



# **Youth Social Exclusion and Lessons from Youth Work**

**Evidence from literature  
and surveys**

**Report produced by the Education,  
Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency  
(EACEA)**

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## INTRODUCTION

It is widely recognised that social exclusion produces deep and long-term damage to the living conditions, social and economic participation, emotional life, and health status of young people. It also contributes to the intergenerational transmission of poverty. In turn, insecurity in living standards, political and social isolation, feelings of estrangement and unhealthy lifestyles aggravate pre-existing conditions of social exclusion. This results in a vicious circle where socially excluded young people are in even more danger of suffering from additional material deprivation, social and emotional marginalisation, and health issues, which in turn expose them to more serious risks of exclusion. Almost one out of three young persons between the ages of 18 and 24 is at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the European Union.<sup>1</sup>

Youth work can offer opportunities for preventing and remedying this vicious circle. By offering young people targeted support, opportunities for non-formal learning, information on health and wellbeing, and opportunities for positive integration into the local community, youth workers are able to reduce the risks of further social exclusion linked to deteriorating living conditions and unhealthy life styles.

The EU Youth Strategy recognises the relevance of youth work to mitigating the effects of social exclusion amongst young people.<sup>2</sup> Reaffirming this concept, the Council Resolution on Youth Work of 2010 invited Member States and the Commission to support the development of youth work at local, regional, national and European level.<sup>3</sup> The relation between youth work and social inclusion also touches upon the priorities established by the 2012 EU Youth Report.<sup>4</sup> A general overview of the fundamental threats to social inclusion experienced by young people can be found in the dedicated chapter of the Youth Report. The benefits coming from youth work to the inclusion of young people, and in particular of those with a migrant background, has been recognised in the Conclusions of the Council of 27 November 2012.<sup>5</sup> To address the risks of exclusion run by many young individuals, the Social Investment Package adopted by the European Commission seeks to improve the situation of young people by tackling childhood disadvantage, improving access to quality education and support services, helping young people develop skills relevant to the labour market, and ensuring work experience and on-the-job training and helping young people find a first good job (European Commission, 2013a).

This paper aims at offering evidence about the situation of social exclusion suffered by young people in the European Union, and the positive effects that youth work initiatives produce in fostering their (re)inclusion. Looking at factual information on the main conditions of exclusion is essential to have an accurate understanding of the threats encountered by young people. Available data and research literature illustrate the major reasons behind the marginalisation of young Europeans, and pave the way to the development of effective policy strategies to prevent it.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the latest data published by Eurostat, an estimate of 29,8% of young people in the 18-24 age group were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU in 2011. Data can be accessed at [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/employment\\_social\\_policy\\_equality/youth/indicators](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/employment_social_policy_equality/youth/indicators)

<sup>2</sup> Council Resolution of 27 November 2009 on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018), OJ C 311, 19.12.2009.

<sup>3</sup> Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on youth work, OJ C 327, 04.12.2010.

<sup>4</sup> 2012 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the Implementation of the Renewed Framework for European cooperation in the Youth Field (2010-2018), OJ C 394, 20.12.2012, pp. 5-16. This report was accompanied by a Staff Working Document on the situation of young people in the EU with a section on social inclusion, SWD(2012)257.

<sup>5</sup> Conclusions of the Council of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 27 November 2012 on the participation and social inclusion of young people with emphasis on those with a migrant background, OJ C 393, 19.12.2012.

The first section of the report depicts an overview of the concept of youth social exclusion and establishes the scope of the analysis. The second section presents a discussion of comparative data on several aspects of youth social exclusion in the European Union. In addition, examples of positive initiatives in the field of youth work, capable of alleviating the effects of youth marginalisation will be described.

## 1. SOCIAL EXCLUSION: A WORKING DEFINITION

The concept of social exclusion includes not only the traditional dimension of poverty, but also the multi-dimensional aspects of material and non-material deprivation, their interrelationships, and the dynamics of social, economic, and political marginalisation that result.

Because of the highly contested nature of the concept – both in the social science literature and in political discourse – a comprehensive definition of social exclusion that incorporates all its multiple dimensions and overlapping features is no easy task. This is even more challenging when attempting to develop a definition that allows for quantitative ‘measurements’ of the level of social exclusion suffered by individuals, and, at the same time, offers concrete grounds for policy action.

The relevant literature provides assistance by proposing an analytical differentiation between the *aspects* of social exclusion, and exclusionary processes or the *determinants* of social exclusion (Mathieson, et al., 2008). These two components help to distinguish the static and the dynamic dimensions of exclusion, and enable an understanding of how they interrelate.

On one hand, the aspects of social exclusion describe the social, political, and economic deprivation suffered by marginalised individuals. This deprivation can be read in terms of an imposed inability to enjoy fundamental human rights, such as the right to education, the right to work and to a fair remuneration, the right to health and wellbeing, and the right to vote and to stand for elections (UNDP, 2007).

On the other hand, the determinants of social exclusion illustrate the confluent economic and social processes, the cumulative effect of which leads to experiencing marginalisation (Estivill, 2003).

In terms of evidence-based policymaking, the proposed working definition is useful because it is flexible enough to include various at-risk groups that are otherwise left out by more rigid categories. At the same time, the focus on exclusion's process-oriented nature reduces the risk of stigmatising specific groups, and seeks to capture the cumulative tendency of overlapping forms of exclusion. As will be shown in the examples of youth work illustrated later on, understanding the intersection of the various exclusionary determinants and the effects of exclusion that result is key to designing effective remedies.

The main aspects of social exclusion can be summarised as follows, although the list is not exhaustive:

- experiencing poor living conditions (in terms of housing, nutrition, clothing, physical safety);
- being unable to participate in the social and political life of one's community (not out of choice but as a result of obstacles encountered);
- being unable to enjoy cultural and recreational activities (as a result of obstacles encountered);
- suffering from health conditions deriving from poor living standards and experiencing obstacles to accessing health care and social services when needed;
- suffering from an emotional and psychological sense of exclusion and isolation from the community and/or from society at large (worsening wellbeing<sup>6</sup>).

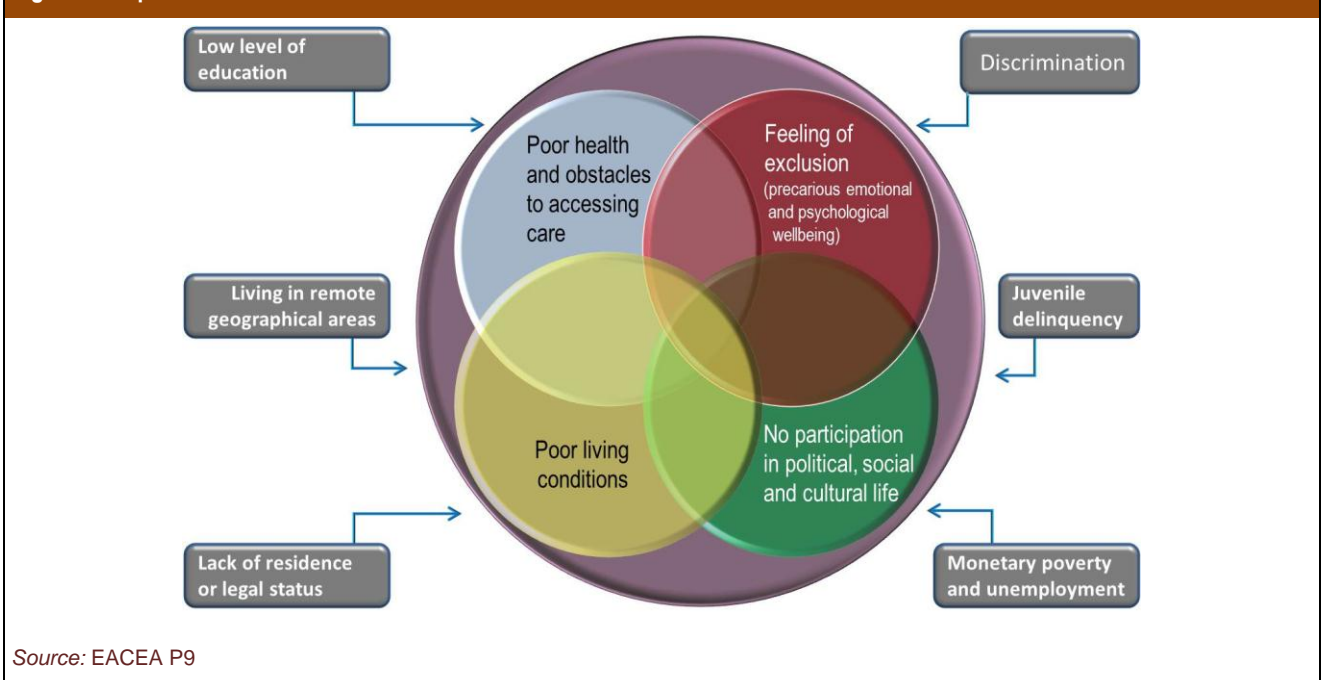
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<sup>6</sup> The report adopts the definition of ‘wellbeing’ as emerging from the survey conducted by Eurobarometer in 2011. According to the report, the vast majority of respondents associated the notion of ‘wellbeing’ with emotional and psychological satisfaction, and a general feeling of ‘happiness’ in personal life (Eurobarometer, 2011).

More than one determinant is generally at play in producing these aspects of social exclusion. Poor levels of education, experiencing discrimination based on personal characteristics, monetary poverty, unemployment, lack of residence or legal status in the host-country, living in remote geographical areas, and experiences of juvenile delinquency, are often indicated as the main determinants of youth social exclusion.

Although each determinant is approached separately for the sake of analysis, they overlap in the life trajectories of socially excluded persons. For example, a person with poor education is usually more likely to be unemployed or to find a poorly paid employment and to suffer from (general or in-work) poverty. Similarly, a member of a national or ethnic minority suffering from discrimination is more likely to face barriers to exercising citizenship rights or obtaining permanent residency in a country and to have a lower income. Likewise, a person belonging to a deprived community (in terms of family background and/or social group) is less likely to have the means to pursue higher studies and to secure a stable job. The same applies to a homeless individual, who is hindered from attending education and training, and more likely to live in poverty. Figure 1 offers a visual representation of social exclusion as defined in this report.

**Figure 1: Aspects and determinants of social exclusion**



The proposed model builds upon the Framework for Action on Health Inequalities developed by WHO in 2006. According to the Framework, the socio-economic and political context (including the labour market; the educational system; religion and other cultural systems; and political institutions) give rise to patterns of social stratification based on differential access to economic status, power and prestige. Income levels, education, occupation status, gender, race/ethnicity and other factors are used as proxy indicators of these differential social positions. Based on socio-economic position, individuals and groups experience differences in exposure and vulnerability to marginalisation.

## 2. SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND LESSONS FROM YOUTH WORK

Four main determinants of exclusion have been selected for this short report: discrimination, lack of citizenship or residence, poor education, and poverty. This choice has been motivated by the availability of comparable data at the EU level to support the analysis. Determinants are tackled with special reference to how they affect the lives of young people experiencing social exclusion, in relation to the aspects identified in Section 1. For each of the identified determinants, available data are presented and discussed. Quantitative data are not always available for each topic. In such instances, reference to qualitative studies is made.

After illustrating how the determinants affect young people's quality of life and expose them to the risk of social marginalisation, examples of relevant youth work projects conducted in Member States will be presented. From the review of these positive practices, insight into the kind of interventions that can mitigate the effects of marginalisation will be offered.<sup>7</sup>

### 2.1 Discrimination

Chronic and repetitive experiences of discrimination (based on various individual characteristics such as ethnic background, gender, sexual orientation, religion, language) increase the probability of experiencing social exclusion. The literature and available data indicate that not only objective discrimination leads to worsening living and health conditions, but also the subjective feeling of being discriminated against, negatively affect young people's quality of life, health, and motivation to participate in political and cultural life (Gee and Walsemann, 2009).

Actual or perceived unequal treatment based on sexual, religious, cultural, and physical characteristics often translates into barriers to accessing services that should be available to everybody and to enjoying universal human rights. Furthermore, a number of reasons why an individual feels discriminated against can overlap making it even more likely that health and wellbeing are jeopardised, and the feeling of belonging to the social and political community is weakened.

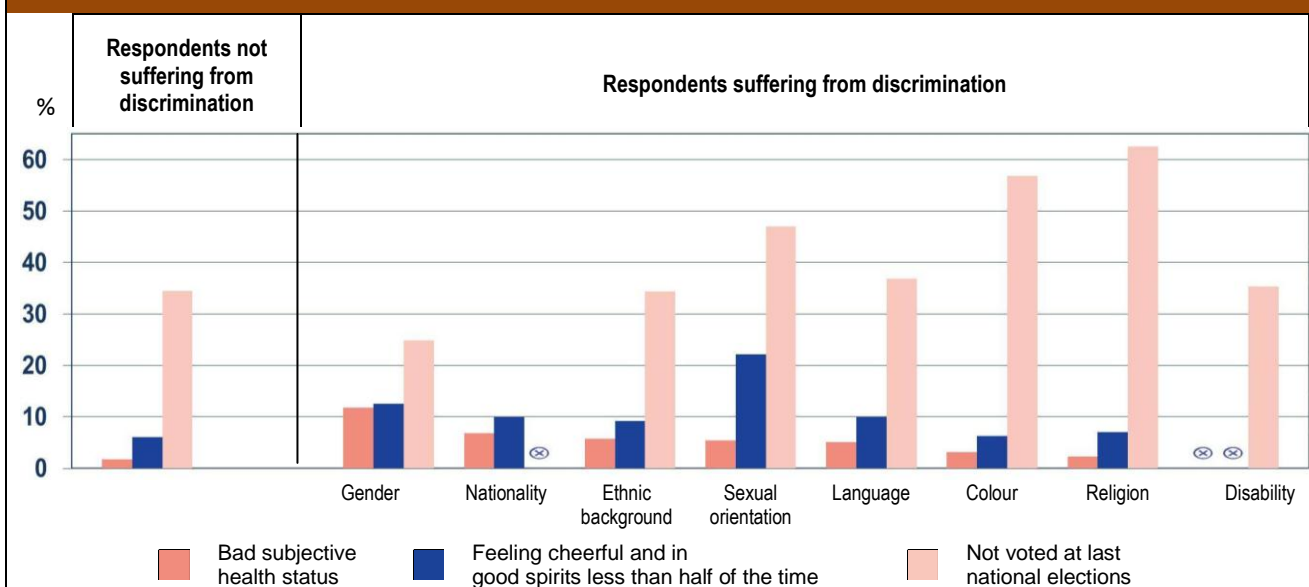
Data collected through the European Social Survey make it possible to investigate how the feeling of being discriminated against is associated with the level of physical health, emotional wellbeing, and enjoyment of voting rights. The grounds of discrimination covered by the survey reflect many of those contained in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The examples of youth work described have been selected through an overview of the main sources of information on youth work projects at European level. In particular, the following sources have been consulted: the contributions from Member States to the 2012 EU Youth Report; the SALTO-Youth Inclusion database; the European Knowledge Centre on Youth Policy (EKCY); the Youth Opportunity Network (YONET); the The online platform for European youth information workers (SHERYCA); and the Youth in Action database.

<sup>8</sup> Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, 2000. OJ C 83/389, 30.3.2010. Chapter III, Article 21.

**Figure 2: Health status, emotional wellbeing, and political participation in relation to feelings of suffering discrimination (15-29). EU-27, 2010**



⊗: Data are not included in the chart. See notes below

Source: ESS 2010

#### Notes

The weighted EU average is calculated for the EU countries participating in the survey (Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Spain, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Slovenia, Slovakia, and the United Kingdom).

Nationality: this basis of discrimination has been excluded for voting at national elections because non-nationals are often not entitled to vote at national elections.

Disability has been excluded for health status and emotional wellbeing because the survey's sample did not allow for controlling the direct impact of disability on one's health and emotional subjective conditions.

Age groups: for subjective health and wellbeing, 15-29; for voting at elections, 25-29.

Amongst young people not suffering from any form of discrimination, very few subjectively report bad health. In contrast, over 10% of respondents, who feel discriminated against because of their gender, report bad health. To avoid a misleading interpretation of the results, the association between gender discrimination and poor health has been tested for both men and women: respondents suffering from gender discrimination subjectively report similar higher percentages of bad health irrespective of their gender.

Discrimination based on nationality, ethnic background, sexual orientation, and language also appear to be associated with poor health. In contrast, suffering discrimination because of one's colour or religious views does not seem to have an effect on the self-assessed level of health.

Additionally, data indicate that feeling discriminated against because of sexual orientation and gender relates to poorer levels of emotional wellbeing. Amongst the aspects considered in this report, inequalities based on sexual identity and gender appear to be the strongest factors inducing physical and emotional suffering amongst young people.

A rather different picture emerges regarding political participation. In this case, feeling discriminated against because of one's gender appears as a possible factor motivating young citizens to cast their votes at national elections. On the other hand, feeling discriminated against because of colour and religion scores as the strongest reason for disenfranchisement. Indeed, about twice as many young citizens who perceive



prejudice against their colour or their religion have not cast their vote in comparison with respondents who do not experience similar prejudice.

Beyond differences in how specific forms of discrimination affect the quality of life and the political involvement of young people, data confirm a general association between feeling discriminated against and being at risk of social marginalisation. Youth work can offer solid remedies to these situations, by combating the root causes of discrimination and, in so doing, establishing favourable conditions for the enjoyment of social, economic, and political rights.

#### 1 Lessons from Youth Work: the youth houses in Finland

The Youth Department of the City of Helsinki has launched a programme for supporting multiculturalism and fighting discrimination through a mainstreaming approach. Contrary to a common definition of multicultural youth work as youth work done only with young people within different ethnic backgrounds, the programme aims at involving both minorities and the general youth population in order to create opportunities for mutual understanding and integration. According to the programme, all youth services should be assessed and developed with the principles of equality and multiculturalism in mind. The programme supports "youth houses" like *Alliance ry*, *Afro-European Youth ry*, and *Kanava nuoret ry*, which organise activities for encouraging the inclusion of youth from Russian, African and Somali backgrounds respectively. Aware of the fact that cultural sensitivity goes hand in hand with gender sensitivity, many issues of intercultural opening and multiculturalism are approached in combination with gender issues. The special position and opportunities for participation of girls with a migrant background (especially Muslim) is a central issue. For example, at one youth house, a youth worker with Somali origin initiated a club for Somali girls. Girls were proactively organising recreational and sport activities in what they felt as a comfortable environment. What was crucial in this case was the cooperation with the girls' parents. The trust relationship between parents and the youth workers supervising the activities were the prerequisite for the girls' participation. In this way, they were able to integrate into the wider community, and connect with peers from other backgrounds.

An evaluation of the programme conducted by a researcher showed that young migrants were rather appreciative of both the contents and the degree of intercultural openness of the youth houses they visited. Enjoying opportunities for socialising with friends and making new friends emerged as the most important reason for the young interviewees' participation in the activities of the youth houses. The programme also created opportunities for influencing the attitudes of Finnish young people by everyday interventions and discussions, therefore contributing to developing a more open and tolerant community (Peltola, 2010).

<http://www.nuorisotutkimusseura.fi/julkaisuja/youthwork.pdf>

## 2.2 Lack of residency, legal status, or permanent address

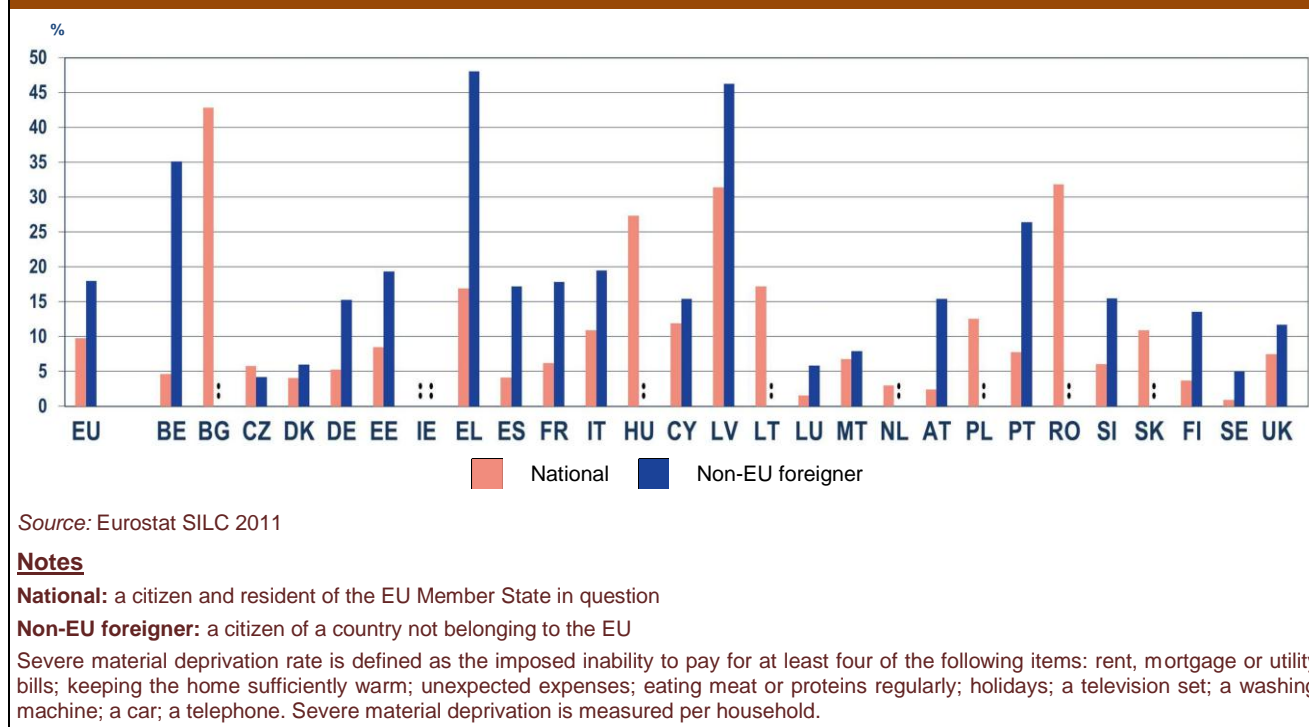
A permanent address, a residency permit, and a legal status in the host-country, are often preconditions for enjoying basic economic and social rights in most European welfare systems. For example, health care coverage, enrolment in formal or non-formal education programmes, and registration with social and employment-seeking services, are generally inaccessible to individuals who lack a legal and official status in the country where they live.

For several groups of children and young people at risk of social exclusion, these preconditions are often missing. Young non-EU nationals (either immigrants or those born in an EU country into immigrant families), 'stateless' children and young people or those without necessary identification documents (ERRC 2003 and 2004), homeless young citizens who do not have a permanent address, can encounter significant difficulties in qualifying for public and social services. In many cases, various circumstances overlap: young immigrants or stateless persons are particularly at risk of becoming homeless and, therefore, of being prevented from accessing support services. Similar challenges exist also for EU young persons who spend a period of time studying or working in other EU countries, and might encounter obstacles to the exploitation of their political and social rights by the lack of administrative residency in host EU countries.

Collecting comparable data at EU level on young people for whom no official trace exists is extremely difficult, exactly because of the challenges in identifying them. Data are mostly available only for immigrants from outside the EU holding a legal residence permit in the EU country where they live. In this context,

Eurostat has figures on young non-EU foreigners suffering from social exclusion through its survey on Income, Social Inclusion, and Living Conditions (SILC) (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Percentage of respondents (15-29) reporting a condition of severe material deprivation, by citizenship status (EU/non-EU), 2011**



The general trend across the European Union is for young non-EU foreigners to suffer from severe material deprivation at twice the rate of nationals.

Belgium, Austria, and Sweden register levels of non-EU citizens reporting material poverty about five times higher than nationals. In Germany, Greece, Spain, Luxembourg, Portugal, and Finland, the ratio is significantly higher than the EU average. In Latvia, particularly high levels of deprivation amongst non-EU young people are recorded, although the disparity with nationals is more modest than in other countries. Only in a few European countries (the Czech Republic, Denmark, Cyprus, and Malta), does the situation of material poverty between nationals and non-EU foreigners appear more balanced.

Although data are only available for immigrants with a legal residency permit, qualitative studies have underlined that material deprivation and social marginalisation are exacerbated when the presence of non-EU foreigners is illegal (FRA, 2011).

There are several explanations for the exposure of young non-EU citizens to material deprivation. As a recent analysis conducted by Eurostat indicates, the presence of dependent children and young people in the household adds markedly to the risk of poverty and social exclusion in non-EU families, while this is much less the case for native families, irrespective of the number of dependent children (Eurostat, 2011b). In non-EU immigrant families, women are more likely to stay at home to care for children, also in consideration of a lack of family ties providing support. This often prevents women from being in paid employment and thus from contributing to the household budget. This condition applies both to young people still living with their parents, and to those who have established their own families.

Lack of awareness of social and economic rights also plays a role in making young foreigners, immigrants, and people without administrative identity documents more vulnerable to material deprivation. Access to social support services (such as financial support schemes for education, economic benefits and housing facilities) is frequently impaired simply because these groups often meet obstacles which prevent them from

obtaining relevant information. In this respect, language and cultural barriers certainly represent significant obstacles. Similarly, high levels of early school leaving registered amongst immigrants, travellers, and homeless youth across the EU further undermine their opportunities to secure good living conditions.<sup>9</sup>

Material deprivation is only one of the risks incurred by young people without a regular residence or address. Accessing health care services and avoiding health risks are also often precluded.

Despite the scarcity of quantitative information collected at European level on the association between the lack of a legal residence permit and the health status of young people, some evidence can be found in qualitative studies. A study conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) highlights the vulnerable situation of young asylum seekers and unaccompanied immigrant children. This qualitative study covering 10 EU Member States<sup>10</sup> illustrates the frequent failure of these young people to obtain the health and psychological support they need, thus aggravating their conditions of marginalisation. Language barriers, lack of economic means, unawareness of rights and insufficient medical screening upon arrival are indicated as important factors.

Similarly, a survey on young homeless people aged 15-24 living in the USA reveals levels of risky behaviours such as survival sex (sex traded in exchange of food, shelter or other basic needs) and use of intravenous drugs, higher than for the general youth population (Carlson et al., 2006). The study finds that once young people have been reached by programmes designed to rescue them from the streets and provide them with housing, they are more likely to access medical services. The authors conclude that young people who are supported in finding transitional housing are more motivated to attend to their health needs, and benefit greatly from gatekeepers who assist them in obtaining medical treatment.

Here lies the importance of youth work initiatives. By reaching out to young people who are the most disconnected from support services because of their immigrant and often illegal status, their stateless or homeless condition, youth workers can act as gatekeepers to youth (re)integration in support networks.

## 2 Lessons from Youth Work: learning 'life skills' in Romania

The project 'Prepare for Life!' was carried out in several rural areas of the Prahova county, home to multi-ethnic communities. The initiative was organised and implemented by young people over a period of eight months. Participants in the project were young people from Roma and non-Roma communities, all experiencing conditions of social marginalisation. Young members of Roma communities often encounter barriers to their social and economic integration not only because of discrimination, but also because they often do not possess proof of citizenship and/or residency in the countries they live. Their frequent status as non-citizens prevents them from enrolling in formal education, receiving support from social services, and registering with employment-seeking services (UNICEF, 2007).

The aim of the project was to increase the chances of social integration for Roma youth by offering them non-formal learning on life skills. The subjects covered by the training sessions dealt with gender identity, sexual life and physical health, development of social skills and competences, and choosing a career. Inclusion of non-Roma youth from the same areas fostered exchanges between neighbouring communities, otherwise separated from one another, and encouraged integration.

Local authorities were involved in the project. Local city halls were responsible for sending out and collecting application forms from people in local communities. The project was successful in helping 47 young participants to develop life skills and to build personal development plans for their future. This project also created a positive model which could be implemented in other communities at risk of poverty.

<http://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/71-1202-11/GROUP2p%2520good%2520pract%2520sheets%25201.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> For data on the higher proportion of early school leavers amongst young people with an immigrant background, see note 3, p.60.

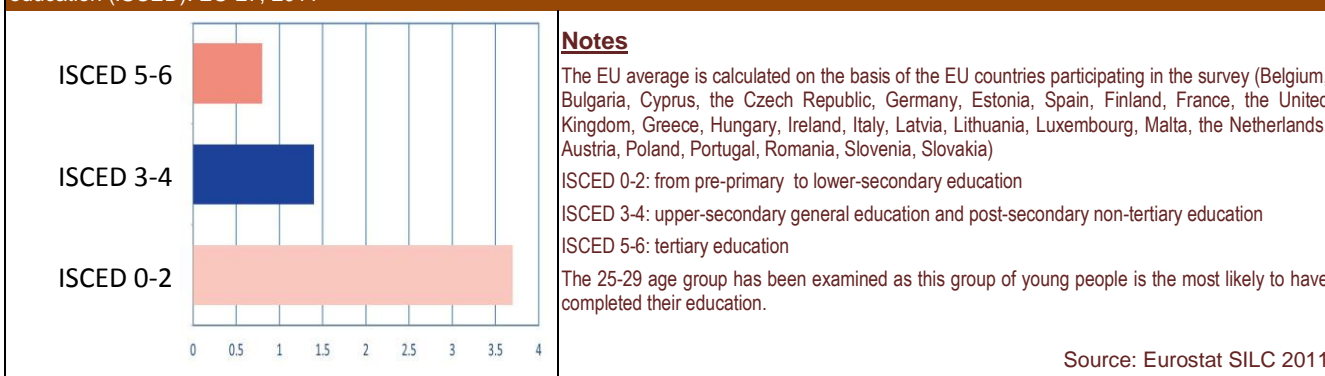
<sup>10</sup> Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Spain and Sweden.

## 2.3 Low levels of education and exclusion

Experiences in education (starting with early childhood education) lay critical foundations for a person's entire life course. In particular, early school leaving and barriers to accessing affordable, quality education and training are common occurrences in the life trajectories of socially excluded young people, which affect their ability to secure comfortable living conditions, enjoy cultural and political participation, protect their own health, avoid risky behaviours, and obtain help and assistance when in need. Combating these problems has been the EU's aim in establishing the target of reducing the rates of early school leaving to below 10% as part of its EU2020 strategy.<sup>11</sup>

Several studies on the consequences of school failure indicate that dropping out of school can result in lower employment rates, lower initial and lifetime earnings, worse health status, less risk aversion, and lower satisfaction with life (Psacharopoulos, 2007, p.7). Particularly concerning health and wellbeing, research confirms that better education goes in parallel with healthier lifestyles related to diet, smoking, alcohol consumption, taking regular exercise, and psychological wellbeing (Ibid). The first mechanism through which education influences health is that it empowers young people to better understand health risks (associated with, for example, diet, environment, working conditions, stress and addictions) and supports their ability to secure the most timely and effective health care (Brenner, 2009). In addition, the intrinsic relationship between education and level of income also helps to explain the impact of education on health. As it is illustrated in the next section (Figure 7), young unemployed experience greater difficulties in accessing appropriate health care than their peers in paid jobs.

Figure 4: Percentage of respondents (25-29) reporting unmet need for medical examination because it is too expensive, by level of education (ISCED). EU-27, 2011

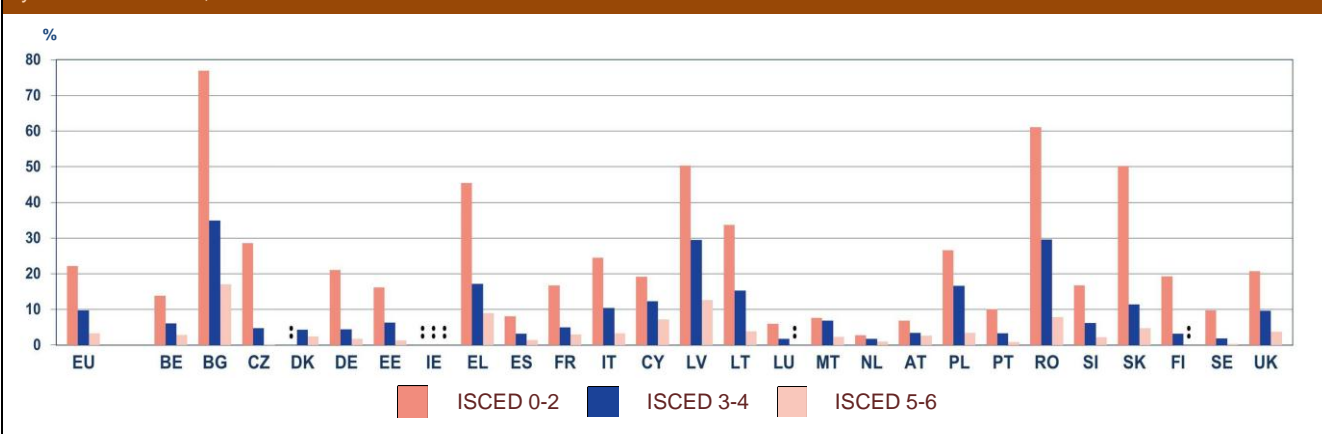


As Figure 4 shows, lower levels of education are associated with higher levels of unmet medical needs. Young people who have not studied beyond lower secondary education are more likely to find low-paid employment and thus to encounter economic barriers to accessing health care. In contrast, a higher level of education allows youth to choose healthier lifestyles and afford better health care.

Similarly, higher levels of education generally secure young people better living conditions. The literature indicates that every extra year of schooling has a significant effect in reducing dependence on social welfare payments and the number of those below the poverty line (Oreopoulos, 2003, quoted in Psacharopoulos, 2007). As illustrated by Figure 5, young people with lower levels of educational attainment suffer more frequently from severe material deprivation.

<sup>11</sup> Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020'), OJ C 119, 28.05.2009, pp. 2-10.

Figure 5: Percentage of respondents (25-29) reporting a condition of severe material deprivation, by level of education, 2011



Source: Eurostat SILC 2011

**Notes**

ISCED 0-2: from pre-primary to lower-secondary education

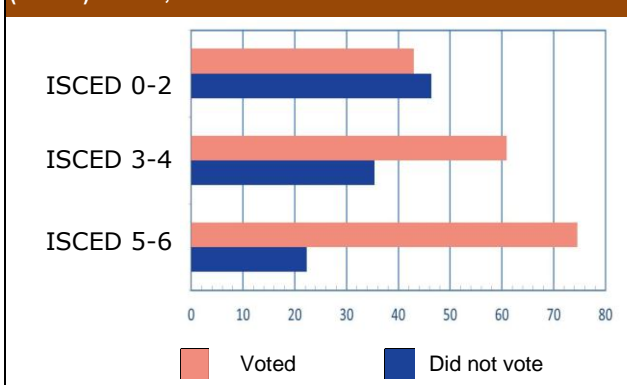
ISCED 3-4: upper-secondary general education and post-secondary non-tertiary education

ISCED 5-6: tertiary education

The age group 25-29 has been considered in order to focus on the sample of young respondents who are most likely to have completed education.

On average, the chances of suffering from material deprivation when having completed lower-secondary education at most, are 7 times greater than when holding a tertiary degree. Some countries (Germany, Estonia, Cyprus, Lithuania, Portugal, and Slovakia) report even higher ratios. The actual percentage of young people with poor education suffering from deprivation are significantly above the EU average in Bulgaria, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia. In contrast, Belgium, Spain, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, and Sweden have the lowest rates below the European average.

Figure 6: Percentage of respondents (25-29) who reported having voted at the last national elections, by level of education (ISCED). EU-27, 2010



**Notes**

The EU average is calculated for the EU countries participating in the survey (Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Spain, Finland, France, the United Kingdom, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Slovenia, and Slovakia).

ISCED 0-2: from pre-primary to lower-secondary education

ISCED 3-4: upper-secondary general education and post-secondary non-tertiary education

ISCED 5-6: tertiary education

The 25-29 age group was selected to minimise the proportion of young respondents not eligible to vote because of age restrictions.

Source: ESS 2010.

Education also strongly affects the capacity and motivation of young citizens to enjoy their political rights and actively participate in society. By acquiring the intellectual tools and information necessary to understand social and political processes and be aware of their own civic rights, young people grow more interested and active in the political domain. Data in Figure 6 confirm that the higher the level of education the higher the level of voting among young people.

Besides casting votes at elections, research shows that in the civic and political sphere, the benefits from education include stronger social engagement, trust in public institutions and political parties, willingness to extend civil liberties and knowledge of democratic institutions and processes (Psacharopoulos, 2007).

### 3 Lessons from Youth Work: non-formal education and training through community service in France

Established in 2010 and still on-going, the project 'Heritage Guardians' ('Les Eveilleurs du patrimoine') aims at providing training for young people with no or low-level qualifications by involving them in the preservation of the local heritage. Projects last five months, and consist of practical training two days per week, and theoretical training once a week. During the practical sessions, young participants work to restore sites in public spaces entrusted to local associations (for example, cleaning up hiking paths, contributing to the renovation of monuments, taking care of green areas...). The theoretical training focuses on acquiring the necessary qualifications to seek further education or employment (computer skills, basic literacy skills, obtaining a driving license etc.). Visits to local firms are also made in order to put participants in touch with potential employers.

As a result of the 5-month training, the vast majority of participants have either found the motivation to return to the studies they had left, or have found employment thanks to the new skills acquired.

[http://www.mllweb.info/Rapport%20D'activit%C3%A9s\\_2011.pdf](http://www.mllweb.info/Rapport%20D'activit%C3%A9s_2011.pdf)

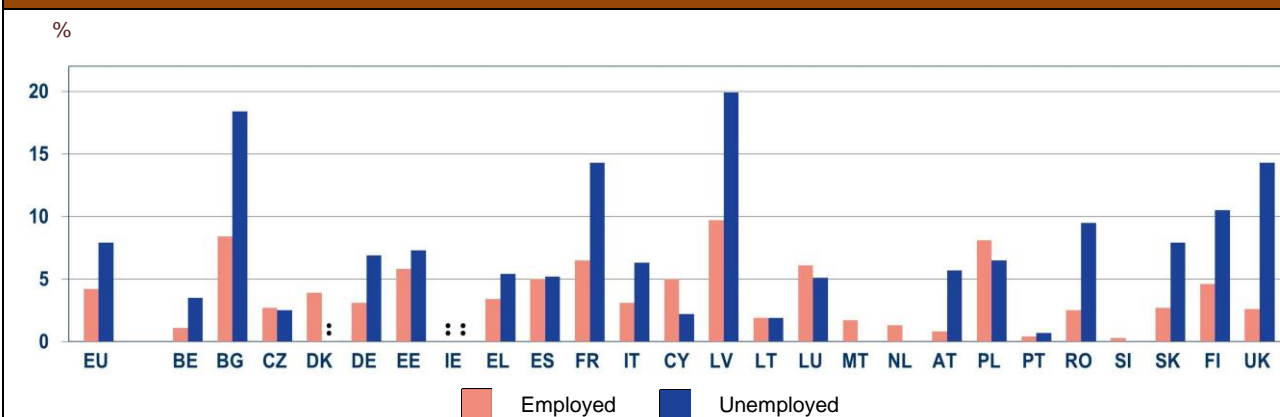
## 2.4 Poverty and unemployment

According to the EU-agreed definition, people are considered at risk of poverty when they live on an income below 60% of the median household income of their own country. As one of the main determinants of social exclusion, poverty strongly affects the quality of life of excluded young people. In particular, poverty and insecure work contracts with no job security and a low income means that young people may have insufficient resources to afford quality housing and material security, quality education and training, good health care, cultural, and recreational activities, as well as access to professional counselling in case of emotional difficulties.

Unemployment is a powerful threat to the wellbeing of young people. Lack of employment can not only give rise to psychological discomfort in a young person through jeopardising his or her self-esteem and social confidence, but it also frequently means that young people will not have the material resources necessary to take good care of their own health. Being out of education and work for an extended period of time leads to the long-term social and political marginalisation of young people, strengthening the feeling of dependence, powerlessness and distress. Being not in employment, education and training (NEET) is also linked to risk behaviours, contributing to worse health conditions and further social exclusion (Eurofound 2012, p. 60).

Accordingly, data shown in Figure 7 indicate that the proportion of young people declaring unmet needs for health care is significantly higher amongst those who are unemployed than amongst those who have a paid job. These results add to the association between low levels of education and insufficient medical care illustrated in Figure 4.

**Figure 7: Percentage of respondents (25-29) declaring unmet need for medical examination, by activity status (employed or unemployed), 2011**



Source: Eurostat SILC 2011

#### Notes

The EU average is calculated on the basis of the EU countries participating in the survey.

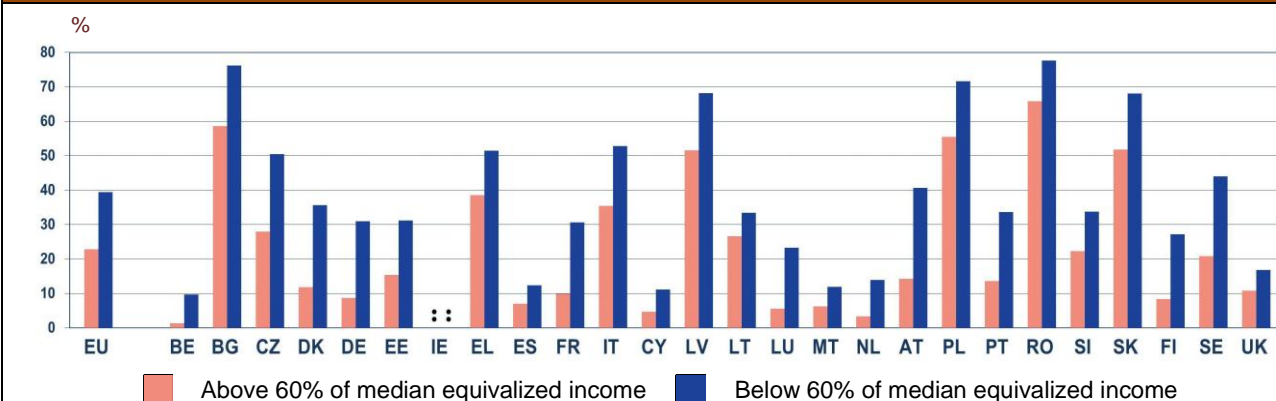
The 25-29 age group has been selected as this is the group of young people most likely to have completed their education and be active in the labour market.

The EU average shows that almost twice as many unemployed young people experience insufficient medical care as those who have a paid job. Some European countries report particularly high differences between the two groups: in Belgium and Romania, the chance to report unmet medical needs is more than three times higher for the unemployed than for the employed, in the United Kingdom it is five times higher, and in Austria seven times higher. On the other hand, the Czech Republic, Spain, and Lithuania show more balanced figures, while in Cyprus, Luxembourg, and Poland unmet medical needs are more often reported amongst the employed. The highest actual percentages of unemployed young people lacking sufficient health care are found in Bulgaria, France, Latvia, and the United Kingdom. It is interesting to note that in some countries, the share of employed young people experiencing barriers to accessing health services is also significantly above the European average (Bulgaria, Latvia, Luxembourg, and Poland), while in others both employed and unemployed respondents report very low levels of unmet needs (Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Slovenia).

Besides unemployment, insecure jobs and poor working conditions also severely affect the health and wellbeing of young people. Studies have demonstrated, for example, that employment in the 'shadow economy' generally offers working conditions of comparatively low quality such as long hours, minimal health and safety rules and no time off. In addition, employees operating in the shadow economy are not paid standard wages and do not receive the general benefits of insurance, including health, disability, and social welfare (Brenner, 2009).

Poverty often derives from a lack of employment or poor working conditions, and is frequently a condition shared by and transmitted through generations. Children and young people growing up in families that struggle to afford quality in housing, health care, education, and basic comforts, are significantly more exposed to the risk of inheriting such conditions and replicating them in their adulthood. It is therefore crucial to consider a household's circumstances to assess the risks of social exclusion.

**Figure 8: Percentage of respondents (15-29) reporting a situation of overcrowded housing by level of household income, 2011**



Source: Eurostat SILC 2011

#### Notes

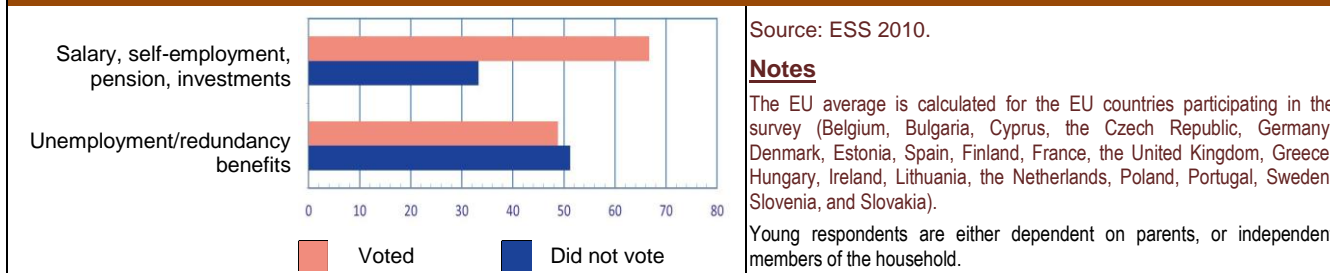
Eurostat defines as overcrowded an household which does not have at its disposal a minimum number of rooms equal to: one room for the household; one room per couple in the household; one room for each single person aged 18 or more; one room per pair of single people of the same gender between 12 and 17 years of age; one room for each single person between 12 and 17 years of age and not included in the previous category; one room per pair of children under 12 years of age.

To take into account the impact of differences in household size and composition, the total disposable household income is 'equivalised'. The equivalised income attributed to each member of the household is calculated by dividing the total disposable income of the household by the equivalisation factor. Equivalisation factors can be determined in various ways. Eurostat applies an equivalisation factor calculated according to the OECD-modified scale first proposed in 1994 - which gives a weight of 1.0 to the first person aged 14 or more, a weight of 0.5 to other persons aged 14 or more and a weight of 0.3 to persons aged 0-13.

Figures are affected by the different ages at which young people leave the parental household and establish their own. Departing from the parental home earlier exposes youth to higher risks of poverty and inadequate housing.

Eurostat data presented in Figure 8 confirm an association between low levels of household income and having poor quality housing. Young people living in low-income households in Belgium, Denmark, Germany, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Finland report the highest ratio of overcrowding in relation to peers living in better off families. In other countries, both groups suffer from particularly high levels of overcrowded dwellings (Bulgaria, Latvia, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia). The gap between low and high-income households is less pronounced in Spain, Lithuania, and the United Kingdom.

**Figure 9: Percentage of respondents (25-29) who reported having voted at the last national elections, by main source of household income. EU-27, 2010**



Source: ESS 2010.

#### Notes

The EU average is calculated for the EU countries participating in the survey (Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Spain, Finland, France, the United Kingdom, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Slovenia, and Slovakia).

Young respondents are either dependent on parents, or independent members of the household.

The exclusionary processes triggered by low incomes are not confined to the sphere of material needs and living conditions. Poverty greatly affects young people's social and political participation. Findings from the interviews conducted within the framework of a recent European Commission study on Youth Participation, indicate that social and economic integration is a precondition for any political involvement by young people (European Commission, 2013b). Stakeholders working with excluded young people stress that in order to stimulate their participation in debating and building democracy, certain basic needs have to be met first, like housing, clothing, food, and employment (Ibid).



Data on household income and voting turnout confirm this message (Figure 9). Young citizens living in a household whose main source of income is work or investments tend to vote more frequently at national elections than those whose household subsists on unemployment benefits.

#### 4 Lessons from youth work: entrepreneurship and credit support in Ireland and France

The Irish partner programme of the US **Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE)**, coordinated by the Irish youth organisation 'Foróige' has since 2008, supported the professional development of young people from low-income communities by providing them with business and entrepreneurial skills. The programme facilitates contact with environments and experiences from which young participants might otherwise be excluded.

The programme is offered in both schools and youth centres, and runs for one school year. Teachers and youth workers deliver classes and practical training to young people between 13 and 18 years of age. Students study all aspects of starting and successfully running a business, within a 40-hour curriculum, which includes goal setting; sales and customer service skills; marketing, financial management and book keeping; and communication skills.

Besides the theoretical learning, participants receive an initial grant to establish their business project. In this context, contacts with entrepreneurs and local companies are essential to gain insight into how to build and develop individual projects. At the end of the academic year, participants present their business plan to a panel of judges and obtain a Youth Entrepreneurship Award.

<http://www.foroige.ie/ee/index.php>

In 2008, the **National Association of Directors of Young People's Local Support Services** (*Association Nationale des Directeurs de Mission Locale*) established an agreement with a credit institution (*Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations*) to support access to credit for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. During three years, 43 Young People's Local Support Services have helped over 1200 young participants to obtain individual micro-credit in order to afford professional training or establish a business. This mechanism proved very effective in overcoming the exclusion of young people from accessing credit and supporting their reintegration in the social and economic network.

In view of the success of this initiative, confirmed by an evaluation covering both the credit institution and young participants, it has been extended and widened to cover additional regions of France.

[http://www.experimentation.jeunes.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/AP1\\_085\\_Rapport\\_Final\\_Eval.pdf](http://www.experimentation.jeunes.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/AP1_085_Rapport_Final_Eval.pdf)

## CONCLUSIONS

This brief overview examining the determinants of and possible solutions to youth social exclusion allows for three main concluding remarks.

- One third of young people in the European Union are at risk of social exclusion. Across the different dimensions investigated, a significant proportion of the youth population is living in marginalised and deprived conditions, which hinder them from exercising their fundamental rights and threaten their long-term future.
- The main determinants of social exclusion are rooted in social inequalities, such as obstacles to accessing quality education and training, securing adequate employment, suffering from discriminatory practices and attitudes, as well as being subject to exclusionary processes based on residence and/or citizenship.
  - Discrimination, and in particular gender based discrimination, appears to affect significantly the health and emotional wellbeing of young people. Feeling discriminated against one's own religion, colour, and sexual identity also poses serious obstacles to youth participation.
  - Being a non-EU foreigner (or belonging to other categories of individuals lacking identity and residency papers) deeply increases the chances of suffering from severe material deprivation amongst youth, as does holding a low level of education.

- Poor qualifications also represent a powerful barrier to access medical care and affect the motivation and ability of young citizens to participate in political life and cast their votes at national elections.
- Unemployment and household poverty hinder the ability of young people to receive appropriate health care, and to enjoy quality in their living conditions and housing.
- In order to effectively prevent and remedy the risk of exclusion for many young people, the determinants that generate social inequalities need to be redressed. Lessons learned from the tradition of youth work indicate that this is possible. Targeted and comprehensive political action is highly needed to make positive change in the life of young people living in Europe. Fostering education and training, offering concrete opportunities for integration in the labour market, fighting discriminatory practices by creating opportunities for real inclusion, and designing actions not tied to formal citizenship/residence requirements that can reach out to marginalised groups, are all powerful mechanisms of social inclusion.

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