

First to be fired, last to be hired



Tomasz Jasiński

Europe's youth face seemingly insurmountable barriers to stable work. Two thirds have short-term contracts, work part-time and have temporary or seasonal work, according to the Youth Committee of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC).

'Europe's youth are the first to be fired and the last to be hired,' says Tomasz Jasiński, member of the EESC and President of the Youth Committee of the ETUC. 'Young people are obliged to take the worst possible contracts. Either part-time or paid "under the table", it is exploitation,' he adds.

The long-term implications of an unemployed youth are worrying. Europe's population is falling and the demographics are shifting as the

older generation progressively outnumber the young.

In the EU, 25% of young people do not have a higher education degree and lack the skills employers seek in today's job market. Those with jobs face a probationary employment period which, in most EU Member States, enables employers to engage people for up to one year without any commitment. The ETUC wants to see more investment in training and education and stronger employment protection legislation and is asking Member States to commit an extra 1% of their GDP to fight unemployment.

'All Member States have stimulus packages but lack measures on how to reduce unemployment among young people. They try to create temporary, short-term jobs but not long-term stable jobs and solutions,' says Eve Päärendson, member of the EESC's Employers' Group.

Youth unemployment accounts for one fifth of the total increase in unemployment since 2008, according to Eurostat. There are tentative signs that this is levelling off but it still stands at 20%, more than the limited increases in the rate for adults. The

unemployment rate among young people was already 15.4% before the crisis, which is twice that of the population as a whole.

The EESC opinion on the EU strategy for youth states that young people must be included in the decisions that affect them. The Commission believes that growth and prosperity also depend on young people making a substantial contribution in all areas. To that end, the EESC Employers' Group wants to see a heightened pro-European and pro-business culture that supports aspiring young entrepreneurs. Such a measure could translate into creating both more, and better, jobs.

But the structure to support young entrepreneurs is missing, according to the EESC opinion on university/business cooperation. Fostering a European entrepreneurial spirit is also challenging, for two reasons. First, Europe has a risk adverse culture. Secondly, the fear of starting a new enterprise along with the stigmatisation of failure makes getting the youth engaged all the more difficult.

'In Europe, in addition to developing new skills, more attention is



Eve Päärendson

needed on entrepreneurial education in primary schools and in life-long learning systems. We do not promote enough entrepreneurship among young people. Starting your own business can be one way out from unemployment. This may be why young people prefer working in the public rather than the private sector,' says Ms Päärendson.

The EESC opinion on the EU strategy for youth further states that entrepreneurship should be looked at in a broader, more holistic approach. This requires identifying or creating opportunities and turning ideas into action. The hope is to get more young people into the labour market and to have a brighter future.

Seasonally adjusted unemployment rates (%)

	Youth (under 25s)			
	Feb-09	Dec-09	Jan-10	Feb-10
EU-16	18.4	19.7	19.8	20.0
EU-27	18.4	20.3	20.5	20.6
BE	21.1	23.5	24.3	24.8
BG	13.5	20.4	21.2	22.4
CZ	12.8	20.7	21.2	21.6
DK	8.8	13.4	13.7	13.7
DE	10.1	10.2	10.1	10.2
EE	24.5	32.1	-	-
IE	20.5	28.7	29.1	28.6
EL	24.5	27.5	-	-
ES	34.8	39.3	39.8	40.7
FR	22.9	22.7	22.2	22.1
IT	24.2	26.7	27.4	28.2
CY	10.9	16.4	-	-
LV	27.8	41.3	-	-
LT	23.9	30.4	-	-
LU	18.5	18.1	17.9	18.2
HU	24.7	28.5	28.4	27.6
MT	12.8	15.4	14.8	15.0
NL	6.1	7.4	7.3	7.3
AT	9.3	9.4	9.6	10.0
PL	18.2	22.7	23.1	23.4
PT	19.2	21.2	21.2	21.0
RO	20.2	20.4	-	-
SI	12.3	13.9	-	-
SK	22.6	32.2	32.7	33.2
FI	18.9	23.4	23.6	23.7
SE	23.8	26.3	26.6	25.6
UK	18.1	19.7	-	-
NO	8.5	8.9	8.4	-
US	15.8	18.9	18.9	18.5
JP	-	-	-	-

- Data not available
Source: Eurostat