



Youth Employment

*by Marianne Thyssen**

For Europe, tackling unemployment, and especially youth unemployment, is a matter of principle. It is about ensuring political, economic and social stability and progress. This is clearly reflected in the priorities of the new European Commission, which has put at the core of its agenda quality jobs, growth, fairness and democratic change.

Economic growth and confidence are now returning in Europe and employment has also started to recover, extending to all population groups, and to involve more permanent and full-time jobs. These positive signs are a confirmation of the need to accelerate and intensify our efforts, as the employment and social challenges remain.

Indeed, despite the fact that youth unemployment rates are finally starting to decrease, youth unemployment is still one of the most pressing concerns in the European Union, standing at just over 21% across the EU and nearly 23% in the euro area. However, developments at the EU level hide marked differences between Member States with countries such as Spain and Greece experiencing youth unemployment of over 50%. A whole generation of our youth could become demotivated and disconnected from the labour market. We should never accept this. And neither can Europe afford it. We cannot tolerate this for social reasons. We cannot accept this as it creates a macro-economic imbalance that damages our economic growth potential.

Since I became Commissioner in charge of employment a few months ago, I have prioritised jobs for young people. My first act in office was to propose a 1 billion EUR increase in the pre-financing of one of the key EU funding instruments supporting youth employment: the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI).

The YEI is expected to provide immediate support directly to the most disadvantaged: those young people who are neither in employment, education or training (NEETs). The Initiative is active in 20 Member States and aims to help NEETs in the regions that are worst affected by youth unemployment. The new proposal will increase flexibility for the Member States to urgently launch measures that provide jobs, apprenticeships and traineeships, entrepreneurship support and further training and education programmes. It could help support up to 650,000 young people who urgently need it.

Through YEI and the European Social Fund, the Commission actively supports member States in implementing the Youth Guarantee as a comprehensive framework of action and



reform to facilitate school-to-work transitions. This policy framework requires comprehensive reforms, such as strengthening the capacity of public employment services, reforming education and training systems, reinforcing partnerships for reaching out to inactive young people and delivering quality offers. Member States agreed and spent the last year developing plans to make this a reality. The European Commission accompanies Member States in this effort through multilateral surveillance, the exchange of good practices, awareness raising and a substantial funding effort, as beyond YEI funding, the European Social Fund will directly support youth employment measures worth close to 6 billion euros. We now need to make this actually happen on the ground and reach the young people it is meant to support.

Our social agenda must lead to fair opportunities. Employment is one important part of the solution. Education and training is the other part, as no other policy measure can speed up social convergence as much as investment in education and training.

Our education and training systems need to be in tune with the labour market's needs, as many difficulties in youth employment arise in the transition from school to the labour market. Therefore we need to invest in developing a wide spectrum of skills for our people; specialist skills in science, technology, engineering and mathematics as well as soft skills and entrepreneurial skills to facilitate more — and more successful — company start-ups can also foster self-employment and innovative forms of work. The Commission is actively supporting Member States in their efforts, investing a further 26 billion euros in reforms of education systems through ESF. The promotion of decent work and core labour standards is a transversal objective for the European Commission that the Union extends also in the partnerships it develops with its partners.

The joint initiatives that the Union has launched with the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) in the framework of their strategic partnership seek, inter alia to foster sustainability and social inclusion through a targeted focus on science, research, technology and innovation, and to develop an efficient framework to exchange best practices and build capacities that can help to address bi-regional migration challenges.

***Marianne Thyssen** is the European Union Commissioner for the Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility.

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