



Slovensko predsedstvo EU 2008
Slovenian Presidency of the EU 2008
La Présidence slovène de l'UE 2008

CONFERENCE

JOBS FOR YOUTH – PROSPERITY FOR ALL

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BACKGROUND PAPER

Successful integration of young people into the labour market is one of the most important challenges we are facing in the EU. There is an urgent need for effective approaches towards better employability in response to the skill needs in the labour market. Education can be a crucial factor of employability, as well as of effective social inclusion of young people. The average unemployment rate in the EU Member States for young people aged 15–24 is today 2.4 times higher than that for the working age population as a whole, and was 17.4% in 2006. This is an obvious waste of human capital, and should not be tolerated. Urgent action is therefore needed. Facing demographic challenges and the consequences of an ageing society, adequate and comprehensive responses are required both at the European and national levels so as to meet the most pressing challenges that affect young people on the labour market.

Such responses should follow the basic principles of the European Youth Pact: investing in youth, in education, training, mobility, fast transitions of higher quality, and motivational, counselling and guidance facilities to effectively integrate youth into the labour market. This should be a joint effort of the whole society at the European, national, regional and local levels. A wide range of institutions, and in particular the social partners, have a crucial role to play. A comprehensive mix of policy responses should include measures addressing new forms of employment, the mobility of young people, and education and training in response to labour market needs, as well as reconciliation of work, private and family life.

The Presidency Conference "Jobs for Youth – Prosperity for All" aims to contribute to identifying policy orientations in order to support Member States' policies for the better integration of young people into the labour market.





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1. NEW FORMS OF EMPLOYMENT: STEPPING STONES OR DEAD-END JOBS?

With the adoption of the common principles of flexicurity in December 2007, the basic question of how to enhance both flexibility and security on the labour market, especially for youth, has become even more important. According to recent figures, 41% of working young people between the ages of 15 and 24 worked on short-term contracts, and this rate exceeded 60% in some Member States.

Increased flexibility, via the extension of part-time and temporary employment, particularly affects the young and is most noticeable in the service sector and in the areas of social, cultural and healthcare work. Besides that, a variety of new forms of flexible employment trying to offer young people greater chances to successfully enter the labour market can be found across the Member States; examples include home-based work, virtual offices, e-work, flexible working hours, supplemental work, and partial "ad-hoc" employment such as project work at local, cross-border, interregional and global levels. Self-employment activities, which are often classified as micro-enterprises or small enterprises and which can offer a wide range of new work experiences for youth in the labour market, are a common practice as well.

While such forms of flexible employment may serve as stepping stones into the labour market and help young people in overcoming their disadvantage of less work experience compared to workers in their prime, a trend can also be observed that many young people remain very long in employment forms demanding high flexibility, but providing only very limited security to the young worker.

Against this background, the challenge for labour market institutions is how to pursue the combined objectives of a high level of employment and an appropriate degree of security for young people.

Questions for discussion:

- What could be the characteristics of the sustainable integration of young people into the labour market in the current situation of high international competitiveness?
- How could such integration be implemented, taking account of the common principles of flexicurity, and what would be the role of the different stakeholders involved?





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2. LOCAL, REGIONAL, INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY: PROMOTION OF YOUTH EMPLOYMENT?

Knowledge transfer at different levels, investment in human capital and promotion of life-long learning accelerate the geographic and vocational mobility of young workers at the local, regional, national and European levels. Companies contribute to the increased flexibility and thus also mobility of workers through their investment in human capital, for example through internal mobility courses giving their employees new knowledge, skills and competences and greater flexibility in the labour market.

Different local and regional mobility approaches take the form of job rotation projects, rotation at the work place, exchange of work experience, and mentor and tutor schemes for knowledge mobility among different target groups, especially for young people (e.g. apprenticeships, mentor-colleagues who are responsible for mentoring and supervising the young trainee, tutorships, intergenerational mentorship schemes). Introducing mobility in the work process gives young people opportunities to practice and acquire new skills, competences and knowledge for their further progression in the labour market. On the other hand, work force mobility allows businesses at local and regional levels more flexibility to adapt to the changing needs of the market.

Greater mobility of students, pupils, professors, researchers and other employed (e.g. via partial exchange programmes, practical training, knowledge transfer from the EU Member States, and internationalisation, particularly of small and medium-sized companies), work experience abroad and exchange of good practice projects are practices of the utmost importance resulting from the globalisation and internationalisation of work and knowledge.

The recognition of skills and competences and the validation of experience gained abroad is an important element for the promotion of mobility in the European labour market. National qualification frameworks and the European Qualifications Framework are part of the strategies and policies for mobilising the work force.

Questions for discussion:

- Which are the legal and other strategic issues at the European, national, regional and local levels to promote the occupational and geographic mobility of the young work force?





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- What action is needed to improve and accelerate the mobility of young people at different levels?
- What does a flexicurity approach to mobility imply in terms of enhancing flexibility and security?

3. EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF YOUTH: A CONTRIBUTION TO LABOUR MARKET NEEDS?

In order to adapt to new situations on the labour market and to acquire new skills and qualifications for young people, focused policies need to be defined. The concept of lifelong learning and new approaches to (re)form educational programmes to adapt to the labour market needs, including the needs of employers, are already present in most national strategies. Nevertheless, even highly qualified and skilled young people are still often struggling to find work.

Besides better cooperation and building partnerships between businesses, secondary schools and universities, the concepts of entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and helping young people to understand their responsibility for continuous learning are of the utmost importance. Young people should be offered an opportunity to gain work experience. The programmes already being run show how important it is to implement traineeships as part of the school curriculum, as well as in vocational training schemes and in all projects for improving the skills and qualifications of young people.

The constant promotion of education and training to respond to labour market needs for youth is especially important to overcome mismatches between the acquired qualifications of young people and their current jobs or the jobs available on the labour market.

Particular attention needs to be paid to the integration of disadvantaged groups, such as long-term unemployed young people and school and vocational training drop-outs. Apart from providing appropriate education and training pathways suitable to the needs of this specific group of young people, the role of non-formal and informal education and career guidance is also important.





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Questions for discussion:

- How are young people to be equipped with the right knowledge, skills and competencies to perform best in the knowledge-based economy?
- How could problems of qualifications mismatch be resolved in the short-term, medium-term and long-term perspective?
- Which policy strategies have proven to be effective in addressing the needs of young people with a low educational level, representing nearly a quarter of the EU youth population?

4. WORK/LIFE BALANCE: WHAT IS THE RIGHT SOLUTION FOR YOUTH?

Women – particularly those of child-bearing age and those taking care of the elderly – as well as families with smaller children often face difficulties in accessing or remaining in the labour market. Young women are particularly affected, often finding themselves in a situation where they have to give up a rewarding career because of the lack of opportunities to combine work and family life. Additionally, the present situation of precarious work contracts for young people in many Member States leads to a situation where young people are increasingly financially dependent on their families and/or public welfare, and thus postpone the decision to found a family themselves.

National strategies, policies and programmes provide and promote solutions, projects and the dissemination of good practice for young people that ensure that work can be reconciled with personal and family life according to the basic principles of equality and non-discrimination. The situation in the labour market for young people needs to be closely monitored and progress towards the defined targets, such as the availability of child care, seriously evaluated.

Questions for discussion:

- How should policies at the European, national, regional and local levels address the problem of work-life balance for young people/women/families?
- What are good examples of current practices?
- How could the work-life balance be improved in an overall flexicurity-oriented approach to labour market policies for the young?

