

Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission
and the Council of Europe in the field of youth



National Policies Combating Youth Inequalities across Europe: Responses from the EKCYP Correspondents

Dunja Potočnik

Pool of the European Youth Researchers & the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb

May, 2016

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This paper, prepared ahead of the symposium ([Un\)Equal Europe? Responses from the youth sector](#) covers several thematic sections of the symposium, and is based on the thematic questionnaire administered to the national correspondents of [the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy](#) (EKCY). Its core lies with national policies and practices in combating youth inequalities across Europe and in this version it covers sixteen¹ out of forty one countries that have [national correspondents](#) at the EKCY. It shall be noted that not all countries have provided answers to all questions and that their answers mostly focus on governmental measures targeting youth inequalities, while the responses from the youth sector were not to often represented. In its first part the paper brings a short overview of the inequalities among young people in Europe and the European policies tailored to combat the inequalities that affect majority of vulnerable youth groups, mainly in the field of social integration and employment. It also mentions youth participation since the first question of the thematic questionnaire was committed to important civic actions marked by active participation of young people at the national level. The second part of the paper presents the responses from the national correspondents, which are aggregated according to similarities, or simply by an alphabetical order.

Inequality is often related to social exclusion, which is especially troublesome when it comes to a social position of young people. The study by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency in 2013 [Youth Social Exclusion and Lessons from Youth Work Evidence from literature and surveys](#) noted the main aspects of inequality and social exclusion: I) experiencing poor living conditions (in terms of housing, nutrition, clothing, physical safety); II) 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); III) being unable to enjoy cultural and recreational activities (as a result of obstacles encountered); IV) suffering from health conditions deriving from poor living standards and V) experiencing obstacles to accessing health care and social services when needed. The Youth Partnership study on barriers to social inclusion [Finding a Place in Modern Europe](#) (2015) refers to **five areas of possible inclusion or exclusion, which can be applied to inequality as well: education, labour market, living, health and participation**. These five areas present a basis for social inclusion and tailored-made measures for combating inequalities and can be referred to as 'safety nets' since they provide basic resources and prerequisites for fulfilment of everyday needs.

Inequality and social exclusion often happen across intersecting identities, meaning that a single person can be disadvantaged due to their various identities, based on gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability status, residence, socio-professional status, religion and some other aspects. As noted in [the European Youth Forum Survey on Youth and Multiple Discrimination in Europe](#) (2014), discrimination, especially a multiple discrimination, is one of the major causes of inequalities among young people. This study summarizes the main areas of discrimination according to the European youth (p. 6): education (53,8%), search for a remunerated job (50,5%), workplace (42,4%), looking for accommodation (29,2%), healthcare (26,6%), recognition of their qualifications (26,0%), at the restaurants, cafés or pubs (24,9%), when asking for bank services (24,7%), at cinema, theatre or clubs (24,0%), at sport centres (19,3%), shops, supermarkets or shopping centres (22,8%) and when

¹ Armenia, Austria, Belarus, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine.

accessing the justice or legal system (15,8%). The European Youth Forum Study and [the EU Youth Report \(2015\)](#) accentuate migrants and ethnic minorities as the groups most vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion since they usually face multiple disadvantages leading to persistent poverty and a marginalised position in society. Already [the EU Youth Report 2012](#) (p. 133) emphasized that immigrants often lack networks and information needed for being fully included in society, which results in higher risk of poverty and social exclusion than of the native-born population (43,8 % vs. 28,1 % in 2013). Moreover, the situation looks similar when looking at second generation immigrants – the children of foreign-born parents are at higher risk of social exclusion than the native born youth (31,1 % vs. 17,8 %) (p. 75).

The European Commission and the Council of Europe have a long tradition of inventing and reinventing policies for combating youth inequalities and exclusion. The flagship initiative [European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion](#) and [An EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering](#) are among the most important European initiatives covering measures against social exclusion and inequality. They are closely linked to [the Renewed Social Agenda](#) and its priorities: I) creating more opportunities for youth in education and employment; II) improving access and full participation of all young people in society and III) fostering mutual solidarity between society and young people. Cooperation between the European Commission and the Council of Europe has brought youth inequality and social exclusion on agenda in multiple occasions. The policy seminar on inequality among young people presents a continuation of the efforts of the Council of Europe and the European Commission to recognise needs of young people and set them up as a priority. [Resolution CM/Res\(2008\)23](#) on the youth policy of the Council of Europe emphasized social inclusion of young people in regard to: 1) supporting the integration of excluded young people; 2) ensuring young people's access to education, training and working life; 3) supporting young people's transition from education to the labour market; 4) supporting young people's autonomy and well-being, as well as their access to decent living conditions; 5) ensuring young people's equal access to cultural, sporting and creative activities and 6) encouraging intergenerational dialogue and solidarity. Some of the recent Youth Partnership activities focused on youth inclusion encompassed [a preparatory meeting on mapping of barriers to social inclusion of youth in vulnerable situations](#) held in Strasbourg in March 2014, [the conference on the role of youth work in supporting young people in vulnerable situations](#) in Malta in November 2014, [the expert seminar related to the mapping of barriers to social inclusion for young people in vulnerable situations](#) in Strasbourg in September and October 2015, and a seminar on youth in vulnerable situations in South East Europe [Beyond Barriers](#) that was held in Bosnia and Herzegovina the same year. Moreover, a comprehensive study on the mapping of barriers to social inclusion of young people in vulnerable situations titled [Finding a place in modern Europe](#) has been published under editorship of the Youth Partnership in 2015.

2. SOCIAL ACTIVISM AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN VOLUNTEERING

According to [the Flash Eurobarometer European Youth](#) (2015) a quarter of young people in the EU have been involved in an organised voluntary activity in past 12 months, mostly aimed at their local community. There are significant differences in participation rates among member countries; respondents in Bulgaria (10%), Greece (13%) and Sweden (15%) are least likely to have participated in such activities, while three countries registered more than a third of young people included in volunteering – Ireland (42%), Denmark (39%) and the Netherlands (38%) (p. 25). Comparison to the Youth on [the Move Flash Eurobarometer](#) (2011) brings us to a conclusion that now young people are

either equally or less likely to have been involved in organised voluntary activities in past 12 months. Young people who seem to be discouraged in volunteering mostly come from Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia and Lithuania, where a decrease between 12 and 6 percentages has occurred. A profile of a young person more frequently involved in organised volunteering is following: age 15-19, higher secondary or university education and rural background (p. 28). Rural background may come as a surprise only until we take into account that majority of voluntary activities were aimed at changing something in a local community. Regarding the areas of activity (p. 33), charity, humanitarian and development aid (44%), education, training and sport (40%) outnumbered the rest of activities. Looking at a level of member states, respondents in Cyprus (71%), Croatia (70%), Poland (70%) and Portugal (68%) are most likely to be involved in voluntary activities related to charity, humanitarian and development aid. Young people in the United Kingdom are most likely to participate in voluntary activities related to education, training and sport (50%), followed by those in France (49%) and Denmark (48%). Young people inclined to art can be found in Latvia (34%), Slovenia (29%) and Slovakia (29%). Swedish youth are much more likely than those in other countries to take part in voluntary activities related to human rights (28%) and politics (25%), while young people in Bulgaria (26%) are most likely to take part in voluntary activities related to religion, and respondents in Latvia (28%) are most likely to be involved in activities related to climate change or the environment and animal right (21%).

Although a number of young people active in participation vary across countries, and although there is only a quarter of young people active at the European level, a study by [the EACEA](#) and [the London School of Economics Youth Participation in Democratic Life](#) (2013) challenges a view that young people are more disenchanted with politics and less keen on participating in comparison to the older population (p. 95). One of the data sources used for this study, [the European Social Survey 2012](#), registered 33% of young respondents who declared to be very or quite interested in politics. However, it has to be noted there are variations among the countries, where Northern and Scandinavian Member States register above average level of interest, while some countries of Eastern and Southern Europe noted relatively low interest in politics. The study [Youth Participation in Democratic Life](#) suggests that young people, in order to feel motivated for participation, need to have a real stake in decision-making processes. Moreover, it refers to Hoikkala, 2009; Barber, 2010; Gaisel et al., 2010 and Santo et al., 2010, when saying that “young people tend to favour flexible and issue-based forms of active participation such as contributing to the projects of non-governmental associations, participating in community-driven initiatives, joining social movements and expressing political opinions in public spaces” (p. 101). Furthermore, it says “in this context, petitions, public demonstrations, boycotts, wearing political symbols such as badges and stickers, become the means of more loose and informal participation in society and in politics, which many young people find worth experiencing” (p. 102). Again, youth in some countries, like Germany, Denmark, Ireland, Spain, France, the Scandinavian countries (Finland, Sweden, and Norway) and Iceland tend to engage more in these modes of political participation than their peers in the rest of Europe (p. 103). In a conclusion, this study suggests that young people are stakeholders, not victims in the European democratic systems, and emphasizes the importance of civic education to fostering civic and political participation of young people. The following section of this paper will present a summary of the thematic questionnaire answers addressing youth participation at the national level.

3. COUNTRY RESULTS ON THE THEMATIC QUESTIONNAIRE

As stated in [the Summary Analysis of the Information Templates on Youth Participation in the EKCYP](#) (2011): “the ‘indignados’ on the Puerta del Sol, the Geracao a Rasca, Stuttgart 21 and not to forget the ‘Occupants’ are symbols of the new movements influencing societies at the beginning of the second decade in the 21st century” (p. 3). Before presenting the answers on youth activism provided by the national correspondents, this section will give a short overview of some of the actions led by young people in countries that have not completed their questionnaires. A choice of thirteen countries was made, on the basis of information available online in English for years 2015 and 2016. The first countries to mention are [Albania](#), where the university students led a protest against neoliberal education reform, and [Denmark](#), where 30.000 young people protested against cuts to education. Similar action occurred in [Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia](#), where the university students protested in order to protect universities as the ‘camp of freedom’.

A number of countries registered youth protests against austerity measures, and here we will mention [Belgian](#) youth who joined a solidarity protest with Greece and against austerity measures, the [Spanish](#) youth who led a protest against austerity measures and high unemployment, using a slogan “We don’t ask for favours”, and a protest in [Turkey](#) when dozens young people were detained in protests against G20. Here we can also list [Bulgarian](#) university students and youth in [Moldova](#) who protested against a widespread corruption.

Next to the protests against educational reforms, and against austerity measures and corruption, the third group of actions referred to the armed conflicts. In [Azerbaijan](#) the youth were protested against European hesitance to condemn the Armenian aggression against Azerbaijan, while [Greece](#) has experienced mass uprising of youth following the killing of 15-year old boy by a special police unit. In [Cyprus](#) young Greek and Turkish Cypriots were protesting against use of the Akrotiri British bases to bomb the Islamic State in Syria. University students in [Croatia](#) organised a different kind of action – a stage performance to commemorate 147 students killed on a university campus in Kenya in April 2015. One more interesting action was organised, this time in an area of dealing with the past, when [Estonian](#) youth joined a protest against plans to remove Red Army monuments.

3.1. YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL, ECONOMIC OR SOCIAL EVENTS AND PROCESSES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL²

3.1.1. VOLUNTARY AND PUBLIC ACTIONS INITIATED BY YOUTH

Examples of youth voluntary and public actions targeting youth inequalities, provided by the national correspondents vary from protests against educational reforms and austerity measures, through protests against armed conflicts, to fight for gender equality and marijuana decriminalisation. The

² Have there been significant processes/events in your country over the last period (political, economic, social), where young people have played an active role? What are the groups of young people engaged and what is the effect of that engagement process?

first to mention are **Armenian** and Yezidi youth who established informal group called “No Genocide Civic Initiative team” in 2014, following massacre killings of Yezidi people by ISIS in Sinjar. This civic initiative, which gathers almost all the political parties` youth wings and many active youth NGO`s, organised several social political movement in Armenia and beyond in 2014 and 2015. In **Ukraine**, young people gathered in a protest on multiple occasions, followed the military aggression in eastern Ukraine and invasion into the Crimea Peninsula.

Youth volunteer movement “Good Hearts”, organised by the **Belarusian** Republican Youth Union, in cooperation with the partners, allocated financial support to different vulnerable groups. Similarly, in **Serbia** during 2014, when the worst floods in 120 years hit Serbia, the huge number of young people organised themselves and helped the worst-affected areas and population, acting as a significant support to local and national authorities.

A successful example of **Finnish** youth gathered in a protest was the political process – the Citizens’ Initiative Campaign [Tahdon2013](#) – which was launched on 19th March 2013 – Finland’s national day for equal rights. The primary objective of the initiative was to ensure that same-sex partners will be allowed to get married, even after going through the sex surgery. The Finnish Parliament accepted the petitions signed by 166.851 people and the new Act will come into force in 2017. **Malta** registered two significant processes in 2015 where young people played a significant role: lowering of the voting age to 16 in local elections, and the introduction of new LGBTIQ Rights through adoption of “the Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics Act”. **Slovakia** has experiences several significant protests organised by the young people: 1) [March against fascism](#) as a reaction to the election results; 2) [Support for teachers on strike](#) and call for improvement of quality of education; 3) [March for family](#) / Pro life March; 4) [Pride](#) march and 5) [Gorilla](#) protest following leaking of secret service documents revealing connections between political and business elite.

In **Georgia** there are number of processes where youth have played an active role and their participation had positive impact: 1) in 2012, youth organized a protest connected to “the Prison Scandal”, which took place before parliamentary elections in October. The event had important impact on resignation of the Minister of Internal Affairs, which was followed by number of changes in the Government; 2) petition and organised demonstration for Marijuana Decriminalization, with a success of putting it on an agenda on the governmental and non-governmental level; 3) petition for support to people with disabilities, which resulted in the pavements and undergrounds adapted to people with special needs and 4) demonstration and petition organised by the students at Tbilisi State University in order to obtain University’s autonomy, as well as reform of students’ self-government. As a result, the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia expressed its readiness to meet the needs of students.

3.1.2. PARTICIPATION IN YOUTH-RELATED POLICY MAKING

In **Austria** the involvement of young people in political decision making got more impetus with the development of the impact assessment of any legal / political decision on young people (the Wirkungsfolgenabschätzung) and the Austrian youth council stood as the lobby group for youth. In **Belarus** young people gained an opportunity to cooperate with the government through the events dedicated to “the Youth Capital 2016”, the city of Baranovich. The objective of the open dialogue

organised during this year is to help young people shape an active citizenship view, provide the youth with opportunities to declare their life aspirations and strengthen the public awareness of the young people's image as an active part of community. Previous similar events include 2014-2015 open dialogue "Traditions and the Future of the Belarusian Youth" and "the First Republican Forum of Youth Work Specialist" held in October 2015 in Minsk.

Youth in **Serbia** have been included in consultations with the Ministry of Youth and Sports since its establishment in 2008. Examples of cooperation relate to adoption of the National Youth Strategy in 2008, the Law on Youth in 2011, and the second National Youth Strategy in 2015. In **Portugal**, young people are included in policy making through the National Youth Council (CNJ), the National Federation of Youth Associations, Municipal Youth Councils, and through cooperation with the State Secretary of Youth and Sports. Also, in the recent economic crisis there has been developed a new instrument for the Youth Policy – the White Book on Youth – when a wide range of topics were submitted to public discussions. **Hungary** registered several important campaigns and instruments related to the youth participation in policy making, such as "Children's Parliament on Social Integration", "It's About You! – Dialogue with young people" and "Youth Day in the Parliament".

In **Finland**, the youth took part in a consultative process during adoption of the Governmental Strategic Programme. There is also a programme [the Equality and non-Discrimination Plan](#) that has been developed by the Ministry of Education and Culture by appointing 13 organisations as members in a development and service centre network. These organisations are responsible for developing youth work and policy in their areas of expertise. Moreover, [the Finnish Youth Cooperation Allianssi](#) (the National Youth Council) was represented in the committee set for the renewal of the Youth Act. The committee submitted its proposal on a new act in September 2015. In Germany, a programme I make politics/I am into politics ([IChmache>Politik](#)), run by the Federal Youth Council (Deutscher Bundesjugendring, DBJR) gave youth (12-27 years old) the opportunity to actively engage with politics, and in particular, with youth policy. It allows young people to gather virtually, discuss politics and jointly find solutions to existing issues.

The first direct presidential election in the **Czech Republic** in January 2013 showed young people as a very interesting group of voters. According to the national correspondent, before this period young people's participation in parliamentary or local/regional elections was not high. Since that time, politicians are much more open to young people's opinions and support their political engagement. For example, the Czech Council of Children and Youth has succeeded in signing a Memorandum of Cooperation with political parties and is regularly received by the Minister responsible for youth if requested.

French national correspondent reported that "in recent times, no (social) youth movement has succeeded in bringing about a profound change in French society. However, many initiatives are carried out by youth local NGOs to fight against inequality". One of the initiatives was "the Youth and popular education agreement" from the Ministry for Urban policies, Youth and Sports, allowing young people to apply for public subsidies and to be recognized as governmental 'privileged' partners.

3.2. EUROPEAN POLICIES AND INSTRUMENTS WITH A POSITIVE IMPACT ON INEQUALITIES AMONG YOUTH AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL³

There are a number of processes common to the EU member and Candidate Countries, which were mentioned by the national correspondents and they will not be reported on in the following sections. Instead, they will be listed here, with a hyperlink to the home pages of the programmes. The most prominent European programme in a field of volunteering, education, training and mobility is [the Erasmus+ programme](#) available to 33 member countries. The second important element for enhancing opportunities of young people at the European level is [the Structured Dialogue](#), a process that enforces an active role of youth in policy making through its thematic cycles, the first of which in 2010 was dedicated to employment, and currently is focused on youth empowerment. One of the most important campaigns of the Council of Europe that joined civic and governmental sector is [the No Hate Speech Movement](#). Its results are recognised in all included countries and it was frequently mentioned in the thematic questionnaire on youth inequalities. The other institutions also mentioned in the national questionnaires were the institutions of the [UN Youth Ambassador](#), Youth Parliaments, and the Youth Councils and Student bodies.

3.2.1. GENERAL NATIONAL (YOUTH) POLICY PROGRAMMES

This section will give an overview of the national youth policies in regard to which no direct youth participation was mentioned by the national correspondents.

Belarus has a Youth Policy sub-programme within the Education and Youth Policy state programme for 2016-2020. The objectives of this sub-programme are: 1) to form active citizenship and patriotism in young people; 2) to involve them in public activities; 3) to help young people form a positive attitude towards traditional family values and responsible parenthood, and attitudes sensible to health; 4) prevention of negative phenomena in youth; 5) to increase efficiency of carrier promotion and choice as well as employment of young people in extracurricular time (time out of their primary workplace); 6) to support entrepreneurial initiatives; 7) to develop volunteering and student work team; 8) to support socially significant and public initiatives of young people, and 9) to encourage children's and youth public associations' activities.

In **France** general national youth-related policy comes under a title "Priority: Youth plan" (Priorité Jeunesse), which has a budget of €391 million. It was adopted in 2013 by defining the national youth strategy as the government priority. This plan is based on five main areas: 1) promotion of the national law for all aspects concerning young people's access to social rights; 2) empowering young people; 3) fighting against inequality and discrimination; 4) encouraging youth participation in public debate and 5) implementation of the youth priorities on the local level. France is also implementing a programme [Le Plan pluriannuel de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'inclusion sociale](#), which goal is to fight against poverty and for social inclusion. The 2015-2017 plan, with a €2,6 billion budget, is based on three main lines of intervention: 1) prevention of social break-ups; 2) supporting people in difficulty

³ What national and European policies and instruments for combating inequalities among young people have had a positive impact in your country? Can you briefly describe two or three of the main ones?

and 3) partnership actions with local communities. Main target groups are: people in precarious situations and socially vulnerable groups: low-wage workers, single parents, young people neither in employment nor in education or training (NEETs), homeless people, working students.

In the framework of the State's Youth Policy, the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs of **Georgia** developed several annual programmes: 1) programme for promotion of integration of ethnic minorities in society (cultural creative trainings; teaching of Georgian language for ethnic minorities); 2) programme for international cooperation; 3) programme for protection of underprivileged and vulnerable children; 4) programme for promotion of children living in municipalities; 5) programme for promotion of relations with children living in occupied territories of Georgia; 6) integration of youth with disabilities into society.

Portugal has developed a programme [Escolhas](#), with designated €26 million. Its target groups are: children and young people of the most vulnerable communities, who are exposed to greater risks of social exclusion. An added value of this programme, accentuated by the national correspondent, is a connection between the economy and society, encouraged by close relations that generate solidarity. **Ukraine** is implementing a programme under a title "Youth of Ukraine", which budget is planned on a yearly basis and includes support to the youth in difficult life circumstances. Main implementing bodies are social centres for families, children and youth.

Three countries were listed as the ones allocating grants to the civic society organisations in the field of youth. Federal programme in **Germany** [Living Democracy! – Active against right-wing extremism, violence and hostility](#), (2015-2019) supports civil society against anti-democratic tendencies and behaviour. The national correspondent from **Romania** referred to the activities of youth centres at the local level, which were provided a budget of €165.000 for 2016. Programme in Serbia "Youth Rule" [\[Mladi su zakon\]](#) is a multi-annual programme of grant-making to both formally registered associations of young people and so-called 'non-formal' groups. This programme is run through 25 Resource Centres around Serbia, aiming to stimulate self-organisation and initiatives of youth. In regard to the national policy against inequalities in **Czech Republic**, there are two strategic documents: "Conception for Combating Social Exclusion" and "National Concept of Family Policy".

3.2.2. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES

Several countries have briefly mentioned educational programmes aimed at reducing inequalities among young people – **Armenia** covering inclusive education for children with special educational needs, **Czech Republic** by a programme of financial literacy for pupils, students, teachers and parents, and **Hungary** and **Romania** that undertake efforts in integration of school drop-outs. In **France**, the Ministry of National Education, Higher Education and Research helps to reduce educational inequalities by providing college and high school scholarships based on social criteria. In 2013-2014, there were 640.000 students with a scholarship on social criteria. Universities can also assign an emergency benefit (National Fund for emergency aid to the young) to students who encounter occasional financial difficulties. In 2013, 40.000 students benefited from the national fund.

In **Germany**, Federal Ministry of Education and Research runs the programmes directed to the young people, specifically the following programmes: [Educational chains leading to vocational qualifications \(Abschluss und Anschluss – Bildungsketten bis zum Ausbildungsabschluss\) initiative](#); [the career start](#)

[coaches special programme \(Sonderprogramm Berufseinstiegsbegleitung\)](#): School development programme [Ideas for more! Learn full-time](#); [the VerA initiative for preventing premature training termination](#).

3.2.3. EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMES

European Commission and its Directorate General on [Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion](#) supports and complements the Member States' policies in the fields of social inclusion and social protection, primarily with the [Europe 2020 strategy](#), which [flagship initiatives](#), including the [Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion](#) and the [Agenda for New Skills and Jobs](#), support efforts to reach these targets. Furthermore, the European Commission through its [Social Investment Package](#) provides guidance to Member States to modernise their welfare systems towards social investment throughout life. Decreasing structural unemployment, acquiring new skills and developing highly trained labour force in order to match labour market supply and demand, with lifelong learning at the forefront of proposed guidelines are the strategic goals set by the Europe 2020 strategy. These aims are reflected in establishment of [the Youth Employment Package](#) (2012) as an instrument for ensuring opportunities for youth at the labour market. The Employment Package consists of [the Youth Guarantee](#) (2013), [the European Alliance for Apprenticeships](#) (2013) and [the Quality Framework for Traineeships](#) (2014). Majority of the national correspondents who have completed the thematic questionnaire gave a review of the measures under the Youth Guarantee, but they are not going to be listed here. An extensive description of activities implemented under Youth Guarantee in each Member State can be found [here](#).

The first nationally developed programme to be mentioned in this report – the one in **Austria** – has been developed by the Ministry of Social Policy (SozialministeriumService) and has a title “Production schools NEBA”, and a budget of €7,5 million per year. It is specifically targeting young people aged 15, who have not completed initial education and training, young people with employment difficulties, social disadvantages and/or adjustment difficulties.

A national correspondent from **Germany** referred to a long list of programmes, with the Ministry for Youth that manages the main national programme – [to Strengthen Youth](#) – which focuses on disadvantaged young people with and without migrant background who need a special support to manage the transition from school to work, in particular young people who are not or no longer reached by regular services in school, vocational training or as part of basic income and employment support services. The programmes led by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs include: Careers orientation as part of the [Initiative Inclusion](#); [ESF Integration Guidelines of the Federal Government](#); [the ESF's IdA – Integration through exchange programme](#); [Increasing the employment prospects of people with disabilities through transnational exchanges](#) and [the ESF and Federal programme to provide labour market support for those with a right to stay in Germany and refugees with access to the labour market](#). Moreover, there are [Girls' day – Girls' future day](#), which gives female pupils an insight into lines of work girls often do not consider in the process of choosing a future career, and [New ways for boys](#) (since 2005), which encourages local initiatives to address the needs of boys who need guidance during the transitional stage between school graduation and labour market.

Malta has developed two national programmes targeting employment of young people, both under [the European Social Fund](#). The first of them – Youth Employment Programme – with its budget of €822.422 – targets young people, particularly early school-leavers (i.e. young people who do not pursue post-secondary education) and young people who could benefit from further training. The other programme – Embark for Life – targets a wide range of youth coming from institutional settings (children's homes, mental health institutions, correctional facilities or rehabilitation residential programmes) as well as youth who are homeless or who are in an inappropriate housing arrangement, and has a budget €150.000 for the period 2013-2015.

In accordance with the Law of the Republic of **Belarus** No. 125-Z of June 15th, 2006 on Employment of the population of the Republic of Belarus graduates who studied at the expense of the national and (or) local budgets in vocational and technical institutions, and special secondary and higher education, have a guarantee for the first job provision. **Romania** is implementing an [Employment Programme for youth at risk of social marginalization](#), with a budget of €975.000. Its target groups are people between 16 and 26 years old who: a) are in the child protection system or come from this system; b) are disabled; c) have no family or their family cannot support them; d) have dependent children; e) have been imprisoned at least one and f) are victims of human trafficking.

National Employment Service in **Serbia** is implementing the Package of Services for Youth and Active Employment Policy Measure Aimed at Youth, which are very similar to activities that can be found under Youth Guarantee. The former involves the National Employment Service undertaking employment assessments within the first three months of the registration of a young person; determining an individual employment plan, and employment and/or inclusion in another measure of active employment policy. The main youth employment programme in **Portugal** is “Impulso Jovem”, with a budget of €344 million. It targets young people from 18-30 years.

3.2.4. MINORITIES, MIGRANTS AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

A national report from **Czech Republic** reports on the national web portal [Inclusive School](#), financed by the ESF and Prague municipality budget. The portal is primarily focused on education of children and young people with migrant background who speak different mother tongues and is focused on their integration into Czech schools. This programme was developed by the NGO META – community for young migrants, in a very close cooperation with youth sector in 2009. Czech Republic has also developed a grant scheme for fulfilling the goals of the updated national Concept Paper on integration of foreigners and Asylum Seekers – “Living Together” – with a budget of CZK 36 million for 2015-2016, and targeting NGOs working with foreigners and refugees. There are also grant schemes administrated by Youth Department at the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports directed at supporting youth work including youth work with refugees, with an annual budget of CZK 170 million: 1) programme for trans-regional and national youth NGOs – NGO recognised by the Ministry for providing quality youth work; 2) programme for umbrella youth NGOs and 3) programme for youth NGOs with branch NGOs.

Italy is one of the countries with very extensive programmes against racial and ethnic discrimination, primarily led by two institutions: UNAR-Ufficio Nazionale Antidiscriminazioni Razziali (the Italian Office against Racial Discrimination) and OSCAD-Osservatorio per la Sicurezza contro gli Atti

Discriminatori (Observatory for Security against Acts of Discrimination). The first institution deals with: 1) promotional activities aimed at duty bearers (by providing trainings, guidance material, etc.); 2) promotional activities aimed at potential victims (trainings, awareness raising, etc.); 3) communication activities and 4) publications and research projects. The second institution: 1) receives reports of discriminatory acts; 2) based on the received reports gives initiative for targeted interventions at local level to be carried out by the Police or the Carabinieri; 3) follows up the outcome of discrimination complaints lodged with the police agencies; 4) maintains contact with associations and institutions, both public and private, dedicated to combating discrimination; 5) prepares training modules to qualify police operators for anti-discrimination activity and participates in training programmes with public and private institutions and 6) puts forward appropriate measures to prevent and fight discrimination. There is also [Migrants' Integration Portal](#), established with the purpose of fostering foreign nationals' integration into the Italian society. The Portal has been on-line since 17th January 2012, and was developed through a project co-financed by the European Fund for the Integration of the Third Country Nationals, under the coordination of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, and with the involvement of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Education, University and Research.

Germany was the third country listed as the one with specific programmes for integration of the migrants and asylum seekers: [National Action Plan on Integration](#) and [Integration of young people with migrant background](#) (12 to 27 years). In February 2016 **Germany** has also established [Fund for European Aid for the Most Deprived](#), when the Federal ministry of youth and the Ministry of labour gave the initiative for 88 projects combating poverty and exclusion. The projects are financed by the Fund for European Aid for the most deprived, and by the federal ministries. The main goals are: integration of newly arrived people in Germany and their children and combating homelessness. Each project is being provided with a sum between €250.000 and one million until 2018.

3.3. FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS COMBATING YOUTH INEQUALITIES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL⁴

Housing is an area where young people are at particular risk if entering a labour market under precarious conditions, which was recognised by many Member States. The first of them – **Armenia** – implements the programme “Affordable housing for young families”, which provides a mortgage loan in a minimum 10-year repayment term of up to 10,5% of the state subsidies and of 2% interest rate. One of the social programmes developed by the State in **Belarus** provides financial support for young and large families in debt. **Czech Republic** has adopted a strategic document [Concept of the prevention and solving of homelessness in the Czech Republic until 2020](#), which aims at solving and preventing the phenomena of homelessness in a broader scope, in a close cooperation with different ministries and other stakeholders, such as the Regional Authorities, municipalities and a non-governmental sector. The **Finish** Ministry of the Environment is primarily responsible for the governmental housing policy and reducing homelessness, and according to an international review, the main goal of [the programme](#) – the permanent reduction of long-term homelessness on a national level – has been reached in 2016. In **Hungary** the 1997 “Act on the Protection of Children” stipulates

⁴ Is there a public financial or material support scheme (social protection offer/minimum income/housing or other benefits) for young people at risk of poverty and social exclusion in your country?

that families who lose their home can request a placement in a temporary home for families. Moreover, the programme “Aftercare” is a personalized consultation that helps social inclusion of young adults and is provided for a maximum of one year between the ages of 18-24, while housing aid can be requested until the age of 30.

In **Italy**, “Fondo per la casa” (Fund for the first home by young couples or single-parent families with minor children) was established in December 2010. It ceased its operations in September 2014. The remaining funds were included in the new “Guarantee Fund for the First House” at the Ministry of Economy and Finance. A national programme dealing with youth housing policy in **Malta** comes under a title “Strengthening policies and reviewing existing schemes so that more families and young couples are enabled to become home-owners”, which enables the first-time home buyers to receive a state loan of 30% annually. In **Romania**, there are registered 200.000 [social house units](#) (2% of the houses) and they are available to young people under 36. In **Ukraine** in 2014 public authorities introduced financial help, accommodation and rental housing to internally displaced people (IDP). On March 14, 2016, social security authorities have registered 1.744.788 IDP’s or 1.396.494 families from Donbas and the Crimea. 762.994 families have applied for cash benefits and 714.046 received these benefits.

It can be said that all countries have a system of financial assistance administered either to the family in need or to a young person individually. In **Austria** all social support systems combating inequality are open for everybody staying legally in Austria, more or less independent of the age. Benefits are provided to the families (parents, foster families...) of the young person, if they are not of legal age. All young people in Austria do have access to the social protection system (including free schooling, and health services), as well as unemployment benefits and the right to a minimum income, if they fulfil the criteria, which in the first place is a registration at the employment offices.

Currently the main activities of social protection and support for youth in **Belarus** include support to young families; social protection of students; providing guarantees to obtain in-demand professional knowledge and skills; enabling employment of undergraduate youth and young specialists; providing assistance in solving housing issues; comprehensive social support of talented and gifted students; social protection of young people with disabilities, etc. Educational institutions have developed and implemented social protection programmes for students, including material and financial help of various forms. Also, support is provided to socially vulnerable youth groups in local social service centres.

There is no universal minimum wage in **Finland**, although there are various forms of [financial support](#) available to young people (under 29 years of age), such as maternity grant, maternity leave, parental leave, paternity leave, child care leave and child benefits. Also, there is an income support policy in Finland for people without any kind of financial means and it amounts to €448,89 per month for a person living alone.

Georgia has universal social protection system for people at risk of poverty and social exclusion, among them for youngsters, which means financial social assistance based on the evaluation of socio-economic status of the family.

Malta offers a number of social benefit provisions and in-kind benefits which directly or indirectly benefit people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, including young people. Refugees uphold the same rights as Maltese citizens, although the asylum seekers’ rights largely depend on their humanitarian status. The main social benefit provisions and in-kind benefits include: 1) social

assistance of 60,7% of the National Minimum Wage; II) unemployment benefit of 43% of the National Minimum Wage, which is intended to be a short-term measure lasting for a maximum period of 156 days; III) persons aged 17 years are entitled to a minimum wage of €161,23 weekly, persons under 17 years are entitled to €158,39 weekly, and persons aged 18 years and over are entitled to €168,01 weekly; IV) young people suffering from a disability are entitled to the disability pension (14 years old in case of persons who are visually impaired) and V) fund European Aid to the most Deprived (FEAD). Through this EU co-funded programme the most deprived households are being provided with a periodic distribution of healthy food items, which contributes towards the alleviation of poverty and improved living standards. Moreover, Social Solidarity (MFSS) in **Malta** offers various initiatives through its main social welfare service provider, “the Foundation for Social Welfare Services” (FSWS), to help young people overcome inequalities. The main services offered in this regard fall under three pillars providing for: 1) family services (incorporating child and adolescent support services and family-oriented services); 2) children services (incorporating issues related to adoption, looking after children and fostering) and 3) general community services (incorporating initiatives aimed at combating poverty reduction and social exclusion, community development and outreach, and the provision of health services).

In **Portugal** young people benefit from the regular social welfare programmes, and have additional support in some specific issues like housing (programme “Porta 65”), internships, unemployment benefit and health insurance.

In **Slovakia**, there are no specific measures of a minimum income for young people who are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. The current system of assistance is aimed at assessing material status and providing assistance to all types of households that are financially deprived.

3.4. INITIATIVES FOR OVERCOMING INEQUALITIES IMPLEMENTED OUTSIDE THE YOUTH SECTOR⁵

In **Finland** the new “Non-Discrimination Act” entered into force on 1 January 2015. The purpose of the Act is to foster equality and prevent discrimination, as well as enhancing the legal protection of those who have been discriminated against. There is also [the Equality is Priority](#) project, a national action programme to combat discrimination. The objectives of the project are awareness-raising and capacity building related to equal treatment and non-discrimination, and the promotion of diversity within Finnish society. Moreover, [the Ministry of Justice](#) cooperates with several ministries and civic society organisations and conducts a number of projects against discrimination. On a civic level, the “Human Rights Centre” (HRC) is an autonomous and independent expert institution whose task is to promote the implementation of fundamental and human rights and increase cooperation and exchange of information between various actors. The HRC has “the Human Rights Delegation” (40 members), which is administratively connected to “the Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsman”, and the youth sector is represented by “the Finnish Youth Cooperation Allianssi”.

Republic of **Serbia** has several strategic documents in a field of combating inequalities: 1) “Strategy for Improvement of the Status of Roma in the Republic of Serbia”; 2) “Strategy for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination”; 3) “Strategy for Improving and Promoting Gender Equality”; 4)

⁵ What initiatives from other sectors and policy fields in your country have a positive change on supporting young people to overcome inequalities?

“Strategy for education development in Serbia 2020” and 5) “Guide for working with vulnerable young people”.

Apart from the provision of financial benefits by virtue of “the Social Security Act” and other in-kind benefits, there is a large number of charity foundations, religious and public organizations (including youth organizations) and the volunteer movements that joined the process of care and socialization of displaced young people in **Ukraine**, like [IDP Ukraine](#), [Crimea SOS](#), [UNDP](#), [UNFPA](#) and [UNICEF](#).

4. CONCLUSION

Contemporary generations of young people differ from the previous ones by the increasing pace of social changes they are experiencing. At the same time, they are also struck by one of the most widespread economic crisis in the new era that has led to precarious status of many young people. Such circumstances have yielded a large number of studies on youth in economic crisis, with usage of sophisticated indexes for measurement of inequalities. Still, it is very difficult to grasp the answers to the social, economic and political crisis that affect young people nowadays. And it is even harder to measure a cumulative process of the inequalities young people are experiencing during their life course. A triangle of policy makers, practitioners and researchers is trying to reinvent policies for combating youth inequalities both on the national and international level. They are trying to support knowledge-based youth policy and practice for fighting against inequalities through networking, dialogue, and peer learning, which is one of the most important aims of the symposium “Unequal Europe”. The paper before you tried to summarize main insights gained through the contributions of sixteen national correspondents of the EKCYP. The implications of this paper are limited due to a relatively small number of the completed questionnaires and the fact that not all national correspondents have replied to all the questions, and what is more important, their understanding of the questions and national and international policies differ to a great extent. What can be said is that young people have to be respected as stakeholders in the European democratic system. They should be provided opportunities to express ideas and preferences, and defend diverse interests. According to the [EACEA and London School of Economics Study on Youth Participation](#) (p. 6), “a clear majority of young people ask for more – and not less – opportunity to have a say in the way their political systems are governed. As such, young people are not ‘victims’ or ‘problematic’ as often claimed, but diverse and critical stakeholders in democracy, who often feel that their priorities are under-addressed in the political discourse”.

Young people are rarely partners in devising policies in the field of social services, while youth-policies in education, employment and political participation present the most frequent meeting point of the governmental and youth civic sector. A review of the national policies targeting youth inequalities have shown that only a handful of countries at the European level have specifically youth-tailored measures for combating inequalities. Majority of European countries still employ only policies targeting entire families. It is especially a case when it comes to financial benefits and housing policies. The unemployment benefit is the most present instrument of financial assistance that can be used exclusively by a person, although it shall be noted that many young people do not have access to it due to a lack of any kind of working experience. The insights in this paper point to a vast area for improvement of policies targeting inequalities among youth, despite well-established recommendations from the international institutions. Therefore, it is useful to remind that the

systems of reducing educational, social, economic, health and other inequalities among young people have an important role in supporting youth self-realisation and social integration. They are also of an utmost importance for avoiding of long-term consequences of inequalities and intergenerational transmission of social exclusion. These components are especially important when Europe is faced by a growing number of migrants and asylum seekers who are trying to find 'a place under the sun', and are showing a great confidence into efficacy of the European institutions.

A note on the author

Dunja Potočnik is a sociologist, a Research Associate at the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb, with background in both policy and research. Her main research and policy development areas are: youth policy, employment, education, social structure, inter and intra generational mobility, ICT and networks and science and research policy. She has also taken part in researches on youth mobility, information and discrimination. She has extensive experience in work with international organisations, governmental bodies and youth NGOs in Croatia and on a European level. Dunja has been a member of the Pool of the European Youth Researchers at the Youth Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe since 2011.