EUROPEAN
COMMISSION

Brussels, 14.10.2021
SWD(2021) 287 final

PART 1/10

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

The situation of young people in the European Union

Accompanying the document

Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions

on the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2021

{COM(2021) 636 final} - {SWD(2021) 286 final}

The situation of young people in the European Union

Commission Staff
Working Document

EACEA A6 – June 2021

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Abbreviations

Statistical codes

: Data not available

Not participating

Country codes

EU	European Union Member States ([1])	LV	Latvia
BE	Belgium	LT	Lithuania
BG	Bulgaria	LU	Luxembourg
CZ	Czechia	HU	Hungary
DK	Denmark	MT	Malta
DE	Germany	NL	Netherlands
EE	Estonia	AT	Austria
IE	Ireland	PL	Poland
EL	Greece	PT	Portugal
ES	Spain	RO	Romania
FR	France	SI	Slovenia
HR	Croatia	SK	Slovakia
IT	Italy	FI	Finland
CY	Cyprus	SE	Sweden

Non-EU Member States – Erasmus+ programme countries until December 2020 ([2])

IS	Iceland	RS	Serbia
LI	Liechtenstein	TR	Turkey
MK	North Macedonia	UK	United Kingdom
NO	Norway		

([1]) Alphabetical order according to country's name in national language.

([2]) Alphabetical order according to codes.

Other abbreviations

COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
EACEA	European Education and Culture Executive Agency
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ESC	European Solidarity Corps
EU	European Union
EU-27	27 Member States of the EU from 1 February 2020
EU-28	28 Member States of the EU until 31 January 2020
HE	Higher Education
ICT	Information and communication technology
ILO	International Labour Organisation
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
LFS	Labour Force Survey
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
p.p.	percentage points
SILC	Statistics on Income and Living Conditions
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UOE	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation Institute for Statistics (UNESCO-UIS), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the Statistical Office of the European Union (Eurostat)
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WHO	World Health Organization

Introduction

Part two of the EU Youth Report presents data and information on the situation of young people in Europe.

This part of the report builds on the Dashboard of EU youth indicators, a selection of 77 indicators, which measure the most crucial aspects of young people's lives in Europe. The dashboard was first released by the European Commission in spring 2011 and updated in 2021. It is presented as an annex to this document.

Relying on Eurostat data, Eurobarometer surveys and the Youth Wiki ([3]), the report targets young people between 15 and 29 years of age. The analysis often distinguishes between subgroups aged 15 to 19, 20 to 24, and 25 to 29. In a few cases, data for different youth age cohorts are represented, either because of the specifications of survey data, or because the issue in question affects a particular age group. In addition, for some indicators, data for children (under 16 years of age), older age groups and the total population are also included.

The reference year of the report is 2019, for which all data were available at the time of drafting (spring 2021). As far as the availability of data allows, the report illustrates the main trends occurred since 2015 and – when addressing the impact of COVID-19 pandemic – in the course of 2020.

The analysis covers the EU Member States, the United Kingdom, and the other 2014–2020 Erasmus+ programme countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia and Turkey). As the data collection of Eurobarometer surveys does not include the latter, they are excluded from the relevant graphs. In consideration of the fact that the United Kingdom was an EU Member State until the end of 2019, the EU-28 average is used in the graphs and in the analytical text. Nonetheless, figures for EU-27 are added below each graph when available.

Following an introductory chapter on demography, which presents the main trends and projections for the youth and total populations, chapters are dedicated to the topics covered by the core areas identified by the EU Youth Strategy: Engage, Connect, Empower.

Chapter 2 discusses young people participation in political and voluntary activities. The first section analyses young voters' turnout in local, national and European elections. It then looks into young people's involvement in political parties, youth and student organisations, and other forms of activism. Digital participation represents the focus of the third section, while, in its final part, the chapter reports on young people's satisfaction with democracy and trust in national governments and the European Union – in particular during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter 3 illustrates the situation of young Europeans on the labour market, focusing, in its first section, on unemployment and on the most vulnerable groups in the youth population. It also relates the consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The second part of the chapter is dedicated to a discussion of the main patterns of youth employment and to the digitalisation of the labour market.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of young people's participation in learning experiences abroad, including volunteering. The first part of the chapter looks at youth mobility in a broad sense, also covering the reasons

([3]) The Youth Wiki is the platform reporting on national policies in the youth field. To access the most recent developments, see its website: https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki. [Accessed on 28.05.2021]

why some people do not take advantage of such opportunity. The second part of the chapter focuses on youth participation in two specific European programmes, namely Erasmus+ learning mobility and the European Solidarity Corps.

The impact of digitalisation on several aspect of young people's lives is dealt with in Chapter 5. The chapter begins with an overview of the strategies established in European countries to reinforce youth media literacy and online safety. The second section explores several online activities conducted by young people and discusses some of the divides provoked and reinforced by digital technologies. The last section reports on young people' trust in digital information during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter 6 is dedicated to education and learning. The first section illustrates the level of participation of young people in non-formal learning and its trend over the last few years. The second section discusses young people's digital skills and the impact of different levels of formal education. The final section considers the increasing use of digital technologies in education and learning.

The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the psychological wellbeing of young people are the focus of chapter 7. The first section addresses the distress provoked by living for long periods in isolation and facing the health risks posed by the pandemic. The second section explores the changes that have occurred in interpersonal relations, and their impact on youth emotional wellbeing. The last section draws a comparison between the responses of young people and those of the general population to the pandemic.

Chapter 8 focuses on young people' social inclusion. It first sets the context by analysing the age at which young people leave the family home and become independent. This is a phase that may trigger economic insecurity and a deterioration of living standards. Then, the analysis addresses the fundamental factors of exclusion: being at risk of poverty, living in households with very low work intensity and experiencing severe material deprivation. The final section brings into focus one of the groups in the youth population that face a high risk of exclusion: those who are not in employment, education or training (NEET).

Quality in youth work is the topic of chapter 9, whose first section illustrates the modalities of quality assurance across European countries. Since quality in youth work goes hand in hand with innovation in its practices to respond to the evolving needs of young people, the second section of the chapter illustrates the measures taken by European countries to support the digitalisation of youth work practices.

EUROPEAN YOUTH: A SNAPSHOT

Crosscutting issues: digitalisation and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

The report investigates various aspects of the situation of young people, focusing on two crosscutting issues: the digitalisation of society and the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over the past decades, **digitalisation** has grown to cover all aspects of life, transforming the way people participate in education and training, experience employment, and participate in society. The benefits are many. Digitalisation makes possible to participate in education and training even in circumstances when face-to-face learning is difficult. Obstacles to accessing learning establishments can be overcome by e-learning.

The importance of this trend has become all the more evident during the lockdowns imposed to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Digitalisation has also changed the nature and modalities of employment. New jobs are created, such as platform work (i.e. work organised through online platforms) and coding (i.e. writing computer programmes). Working conditions change, often allowing for remote and flexible work. Online applications and platforms are used to find job openings, get in touch with prospective employers and participate in recruitment.

Spaces for participation also widen. Online consultations, exchanges with peers and public authorities, and access to information are examples of additional opportunities to take part in society.

At the same time, digital technologies may aggravate conditions of exclusion. Individuals with low levels of formal education and coming from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds risk staying at the margins of the digital society. The lack of adequate digital skills make them vulnerable to exclusion from the world of work, due to the disappearance of some non-automated jobs. Access to online education can also be restricted, as well as opportunities for online participation.

Such challenges become ever more serious as the **COVID-19 pandemic** has dramatically increased the use of digital applications. As the amount of time spent online has considerably increased during lockdowns, the risks of social isolation and exposure to online dangers have become all the more serious. Coupled with strong feelings of uncertainty and worry for health consequences, the pandemic has greatly affected the psychological wellbeing of many young Europeans.

This has also been impacted by the loss of employment that many young people have suffered in the course of the pandemic, caused by the economic crisis that has mostly hit the sectors where many of them work (for example, retail, food and hospitality).

COVID-19 has also curtailed youth mobility due to restrictions in travel and extended periods of confinement. Many Erasmus+ students had to suspend their learning experience abroad, and considerably fewer mobility activities started in the framework of this programme in 2020.

Nonetheless, in face of all these difficulties, young Europeans have demonstrated considerable resilience. They have swiftly adapted to the move from face-to-face to e-learning. They have cultivated relations with family members and friends through online means, as a coping practice against isolation. Moreover, they have shown awareness of the threats posed by news unreliability concerning the pandemic. Children and young people reported being able to detect fake news more promptly than before. This can partly be explained by the increased amount of time spent with family members during the lockdowns and their mediating effect in relation to news content. Indeed, scientific sources of information prove to be the most resorted to by young Europeans.

Main trends: a general improvement since 2015

While stressing the significant challenges caused by COVID-19, it is important to note the many respects in which the situation of young Europeans has improved since 2015.

As mentioned, the growing application of digital technologies in all spheres of society has greatly interested **education and training**. Accompanied by the expansion of online learning – particularly since the start of

2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic has forced learning institutions to close and teaching to move online – it has contributed to an increase in the shares of young Europeans reinforcing their digital skills.

Concomitantly, the report shows that young people have taken advantage of the opportunities offered by **digitalisation** to increasing degrees. The use of the internet has grown, and, in connection, the participation in several online activities such as interacting with public authorities and being active in the collaborative economy. In parallel, national governments in the vast majority of European countries have implemented measures to support digital literacy and ensure safe use of digital media.

Despite the downturn that took place during 2020, on average, youth unemployment has been steadily decreasing until the end of 2019. Linked to the amelioration of their situation in the **labour market**, between 2015 and 2019 the level of **social inclusion** of young Europeans has improved. All indicators analysed in this report – risk of poverty, very low work intensity and severe material deprivation – show positive trends. This also applies to the share of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEETs) – up until 2020, when the economic crisis due to the pandemic pushed many young people out of employment.

Over the years considered, the level of youth **political engagement** also shows several elements of progress. Youth participation in the 2019 European elections was higher than in 2014. The proportion of young people who are satisfied with how democracy works in their countries and in the EU also increased from 2015 to 2019. Participation in voluntary activities has grown considerably, especially in national and international projects.

Young Europeans participate more in volunteering activities and in programmes for learning **mobility**. Since 2015, and until 2019, the total number of learners from Erasmus+ countries augmented.

Another noteworthy trend is the growing efforts by European countries to underpin quality and innovation in **youth work**, in order to support at best the inclusion, participation and wellbeing of young Europeans. The report illustrates how public authorities have established formal mechanisms of quality assurance in youth work projects in the vast majority of countries. Measures have also been established to reinforce the digitalisation of youth work (accelerated by the move to online activities during the COVID-19 pandemic), both by supporting youth workers in strengthening their digital skills and by encouraging youth participation through digital means.

Some challenges persist

Notwithstanding the general improvements, some challenges continue to affect young Europeans, particularly some specific groups.

Young age is frequently associated with worse working and social conditions compared with the total population and older age groups. Unemployment is higher among young people aged between 25 and 29 than among individuals in the prime working age (25–54). The same situation applies to the frequency of temporary contracts. In parallel, young people are at risk of poverty or social exclusion more than the total population.

Such risk tends to affect **young women** in particular. As the report illustrates, young women are more likely to be neither employed, nor in education or training (NEET) than men. A closer look at this gap reveals that women are more often inactive (i.e. not employed and not searching for a job). The fact that women tend to

bear more family responsibilities and hold more precarious positions in the labour market than men concurs to explain the higher rate of inactivity. This is also reflected in the fact that, comparatively, they tend to work part time more frequently and to create their own business to a lesser extent. In addition, the risk of being poor affects young women more than men and the divide is also visible across years. Indeed, the decrease in the proportion of youth at risk of poverty between 2015 and 2019 was bigger for men than for women.

Young people with a **low level of formal education** are often at a disadvantage too. Compared to individuals with higher qualifications, they have less chances of finding a job. This is also related to the lower level of digital skills they tend to have, a fact that, in addition, makes them at risk of exclusion from education and training. As mentioned above, learning has increasingly made use of digital technologies – especially when face-to-face interactions are limited – and this requires an adequate capacity to use digital means.

The level of formal education also influences the level of political and civic participation. Higher levels of formal education tend to be associated with higher rates of participation in elections and in other forms of activism. This is again linked to the lower levels of digital skills possessed by young people with lower attainment, as digital technologies are increasingly applied to participative activities (for example, online consultations, interaction with public authorities, discussion of social and political issues).

Beside age, gender and education, a third potential source of inequalities is represented by **where young Europeans live**. For example, some remote or rural areas do not dispose of a stable broadband internet coverage, thus reducing the possibility for young people to take full advantage of the learning, working and participative opportunities they provide.

The level of urbanisation is not the only factor behind geographical inequalities. In some parts of southern and eastern Europe, young people face comparatively more challenges in various respects. On average, the level of digital skills tend to be lower as well as the use of the internet. Participation in politics, society, volunteering and mobility is also more limited compared to the rest of Europe. In addition, larger shares of young people are faced by the risk of poverty and social exclusion, and unemployment. In this last respect, the gender divide described above is even more marked that elsewhere.

1. Youth population

Although there is no universal definition of the specific period in life when a person is considered to be young, the age range of 15–29 years (used in this chapter and in the rest of the report) is most commonly used across European countries ([4]). Indeed, this is the reference age group used in the European Union Youth Strategy for 2019–2027 and, in general, in EU cooperation in the youth field ([5]).

Clearly, transformations in how the youth age group is defined occur in parallel to developments in society. In some contexts, the youth age group is considered to include people up to their mid-30s, based on the length of time spent in education and when they become independent from the family of origin ([6]).

The transition from adolescence to adulthood represents an important stage in the life course. Over this period, young people complete their education, enter the workforce, become involved in political participation, and acquire new social and family responsibilities ([7]). Some of the implications of this transition are discussed in Chapter 8 on social inclusion.

The first section of this chapter discusses the size of the youth population in Europe, its trends and their impact on the total European population. The second section focuses on the dynamics of youth migration and their influence on the demography of European youth.

1.1. Trends in the youth population

Approximately 86 million young people live in the EU-28 ([8]). On average, one in every six people are aged between 15 and 29 years (Figure 1.1). Young people are equally distributed between the three age cohorts (15–19, 20–24 and 25–29 years), with a slight predominance of the oldest group.

While no variation exists in the share of young men and women, differences between countries in the proportion of young people in the total population are evident. The highest proportions of young people in the EU-28 are found in Cyprus (21.3 %), followed by Malta (19.8 %), and Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden and Ireland (all around 19 %). Conversely, the lowest proportions are found in several southern and eastern Member States (around 15 % in Bulgaria, Slovenia, Italy and Spain, and around 16 % in Czechia, Greece, Latvia, Portugal, Estonia and Romania).

([4]) The national descriptions on the Youth Wiki platform provide further information on how European countries define the youth age group. Available at: https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki. [Accessed on 09.04.2021]

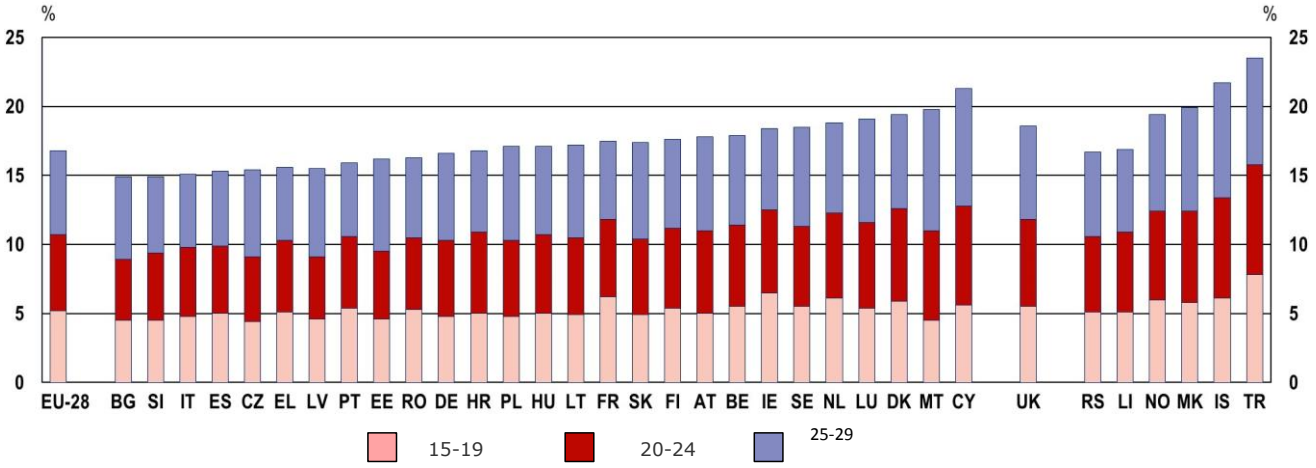
([5]) The European Youth Strategy and information on EU cooperation in the youth field are available at: https://europa.eu/youth/strategy_en. [Accessed on 09.04.2021]

([6]) Billari, 2004; Belmonte et al., 2020.

([7]) OECD, 2020a.

([8]) Source: Eurostat [yth_demo_010]. Data extracted on 09.03.2021. Data refer to the EU-28. In 2020, 74 million young people lived in the EU-27. Approximately 22 million young people live in the non-EU Erasmus+ countries included in this report (Iceland, Liechtenstein, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia and Turkey).

Figure 1.1: Share of young people (15-19, 20-24 and 25-29) in the total population, by country, 2019

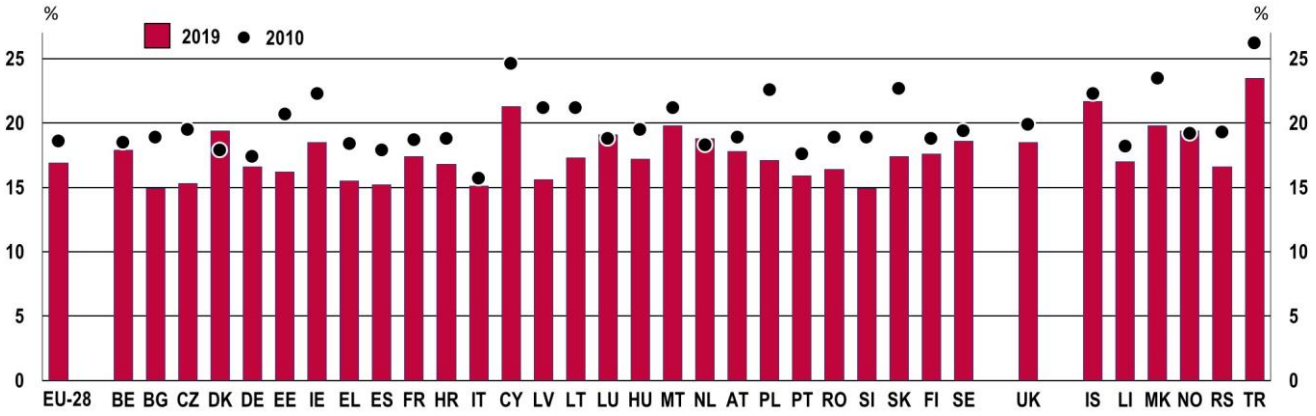


Source: Eurostat [yth_demo_020]. Data extracted on 09.03.2021.
Notes: Countries are ordered by ascending share of total youth population (15-29).
EU-27 averages: 15-29: 16.6 %; 15-19: 5.2 %; 20-24: 5.4 %; 25-29: 6 %.

In the non-EU countries analysed, the highest shares of young people are found in Turkey (23.5 %) and Iceland (21.7 %), while the lowest proportions in Serbia (16.6 %) and Liechtenstein (17 %).

Figure 1.2 illustrates the trends in the proportion of young people in the total population between 2010 and 2019. While, on average, the EU-28 saw a decline of 1.8 percentage points (p.p.), considerable differences exist between countries.

Figure 1.2: Trend in the share of young people in the total population (15-29), by country, 2010 and 2019



Source: Eurostat [yth_demo_020]. Data extracted on 09.03.2021.
Notes: EU-27 averages: 2019: 16.6 %; 2010: 18.4 %.

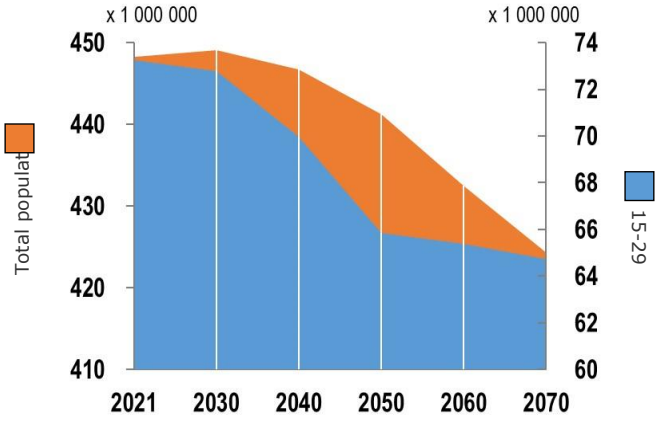
The Baltic and eastern European regions experienced the highest contractions. The share of young people fell by 5.6 p.p. in Latvia, 4.5 p.p. in Estonia and 3.9 p.p. in Lithuania. In the eastern region, Poland saw the proportion of young people decrease by 5.5 p.p., Slovakia by 5.3 p.p., Czechia by 4.2 p.p., and both Slovenia and Bulgaria by 4 p.p. On the other hand, the proportion of young people increased in Denmark (1.5 p.p.), the Netherlands (0.5 p.p.) and Luxembourg (0.3 p.p.).

Among the different factors that determine the proportion of young people in the total population, the trends over time and differences between countries are migratory dynamics and fertility rates ([9]). Fertility rates are discussed below, while migratory dynamics are discussed in Section 1.2.

Over the last few decades, the number of births has been declining – to different extents – in Europe, resulting in a progressive decrease in the total and youth population ([10]). Countries' fertility rates clearly have an impact on the national proportions of young people. Times series from 1991 to 2007 (the span of years when today's young people were born) show that countries currently reporting the lowest proportions of young people are among those that registered the lowest fertility rates over that period. Similarly, countries currently recording the highest proportions of young people had higher fertility rates during this period ([11]).

There are many reasons behind the variation in fertility rate between countries. For example, staying in education for longer, choosing a 'child-free' lifestyle and taking longer to find a partner all contribute to the birth of fewer children and at a later stage in life ([12]). An additional noteworthy factor is a country's economic performance, which, combined with social benefits and family policies, influences the likelihood of young people becoming parents. For example, high levels of youth unemployment, precarious working conditions and downwards mobility result in many young people delaying having children and having fewer children ([13]).

Figure 1.3: Projected trends in the number of young people (15-29) and total population, EU-27, 2021-2070



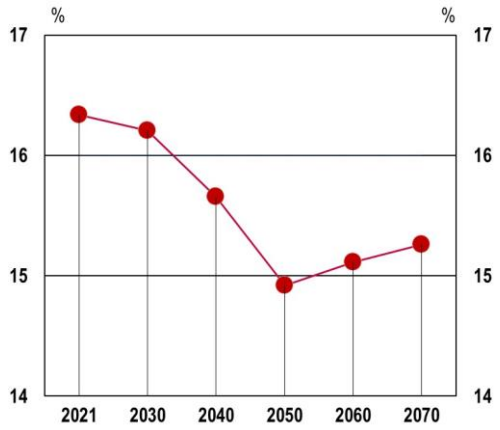
Source: Eurostat [proj_19np]. Data extracted on 23.03.2021.

The decline in the number of young people – and, in general, in the total population of Europe – is expected to continue in the future. As illustrated in Figure 1.3, it is predicted that, in the EU-27, the population of young people and the total population will progressively decrease over the next 50 years. From a current figure of 73 million in 2021, it is estimated that the youth population will decrease to 64 million in 2070. Meanwhile, the total population is projected to decrease by 24 million by 2070. In proportional terms, whereas the size of the total population in the EU-27 will diminish by 5 %, the youth population is expected to shrink by 12 %, more than twice the rate for the total population.

Because of the more pronounced projected decline in the youth population than in the total population, the decrease in the proportion of young people in the total population is expected to continue until 2050. (Figure 1.4).

([9]) IMF, 2016.
([10]) Source: Eurostat [demo_find]. Data extracted on 09.03.2021
([11]) Ibid.
([12]) Sobotka, 2013.
([13]) Currie and Schwandt, 2014.

Figure 1.4: Projected trend in the share of young people (15-29), EU-27, 2021-2070



Source: Eurostat [proj_19np]. Data extracted on 9.03.2021.

The contraction in the size of the youth population is at the root of the progressive ageing of the European population ([14]). While longer life expectancy is a sign of improvements in people's health and well-being, this trend has challenging implications for the future of society ([15]). For example, the contraction in the proportion of the working-age population is deemed to reduce public revenue from fiscal sources and challenge the sustainability of public services ([16]). Moreover, social and healthcare services may be put under increasing pressure to cater for an ever-ageing population ([17]). Finally, the diminution in the size of the youth population and the ageing of society will bring significant changes to the education system, resulting in an oversupply of teachers and a lack of employment in the profession ([18]).

As mentioned above, besides fertility rates, migration dynamics are a powerful factor influencing trends in the youth – and therefore the general – population in Europe.

1.2. Youth migration

Youth migration within and towards Europe has accelerated since the 1990s ([19]). Increasingly higher numbers of young people from third countries ([20]) have been moving to European countries, and, at the same time, more and more young Europeans have become mobile across the continent (Chapter 4 provides an overview of learning mobility across European countries). In the case of young migrants, migration is often not permanent as young people tend to move again later in their lives. In such case, migration can be 'temporary' (establishing one's residency in a foreign country for a definite length of time) or 'circular' (alternating periods in a foreign country with returns to the country or origin) ([21]).

These phenomena have resulted in important changes to Europe's youth population. On one hand, the diversity of the population has increased, as more and more young people with different geographical

([14]) OECD, 2020a; Aurambout et al., 2021.

([15]) UN, 2015.

([16]) Ibid.

([17]) Ibid.

([18]) European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021b.

([19]) King, 2018.

([20]) A third country is a country that is not a member of the European Union, as well as a country or territory whose citizens do not enjoy the European Union right to free movement. See European Commission, 'European Migration Network – EMN glossary'. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/glossary_search/third-country_en. [Accessed on 09.04.2021]

([21]) For a glossary of migration terms, see European Commission, 'European Migration Network – EMN glossary'. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/glossary_search/third-country_en. [Accessed on 09.04.2021]

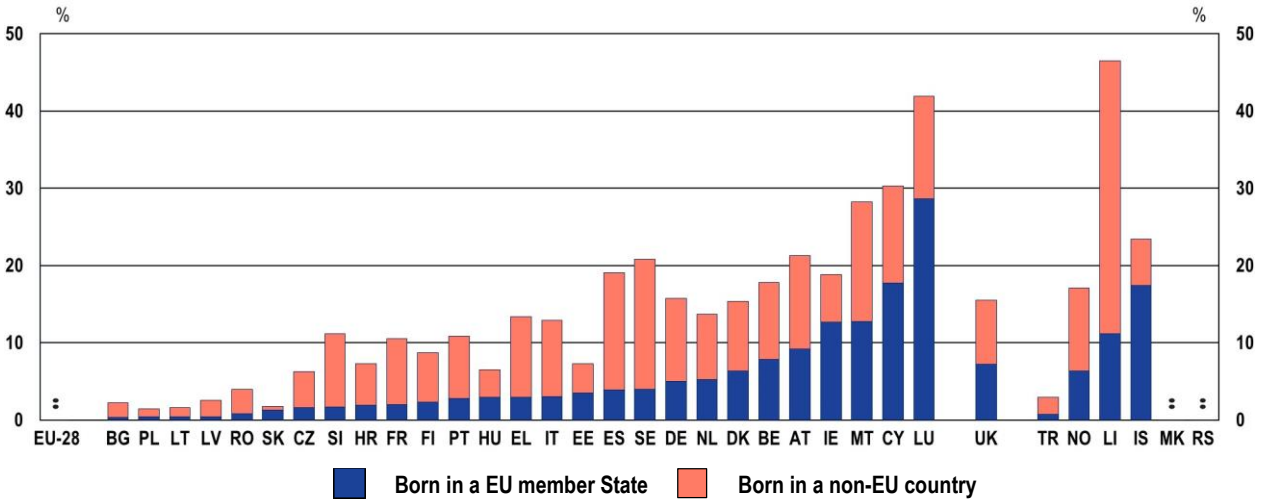
backgrounds have come to live in Europe. On the other, migratory flows have had a large impact on the size of the youth cohort, both across and within European countries ([22]).

Section 1.2.1 provides an overview of migratory patterns among European countries, and Section 1.2.2 focuses on the impact of migration on the European youth population.

1.2.1. Patterns in youth migration

Figure 1.5 represents the share of young people (aged 15-29) born in a foreign country. The chart distinguishes between young people born in another EU-28 member State, and young people born in a country outside the EU.

Figure 1.5: Share of young people (15-29) born in a country different from the one where they reside by country, 2019



%	EU-28	BG	PL	LT	LV	RO	SK	CZ	SI	HR	FR	FI	PT	HU	EL	IT	EE	ES
Born in a EU member State	:	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.8	1.3	1.6	1.7	1.9	2.0	2.3	2.8	2.9	3.0	3.0	3.5	3.9
Born in a non-EU country	:	1.8	1.0	1.2	2.1	3.2	0.5	4.6	9.4	5.4	8.5	6.4	8.1	3.6	10.4	9.9	3.8	15.2

%	SE	DE	NL	DK	BE	AT	IE	MT	CY	LU	UK	TR	NO	LI	IS	MK	RS
Born in a EU member State	3.9	5.0	5.2	6.3	7.8	9.2	12.7	12.7	17.7	28.6	7.2	0.7	6.3	11.1	17.4	:	:
Born in a non-EU country	16.9	10.7	8.4	9.0	10.0	12.1	6.1	15.5	12.6	13.3	8.3	2.2	10.8	35.4	6.0	:	:

Source: Eurostat [yth_demo_060]. Data extracted on 08.06.2021.

Notes: countries are ordered according to the ascending share of young people born in a EU member State.

Ireland: estimated; France: forecast.

([22]) For a glossary of migration terms, ibid.

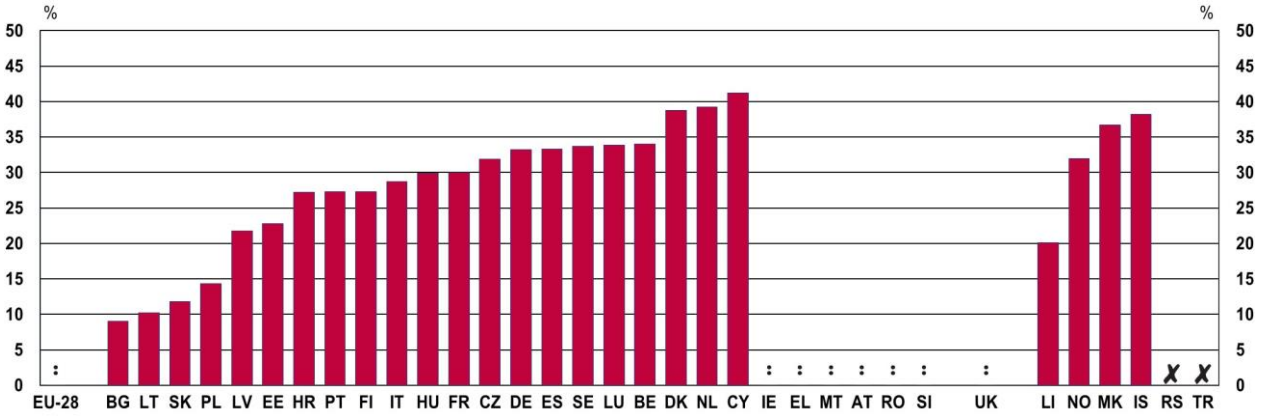
The highest shares are found in western and southern European countries. In the EU-28, Luxembourg presents the highest proportion, followed by Cyprus and Malta. On the contrary, the lowest figures are reported in several eastern and Baltic countries. Outside the EU-28, Liechtenstein reports the largest share of young people born in a foreign country.

In the majority of countries, the share of young people born in countries outside the EU-28 is higher than that of young people born in another EU member State. This is particularly the case in some south-European countries (Greece, Italy and Spain), eastern ones (Bulgaria and Romania), as well as in France, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia and Sweden. Conversely, the share of young people born in a EU member State is higher than that of those born outside of the EU-28 only in Slovakia, Ireland, Cyprus, Luxembourg, and, outside the EU-28, Iceland.

Overall, data indicate that western and southern regions of Europe tend to be destinations for comparatively largest scores of young people both coming from outside of the EU-28 and from other EU member states.

To complement the illustration of immigration dynamics among European countries, it is interesting to observe the proportion of young people in the total population of immigrants, defined as individuals establishing their usual residence in the territory of an EU member State for a period that is, or is expected to be, of at least 12 months, having previously been usually resident in another Member State or a third country ([23]).

Figure 1.6: Share of young people (15-29) in the total population of immigrants in the reference year by country, 2019



Source: Eurostat [yth_demo_070]. Data extracted on 16.06.2021.

Notes: countries are ordered according to the ascending share of young people in the total immigrant population.
Bulgaria: provisional; Poland and Slovakia: estimated and provisional

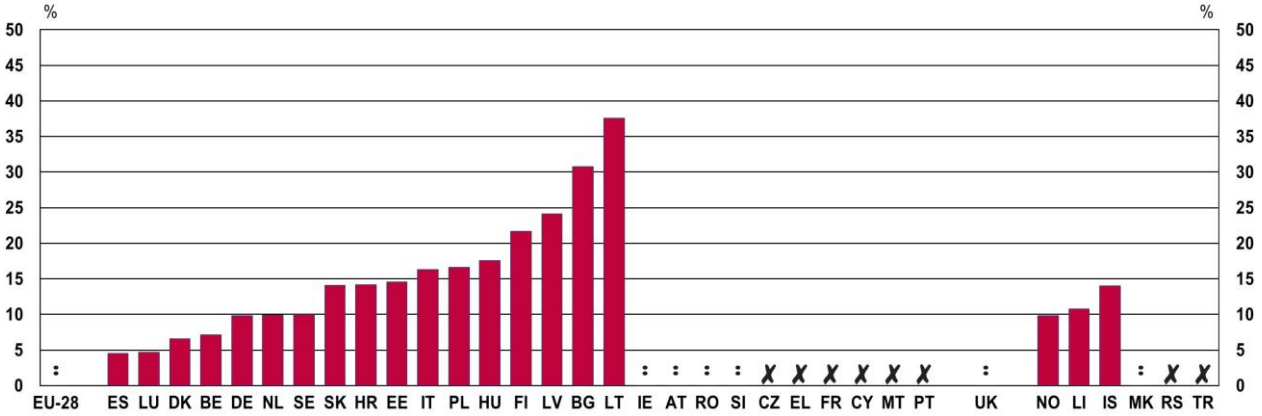
Figure 1.6 indicates that in western and southern European countries immigration tend to be "younger" than in eastern and Baltic ones. In particular, in 2019, the proportion of individuals aged 15-29 among immigrants was around 40 % in Denmark, the Netherlands and Cyprus. Outside of the EU-28, North Macedonia and Iceland reported figures above 30 %. Conversely, less than 25 % of immigrants were young in Bulgaria, Lithuania, Slovakia and Poland.

The tendency suggested by data on the share of young people born in a foreign country (Figure 1.5) is confirmed by the age composition of the immigrant population: larger shares of young people move to countries in the western and southern areas of Europe, compared with eastern and Baltic ones.

([23]) Eurostat, 2021h

To fully understand the patterns of youth migration among European countries, it is essential to observe also the side of emigration. Figure 1.7 shows the proportions of young people among emigrants from the countries for which data are available. Emigrants are defined as people who, having previously been usually resident in the territory of an EU Member State, cease to have their usual residence in that Member State for a period that is, or is expected to be, of at least 12 months ([24]).

Figure 1.7: Share of young people (15-29) in the total population of emigrants in the reference year by country, 2019



Source: Eurostat [yth_demo_080]. Data extracted on 09.06.2021.
Notes: countries are ordered according to the ascending share of young people in the total population of emigrants.

In 2019, a remarkable share of emigrants from Lithuania and Bulgaria were aged between 15-29 (37.6 % and 30.8 %, respectively). High shares of young emigrants were also reported by Latvia (24.1 %) and Finland (21.7 %). On the contrary, western European countries saw the lowest proportions of young people in the total population of emigrants – around 5 % from both Luxembourg and Spain, 7 % from both Belgium and Denmark, and 10 % from Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden.

The data illustrated in the section suggest the existence of two main dynamics in Europe. Western countries attract higher proportions of young people (from both the EU-28 and third countries) and see lower proportions of young people emigrating. With the limitations posed by the limited number of countries with available data, the opposite trend is observed in eastern and Baltic countries: higher rates of emigration are accompanied by lower rates of immigration (mostly from outside of the EU-28).

Various circumstances contribute to these differences between countries ([25]). An important driver inducing many young people to move to western European countries is the opportunity to get a better education ([26]). Besides the desire to experience living and studying in a different country, for many young people who cannot

([24]) Eurostat, 2021h.
([25]) Belmonte et al., 2020.
([26]) European Commission, 2018b; International Monetary Fund (IMF), 2016.

access adequate education opportunities in their own countries, emigration is often a necessity ([27]). Indeed, degree mobility ([28]) (particularly in higher postgraduate education) sees educational institutions in western Europe attracting high numbers of young students. This phenomenon is at the root of imbalances in the level of mobility between countries, with some being 'net exporters' of students and others being 'net importers' ([29]).

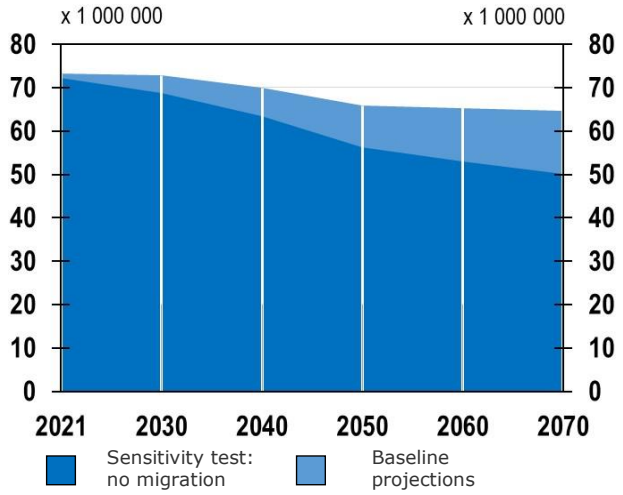
Economic conditions also play a considerable role in determining migratory flows. In countries where young people struggle to access the labour market and are compelled to work in the informal sector – suffering the ensuing precarious living conditions – emigration is an option chosen by many ([30]). In Europe, northern and western countries tend to offer comparatively more opportunities for employment and are therefore the most sought-after destinations for many young job seekers ([31]).

These circumstances are expected to exert strong influences on the demographic situation of European countries for some time to come.

1.2.2. Impact of migration on demographic trends

Comparing data on the share of young people in the total population illustrated in Figures 1.1 and 1.2 with data discussed in the previous section provides evidence of the role played by migration in shaping the size of the youth population.

Figure 1.8: Projected trend in the number of young people (15-29), with and without migration, EU-27, 2021-2070



([27]) European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020b.

([28]) Degree mobility is the physical crossing of a national border to enrol in a tertiary-level degree programme in the country of destination. European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020a.

([29]) European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020a.

([30]) World Bank, 2016.

([31]) European Commission, 2018b.

Source: Eurostat [proj_19np]. Data extracted on 23.03.2021.

In countries where young people tend to immigrate (mainly in western and southern Europe), the general youth population has decreased comparatively less over the past decade. On the contrary, in countries where young people represent a comparatively bigger share of emigrants (as it is the case in eastern and Baltic regions), the contraction in the proportion of young people in the total population has been more pronounced.

Third-country immigration exerts a distinctive influence in terms of offsetting the demographic decline in the share of young people ([32]). This is because the proportions of young people among extra-European immigrants are larger than the proportions of young people living in European countries ([33]).

The balancing effect of third-countries' immigration is expected to continue in the future. Data illustrated in Figure 1.8 show that, when migration is excluded from the calculation of the projected number of young people in the EU-27 up to 2070, the population decrease is bigger.

Under this scenario, instead of a 12 % reduction (as depicted in Figure 1.3), the youth population would decrease by 30 % between 2021 and 2070, i.e. from 74 to 50 million. Countries are expected to be affected to different degrees. In line with data discussed in Section 1.2.1, projections for southern countries such as Malta, Italy and Cyprus indicate a considerable difference between the baseline and net migration trends (data not shown ([34])). Conversely, the balancing effect of immigration is expected to be smaller in several countries in the Baltic and eastern European regions (e.g. Latvia, Estonia, Romania and Bulgaria) ([35]).

([32]) For a detailed overview of how demographic change shapes the future of Europe, see the European Commission Atlas of Demography, available at: https://migration-demography-tools.jrc.ec.europa.eu/atlas-demography/. [Accessed on 01.06.2021]

([33]) Eurostat, 2021h. Migration flows: immigration to the EU from non-member countries was 2.7 million in 2019.

([34]) Source: Eurostat [proj_19np]. Data extracted on 23.03.2021

([35]) Ibid.; Belmonte et al., 2021

Conclusions

On average, in Europe, one in every six people are aged between 15 and 29 years. In line with the trend registered over the past decade, this proportion is expected to decline in the future. From a current figure of 73 million in 2021, it is estimated that the youth population will decrease to 64 million in 2070. Economic circumstances such as recurrent soars in unemployment, as well as changes in lifestyle (for example staying in education for longer) result in many young people delaying having children and having fewer children.

In some countries high rates of youth emigration have aggravated the demographic imbalance. Particularly in eastern and Baltic countries, the proportions of young people in the emigrant population are higher than in western ones, where, in turn, the shares of young people born in a foreign country are larger.

The contraction in the size of the youth population is at the root of the progressive ageing of the European population, which presents challenging social and economic implications for the future of society. This has been – and is expected to keep being – partially offset by immigration from third countries. The influx of immigrants compensates to a certain extent for the overall contraction in the population and counterbalances the demographic decline in the share of young people.