work history might fail to meet the eligibility criteria. Thus, the design of unemployment benefit should take into account the situation of young people who are at the start of their careers and who become unemployed.

When unemployed young people do not meet the eligibility criteria for unemployment benefit, they can claim the minimum-income benefit. Here, the biggest problem is that young people are considered as members of their parents' household, without a separate entitlement. The design of the minimum-income benefit should take this into account.

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