



Intergenerational solidarity: a European perspective

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Eleven years since the Great recession, it has become clear that the crisis hit particularly young people, who have then not been reached by the economic recovery as much as the other age groups.

Despite the robust recovery Europe experienced since 2014, youth employment rate is still below the levels observed in 2008 while the rate of older workers is well above the pre-crisis scenario. While similar trends are recorded among other employment and unemployment related indicators, the impact of the crisis has also enlarged the differences on living conditions among youth and older people. According to a recent Eurofound study¹, youth are more likely to experience difficulties in making ends meet and are much more at risk of social exclusion than older people, with this gap that increased over the past ten years.

Because of the growing economic and social gap between young and older people there were expectations that societal tensions between these two groups could have spiked since the onset of the crisis and its consequences. However, while the share of the population perceiving tensions is not low, this seems not to be the case. According to the European Quality of Life Survey², the share of population perceiving some or a lot of tensions between young and older people has decreased from around 73% in 2007 to around 69% in 2016. While this numbers seem big, only 10% was the share in 2016 of those who perceive a lot of tensions among the two generations.

The analysis of the various trends among Member States reveal that, as pointed out by the *FEPS report*, the perceived tension seems not to be driven by economic reasons but mainly by the type of welfare system in place in the country. In fact, countries where the tension between young and older people is perceived as higher are Eastern countries, including those with a high performing labour market such as Czechia or Poland. Conversely, in South Mediterranean countries, the most hit by the economic crisis with very high NEETs and youth unemployment rate but with family at the centre of their social model, the share of people perceiving a lot of tension between the young and older people is well below the European union average.

¹ Eurofound (2019) [Age and quality of life: Who are the winners and losers?](#)

² Eurofound (2017) [European Quality of Life Survey 2016: Overview report](#)

The slight decrease in social tensions between young and older people should not deflect the political attention from the problem of youth and their precarious entrance in the labour market. High unemployment rates and precarious participation to the labour market through temporary contract may scar their transition to adulthood and trust in institution with negative and important political consequences. While the FEPS report rightly indicates that tensions among the youth and older people is unlikely to degenerate in a conflict, already in 2012 Eurofound³ indicated that high level of unemployment and precarious form of attachment to labour market were giving a political connotation to the discontent of young people. With very low level of trust in politicians, young people were not recognizing themselves anymore in traditional parties but were increasingly attracted by new parties, such as the 5 Stars in Italy and Podemos in Spain, or far right extremist parties. The results of the elections that followed confirmed this analysis which is now is also confirmed by the *FEPS report* which identify a risk of political alienation of youth.

So, what to do? Notwithstanding the recovery, youth should remain at the centre of the policy agenda. Investing in youth of utmost importance for the future of Europe and for the sustainability of the European project. The new European Commission president elect Ursula Von der Leyen, included Youth and Child guarantee as part of her political guidelines as well as advocated for the full implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights that has several principles that may address the problem of youth and intergenerational fairness. While these efforts are positive and important, a progressive political offer for youth should put at the centre the improvement of their working and living conditions. It should include tools that should fight youth protracted precarious attachment to labour market and would give the possibility of a full transitions to adulthood, such as housing and childcare support, allowing them to become full members of our societies. This would allow to address the problems of youth, rebuilding their trust in institution and in political parties, improving their confidence on their future living conditions and avoiding that their discontent is attracted by populist parties.

³ Eurofound 2012 – NEETs: Young people not in employment education and training – characteristics and policy responses. <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2012/labour-market-social-policies/neets-young-people-not-in-employment-education-or-training-characteristics-costs-and-policy>