

# Heightening the Engagement of Youth

## GUIDE

### HEY! WHAT IS HAPPENING?

## DISCLAIMER

The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

## CONTRIBUTORS TO THE GUIDE

This publication constitutes an intellectual output developed under the Project *H.E.Y.! Heightening the Engagement of Youth* (Ref. Number: 2021-2-CY02-KA220-YOU-000049349), co-funded by the Erasmus+ European Programme of the European Union.

## LEAD AUTHORS OF THE GUIDE

- Anna Bellan
- Anja Marojević
- Sarah Harou

Representing REDIAL

## CO-AUTHORS OF THE GUIDE

- Ifigenia Katchie
- Maria Kalogerou

Representing Social Policy and Action Organization

- Margherita Angelucci
- Ornella Basile

Representing Promimpresa Società Benefit s.r.l.

- Dafne Sgarra
- Elena Alina Grigoras

Representing ALDA, Association of Local Democracy

- Marta Formato

Representing AGIS, NOTE et INNOVE (ANI International)

- Hadriana Casla

Representing GRIGRI Project

- Diana Almeida
- Fábio Duarte

Representing Rota Jovem

---

## CONSORTIUM OF PROJECT PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

### Coordinator Organization of the project:



The Social Policy and Action Organization is a not-for-profit Organisation established in Cyprus in August 2014. The main goal of the organisation is to work towards the enhancement of quality of life of citizens targeting mostly groups with fewer opportunities, including young people, covering all social policy related areas. The organisation actively supports and promotes core principles of quality of life, thus being Human Well Being, Health, Employment/Financial Independence, Family Status, Socialization (through Culture and Sports among others) and Social Protection.

### Partner Organizations:



Promimpresa Società Benefit s.r.l. is a private enterprise committed to the enhancement of the entrepreneurial spirit and the strengthening of the socio-economic inclusion of vulnerable target groups. Promimpresa provides tailored upskilling training and job counselling paths, activities of search and recruitment, placement, and upskilling, qualified assistance services targeting unemployed people, young people, NEETs, companies and public authorities.



Redial is an innovative and forward-thinking voluntary and community sector organisation working in the field of social inclusion based in Dublin and working within different communities in Ireland. REDIAL is a collective of practitioners who have come together to share and maximise their wealth of experience, use their skills and collaborate together to develop, implement and evaluate innovative projects and methodologies within learning, employability, entrepreneurship, active citizenship, migration, community development and social cohesion.



ALDA, Association of Local Democracy, is a non-profit association founded by initiative of the Congress of the Council of Europe in 1999, whose main goal is the promotion of good governance and citizen participation at local level. ALDA is a membership-based organisation gathering more than 350 members (including local democracy agencies, local authorities, association of local authorities, civil society organisations, universities, NGOs, grassroots associations and public bodies) based in 45 countries over most of Europe and the European neighbourhood countries.



Created in accordance with the French law from 1901, which informs the structuring and regulation of French non-profit associations, in 2002 AGIS, NOTE et INNOVE (ANI International) was founded by international Science-Po Students as a non-profit association goal-oriented towards the education of citizenship and social inclusion, the promotion of diversity and interculturality, the affirmation of all citizen's own identities, for the socio professional integration and for international cooperation and solidarity.



Grigri Projects is a platform dedicated to research, consulting and production that focuses its action and interests on participatory design, community culture, urban intervention and collective creation processes of a transdisciplinary nature. GRIGRI develop their work thanks to the collaboration with other groups and agents cooperating at the various fields of city construction and management, from citizenship initiatives to international cooperation agencies or local municipalities, at local and international level, specially focused on the African continent.



Rota Jovem is a non-profit youth association based in Cascais that promotes and supports activities for young people. Rota has been operating since 1992 at a local, national and international level, focussing our promotion on the topics of youth participation, social inclusion, European values, volunteering, active citizenship and youth entrepreneurship.

## TABLE OF CONTENT

<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1.1 GLOSSARY OF ITEMS</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>2. NATIONAL CONTEXT</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>2.1. Introduction</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>2.2. National overview in France</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>2.3. National overview in Spain</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>2.4. National overview in Italy</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>2.5. National overview in Ireland</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>2.6. National overview in Portugal</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>2.7 National overview in Cyprus</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>2.8 Conclusions on national overviews</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>3. FOCUS GROUP OUTCOMES</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>3.1. Introduction</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>3.2. Focus group with young people with fewer opportunities</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>3.2.1. Focus Group Discussion in France</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>3.2.2. Focus Group Discussion in Spain</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>3.2.3. Focus Group Discussion in Italy</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>3.2.4. Ireland</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>3.2.5. Focus Group Discussion in Portugal</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>3.2.6. Focus Group Discussion in Cyprus</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>3.3. Focus group with youth workers, youth leaders/ social service providers, operators, teachers and trainers, institutes</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>3.3.1. Focus Group Discussion in France</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>3.3.2. Focus Group Discussion in Spain</b>	<b>53</b>

3.3.3. Focus Group Discussion in Italy	54
3.3.4. Focus Group Discussion in Ireland	55
3.3.5. Focus Group Discussion in Portugal	56
3.3.6. Focus Group Discussion in Cyprus	57
3.4. Focus group with public/private institutions, youth OSC, NGOs, schools and institutes	58
3.4.1. Focus Group Discussion in France	58
3.4.2. Focus Group Discussion in Spain	58
3.4.3. Focus Group Discussion in Italy	60
3.4.4. Focus Group Discussion in Ireland	61
3.4.5. Focus Group Discussion in Portugal	61
3.4.6. Focus Group Discussion in Cyprus	61
3.5. Overall conclusions	62
4. INTERVIEWS WITH RETURNEES AND NEETs	63
4.1. Interviews in France	63
4.2. Interviews in Spain	64
4.3. Interviews in Italy	65
4.4. Interviews in Ireland	66
4.5. Interviews in Portugal	66
4.6. Interviews in Cyprus	68
4.7. Overall Conclusions	70
6. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS	72
7. REFERENCES	74

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The “*Heightening the Engagement of Youth (HEY)*” project, co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme (Project Number: 2021-2-CY02-KA220-YOU-000049349), addresses the challenges young people, especially those with fewer opportunities, face today, especially with the COVID-19 crisis, which may lead to social exclusion in the fields of education, labour market, living, health, and participation in society.

This Guide entitled “*HEY! What is Happening?*” has been produced in the framework of the HEY project by all the members of the consortium composed by 7 partners from 6 European countries: Social Policy & Action Organisation, Cyprus; Promimpresa, Italy; REDIAL Partnership, Ireland; Association des agences de La Démocratie locAle, France; Agis Note et Innove International, France; Grigri Proyectos Socioculturales, Spain and Rota Jovem, Portugal. The preparation, development and implementation of this Guide has been carefully coordinated by REDIAL, Ireland. It gathers all the results of a desk-based research study, the outcomes of focus groups and interviews as well as policy recommendations for social inclusion in the field of youth.

This Guide represents the first Result of the Project. It aims to understand the context of young people with fewer opportunities, specifically NEETs and Returnees, their learning and motivational needs, their level of access to opportunities and tools that can help them get involved as actors of change in their local and international contexts. The purpose is also to identify and highlight the steps for sharing core values, innovative approaches, attitudes and beliefs through successful stories and provide guidelines on how to reproduce similar trends.

Nowadays, young people in Europe are the group most at risk of poverty and social exclusion. According to Eurostat, 18.1 million young people between the ages of 15 and 29 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU in 2020, with women more at risk than males. Young people in most European nations have disproportionate challenges in the labour market, making them the age group with the largest risk of unemployment. Indeed, 13.1 % of the 15-29 year-olds in the EU in 2021 were Neither in Employment nor in Education and Training. Besides, approximately 16,993 migrants were assisted to return from the European Economic Area in 2021. Beyond the issue of unemployment, the global social marginalisation of young people needs more attention at the EU level in regards to access to housing, education, and opportunities for social and political participation.

The main factors influencing whether European policy in this area may lead to greater inclusion of young people are education, employment, equal rights and chances for citizenship, participation, and solidarity between youth and society. Social inclusion as stated by the United Nations is “the process by which efforts are made to ensure equal opportunities – that everyone, regardless of their background, can achieve their full potential in life. Such efforts include policies and actions that promote equal access to (public) services as well as enable citizen’s participation in the decision-making processes that affect their lives.”

HEY project aims to contribute to these efforts by supporting the positive engagement and empowerment of young people, mainly those with fewer opportunities, NEETs and those returning to their country of origin from abroad. The purpose is to build more equal and inclusive communities through innovative and transnational youth initiatives as well as improve the existing local youth work practice of the youth leaders and operators, through quality and sustainability of digital youth work, blended training and the recognition of the vital role the youth sector plays. The project wants to help young people recover from detrimental effects, mitigate the impact of the pandemic and improve successful school-to-work transitions as a potentially powerful way of weakening the intergenerational transmission of poverty and reducing inequality.

## 1.1 GLOSSARY OF ITEMS

### 1. Empowerment:

Definition Source: UKEssays. (November 2018). Defining And Understanding Empowerment Social Work Essay. Retrieved from: <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/social-work/defining-and-understanding-empowerment-social-work-essay.php?vref=1>

Empowerment can be defined in general as the capacity of individuals, groups and/or communities to gain control of their circumstances and achieve their own goals, thereby being able to work towards helping themselves and others to maximise the quality of their lives.

### 2. Empowerment of Young People

Definition Source: [https://europa.eu/youth/strategy/empower\\_en](https://europa.eu/youth/strategy/empower_en)



Empowerment of young people means encouraging them to take charge of their own lives. Today, young people across Europe are facing diverse challenges and youth work in all its forms can serve as a catalyst for empowerment.

### 3. Migration:

Definition(s) Source: [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/pages/glossary/migration\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/pages/glossary/migration_en)

In the global context, the movement of a person either across an international border (international migration), or within a state (internal migration) for more than one year irrespective of the causes, voluntary or involuntary, and the means, regular or irregular, used to migrate. In the EU/EFTA context, the action by which a person either:

(i) establishes 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 EU Member State or a third country; or

(ii) having previously been usually resident in the territory of an EU Member State, ceases to have their usual residence in that EU Member State for a period that is, or is expected to be, of at least 12 months.

Notes:

a) At the international level, no universally accepted definition for migration exists.

b) The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines migration as follows: movement of a person or a group of persons, either across an international border (international migration), or within a state (internal migration), encompassing any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, composition and causes. This broad definition covers all forms of migration (voluntary/forced migration, internal/international migration, long-term/short-term migration), different motives for migration (migration because of political persecution, conflicts, economic problems, environmental degradation or a combination of these reasons or migration in search of better economic conditions or conditions of survival or well-being, or other motives such as family reunification) and irrespective of the means used to migrate (legal/irregular migration). Thus it includes migration of refugees, displaced persons, economic migrants and persons moving for other purposes, including family reunification.

c) Under the UN, definition movements for shorter periods, would not be considered migration.

**4. NEETs** - Young people neither in employment nor in education and training.

## **5. Learning mobility**

DefinitionSource: <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-d/glossary-youth>

Means moving physically to a country other than the country of residence, possibly combined with a period of virtual participation, in order to undertake study, training or non-formal or informal learning. It may take the form of traineeships, apprenticeships, youth exchanges, teaching or participation in professional development activity, and may include preparatory activities, such as training in the host language, as well as sending, receiving and follow-up activities.

## **6. Returnee:**

Definition Source: [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/pages/glossary/returnee\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/pages/glossary/returnee_en)

A person goes from a host country back to a country of origin, country of nationality, or habitual residence usually after spending a significant period of time in the host country whether voluntary or forced, assisted or spontaneous.

Note(s): The definition covers all categories of migrants (persons who have resided legally in a country as well as failed asylum seekers) and different ways the return is implemented (e.g. voluntary, forced, assisted and spontaneous). It does not cover stays shorter than three months (such as holiday visits or business meetings and other visits typically considered to be for a period of time of fewer than three months).

## **7. Social Inclusion**

Definition source: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/social-inclusion>

Social inclusion is the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society—improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity.

---

## 8. Validation:

Definition(s) Source: CEFEDOP, 2018

Validation is a process that aims to make non-formal and informal learning visible socially, in the labour market and in the education and training system, based on the identification, documentation, assessment and certification of such learning.

## 9. Youth worker

Definition: <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-d/glossary-youth>

A professional or a volunteer involved in non-formal learning who supports young people in their personal socio-educational, and professional development.

## 10. Young People With Fewer Opportunities

Source: [Implementation guidelines Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy](#)

The Regulations establishing the Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps programmes define “(young) people with fewer opportunities’ as “(young) people who, for economic, social, cultural, geographical or health reasons, due to their migrant background, or for reasons such as disability or educational difficulties or for any other reason, including a reason that could give rise to discrimination under Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, face obstacles that prevent them from having effective access to opportunities under the Programme.”

## 2. NATIONAL CONTEXT

### 2.1. Introduction

The project aims at contributing towards the empowerment of young people, mainly those with fewer opportunities, NEETs and those returning to their country of origin from abroad, and regionally attached youth by supporting their positive engagement in building more equal and inclusive communities through innovative and transnational youth initiatives; improve the existing local youth work practice of the youth leaders and operators, through quality and sustainability of digital youth work and online and blended training and the recognition of the vital role the youth

---

sector plays in helping young people recover from detrimental effects, overcoming poverty of hope, and to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and; improving successful school-to-work transitions, as a potentially powerful way of weakening the intergenerational transmission of poverty and reducing inequality.

All partners conducted a national-level analysis focused on the current situation of young people (the features and scale of their problems and needs, potential solutions, experiences, the transition from school to the labour market, and the characteristics of young people combining study and work, etc.). The analysis collected information about socio-economic inclusion opportunities for youth, best practices in community engagement, and success stories at the national level. National-level analysis was conducted in France, Spain, Italy, Ireland, Portugal, and Cyprus to gain a better understanding of the youth challenges.

## 2.2. National overview in France

### National framework on youth inclusion

- France has implemented many structures and measures and programs to help youth professional inclusion:
- Service Civique (Missions within associations or institutions for young people between 16 and 25 years old to encourage the commitment of citizenship and public support for it)
- Mission Locale (The local mission is a space for personalised intervention at the service of young people aged 16 to 25 to help them find jobs or training.)
- 1 jeune une solution (Plan of 9 billion euros launched in 2020, which aims to offer employment assistance, training, support and financial aid to young people in difficulty)

### Youth migration

A French measure responsible for youth migration is the Volontariat International en Administration ou en Entreprise (VIA/VIE) which is a professional mission abroad, lasting from 6 to 24 months, for any person between 18 and 28 years old.

### Programmes aiming to support the return of young nationals

Like many European countries, France is suffering from what is known as the "brain drain". Many young graduates move abroad every year, notably to other European countries (Germany,

United Kingdom) or to North America (United States, Canada); many for reasons of living conditions, working conditions, job offers and/or remuneration. Several documents and websites have been written/developed and made available to accompany all young expatriates who are preparing to return to France. For example, the "Guide du jeune expat" (Young expat's guide), updated in March 2022, explains how to choose a project, and prepare for the departure abroad but also offers a guide for the return to France. This concerns, in particular, registration on electoral lists, how to (re) benefit from social protection, how to declare one's income, etc. This Guide also provides a necessary overview of rights with regard to retirement, the employment centre, and unemployment in general. For young people returning from studying abroad, this Guide recalls the procedure for obtaining a certificate of compatibility with a foreign diploma. Other tools have been created to offer "personalised" advice specific to each type of expatriate, taking into account several criteria: Coming from an EU country or not; Children or not; Unemployment back in France or not.

- Data on youth employment/unemployment, youth migration and Returnees in the country.

### **Youth employment/unemployment**

According to INSEE (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies), in 2019, in France excluding Mayotte, approximately 1.5 million young people aged 15 to 29 are neither in employment nor in education or training; they are commonly referred to as NEETs . These young people represent 12.9% of 15-29-year-olds. Although they share the fact of not being in employment, their position in the labour market can be varied: among them, 47% are unemployed in the sense of the International Labour Office (ILO); 20% are inactive and wish to work but do not meet the criteria of availability or job search to be considered as unemployed and therefore belong to the unemployment halo, and 33% are inactive and declare that they do not wish to work, for various reasons (caring for children, health problems, etc.). Out of the young people who are not NEETs, 51% are in employment; 43% are unemployed but still in initial education and 6% have returned to education or other forms of training. With regard to education and training, the INJEP (the National Institute for Youth and Popular Education) notes that in 2018-2019, 45% of 15-29 year-olds were in school, while in 2019, 8.2% of 18-24 year-olds left the school system early. Neither in education nor in training, these people have a low level of qualification (i.e. no diploma or only the *brevet des collèges*). They represent 9.6% of young men and 6.9% of young women. As regards integration into working life, in 2019, 44.6% of 15-29 year-olds are in employment, and of these, 7.3% are underemployed. On 31 December 2019, 25.1% of jobs held by the under-26s were subsidised jobs, i.e., jobs receiving public aid to stimulate job creation or train certain groups. Finally, in 2019, the unemployment rate for the active population aged 15-29 was 15.3%.

## Youth migration and Returnees in the country

In 2014, more than 50% of French expatriates lived in Europe, notably in Belgium, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Another popular destination is Canada and the United States. Oceania is also attracting more French expatriates, particularly to Australia and New Zealand. Still, in 2014, 27% of young people were seeing their professional future abroad. According to a 2018 Yougov study, 70% of young people aged 18 to 24 are considering moving abroad, either for adventure or to find better career opportunities. This is also due to the search for a lower cost of living (44% of respondents) or a better standard of living (43%). According to a study carried out by BCG, in partnership with Cadremploi, among 8,000 people (80% of whom have at least a bachelor's degree), young people are more inclined to expatriate because it "offers the prospect of a better career, higher salaries or the opportunity to build on their professional experience [...] (young French people) give priority to the balance between their private and professional lives, the quality of their interpersonal relationships and the interest of the mission". Other reasons were also cited in the study, such as the lack of professional opportunities in France, but also to escape discrimination. Among French expatriates, 46% do not plan to return to France shortly. More than half of French expatriates have lived outside France for more than five years. In a panel surveyed by My Expat in 2016, 23% said they had been living abroad for between 5 and 10 years, and 39% had been living there for over 10 years. 6% of people born in France and with higher education lived in another Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) country in 2015-2016 (compared to 2% for people with the lowest level of education). Thus, two million people born in France are living abroad according to the latest 2019 United Nations statistics. There were 1.5 million in 2009, according to the January 2021 Trésor-Éco publication (new window), a significant increase in 10 years.

- Good practices:

National and governmental measures:

Among the young people under the age of 26 who are neither employed nor in training and who wish to actively engage in a pathway to employment, for whom the Youth Commitment Contract, launched by the Government is intended, some young people are experiencing disruptive situations that make it particularly difficult to reintegrate into society and employment. These young people, who number 20,000 in 2022, are, for example, homeless, leaving the child welfare system, dropping out of school or having addiction problems, for example.

- Housing is one of the main obstacles to social integration and employment. To counter this specific situation, the Ministry of Housing will increase the number of professionals working in the Integrated Reception and Orientation Services (SIAO). Their mission is to identify and regulate supply and demand, as well as to follow up cases, in conjunction with the local Missions and associations working to combat poverty.

Various other governmental measures aimed at young people:

- The extension of the identification and remobilisation pathways carried out by the associations in the framework of the "100% inclusion" call for projects.
- The publication of regional calls for projects aimed at selecting, in the summer, associations that provide local support to young people in difficulty and that are ready to offer the Youth Commitment Contract, in collaboration with the local Missions. The associations for integration and action against poverty will play an essential role in this deployment.
- As of September, the launch of a national contract aimed at perpetuating the experiments launched by several associations as part of the skills investment plan.

### 2.3. National overview in Spain

The National Strategy for the inclusion of young people is embodied in the 2020 Youth Strategy (Estrategia Juventud 2020) with 8 principal areas of action: education and formation; employment and entrepreneurship; health and wellbeing; participation; voluntary action and social inclusion; youth in the world; creativity and culture. The 2019-2023 National Strategy for the Prevention and Fight against poverty and Social Exclusion (Estrategia Nacional de Prevención y Lucha contra la Pobreza y Exclusión Social) is the other reference in the configuration of a state strategy for inclusion indicating 3 areas of action of particular relevance for the inclusion of young people: Employment, education and housing. Finally, the "Youth Guarantee Plan Plus 2021 - 2027 of decent work for young people" aims at improving the qualifications of young people to gain the know-how and technical skills required to enter the labour market.

#### National framework on youth inclusion

The youth inclusion programs are promoted by the Ministry of Health, Consumption and Social Welfare (Ministerio de Sanidad, Consumo y Bienestar Social), Ministry of Social Rights and Agenda 2030 (Ministerio de Derechos Sociales y Agenda 2030) and the youth Institute (Instituto de

la Juventud) INJURY, Instituto de la Juventud.

### **Programmes aiming to support the return of young nationals**

Returnee Office (Oficina Española del Retorno)

<https://ciudadaniaexterior.inclusion.gob.es/es/horizontal/oficina-retorno/index.htm>

Autonomous Communities' Return Plans (PLANES DE RETORNO DE LAS COMUNIDADES AUTÓNOMAS)

<https://www.sepe.es/HomeSepe/Personas/plan-retorno-espana/Planes-de-retorno-de-las-Comunidades-Aut-nomas.html>

### **Government Allowances and Benefits for Returnee Migrants (Prestaciones y Subsidios Emigrante Retornados)**

<https://www.sepe.es/HomeSepe/Personas/distributiva-prestaciones/quiero-cobrar-el-paro/soy-emigrante-retornado.html>

### **Youth migration**

Spain, a member of both the EU and the OECD, has a total of 7.372.607 young people aged 15 to 29 (Julio 2021, INE) amounting to approximately 6,4% of the total population, with a decreasing tendency. 32% of this age group tend to be concentrated in the capital cities of the regions while only 5% live in towns with less than 2000 inhabitants, corroborating the alarming depopulation of the interior zones and rural areas. According to INE, in 2019 23,000 young people from 20 to 30 years left the country for Northern European countries following a Southern Europe migration pattern – mostly Germany, Belgium, UK, France, and Switzerland - and only around 10,000 young people entered. Though due to the difficulty of getting reliable information and people who do not get registered in foreign countries, it is estimated that between 2008 and 2012 this number is closer to 700,000 (Figure 5). While the after-effects of the 2008 crisis and the following austerity policies are clear in this panorama, young people also state that the dissatisfaction with the measures taken by distinct governments against the crises, worsening working conditions, precarity, increasing unemployment, and the difficulty to access housing with an increased share of residential rentals, especially for younger households and temporary workers in recent years, generates an overall feeling of hopelessness and disappointment that underlies the decision to migrate. It is also confirmed that education levels also shape mobility patterns making tertiary level graduates a more mobile population than the rest causing a 'Brain Drain' in Spain although it is also stated that in foreign destinations this population rarely finds jobs according to their qualifications generating, in



turn, a 'Brain Waste'. Studies show that young people from Romania (41%), Italy (39%), and Spain (35%) showed the biggest desire to migrate within the next five years. In Spain, almost 40% of young people believe that finding a job within the next year is little or not likely probable and the hope of becoming independent has fallen by 15 points in 2020. In such a context Spain, having low incoming/outgoing student mobility ratios but high long-term incoming mobility, is a mobility beneficiary from a consortium country, but, due to economic crises, it has more recently shown a tendency towards being a mobility promoter. When it comes to the main motivations of the young people that migrate, the main motivations cited as better conditions of professional development or professional experience, the bad economic and labour conditions in Spain and learning/better foreign language skills

- **Data on youth employment/unemployment, youth migration and Returnees in the country.**

### Youth employment/unemployment

Spain has the highest youth unemployment rate in the region, meaning 1 out of 3 younger than 25 years which is 30,7% of the total population compared to 14,9% of the EU average. According to Eurostat (2022), in 2019 Spain had a 24,7% rate of youth employment (15 to 29 years) and an estimated 27% in 2021 with a discernible decrease compared to the 34,6% in 2011, three years after the 2008 global economic crisis, and yet these numbers are much higher compared to the EU average of 13,3% in 2020 and an estimated 13% in 2021 (Figure 1). The Spanish National Statistics Institute reports that 58.23% of young people ranging from 16 to 19 years old were unemployed in the first trimester of 2021, while the figure decreased to 36,52% for young people aged 20 to 24. Further, the long-term unemployment rate in 2021 for the concerned population in Spain is double the EU average, 7,6% in the former compared to 3,5% in the latter, which shifts the focus of Spanish youth to urgent labour market integration (Figure 2). Concerning this, Spain continues to be one of the European countries with the highest percentage of people between the ages of 18 and 24 who are neither in employment nor in education or training – a group known as NEETs or *nine* in Spain, after the Spanish phrase *ni estudia ni trabaja*. The rate of NEETs in Spain fell from 23.2% in 2016 to 20.9% in 2017, 20.2% in 2018 and 19.7% in 2019, then rose to 19.9% in 2020, following a similar trend seen across OECD countries 14,6% in average in 2020, according to the report *Education at a Glance 2021*.

In 2020 in most OECD and partner countries, foreign-born young adults (15-29 year-olds) are more likely to be NEETs than native-born ones, 19% of foreign-born young adults compared to

13,5% of their native-born peers and in Spain this rate is 27,2% compared to 16,5%, bringing in the question of integration of migrant young people in the education system and labour market. Further, In Spain, young people who are neither in education nor seeking employment, different from their peers who are actively looking for work, represent 46% of all NEETs and 9,2% of the entire 18-24 age group. Also, in many OECD countries, the large majority of young men are unemployed, while most women are inactive, and Spain follows the same trend: 50.1% of women NEETs are inactive while 42.7% of NEET men are unemployed. This indicates the urgent need for developing policies that secure gender equality when it comes to education, professional training, and labour integration.

### **Youth migration and Returnees in the country**

According to INE, in 2019 23,000 young people from 20 to 30 years left the country for Northern European countries following a Southern European migration pattern – mostly Germany, Belgium, UK, France and Switzerland - and only around 10,000 young people entered. Though due to the difficulty of getting reliable information and people who do not get registered in foreign countries, it is estimated that between 2008 and 2012 this number is closer to 700,000 (Figure 5). While the after-effects of the 2008 crisis and the following austerity policies is clear in this panorama, young people also state that the dissatisfaction with the measures taken by distinct governments against the crises, worsening working conditions, precarity, increasing unemployment and the difficulty to access housing with an increased share of residential rentals, especially for younger households and temporary workers in recent years, generates a overall feeling of hopelessness and disappointment that underlies the decision to migrate.

However, since 2016 the return of young migrants has become an important issue in the public agenda in Spain, returning almost to the pre-crisis levels in 2011. Although Spanish entrepreneurs do not usually consider returning home to create or continue business due to a difficult socio-economic entrepreneurial atmosphere in comparison to other countries in Europe, the returning young people state that they would like to benefit from the skills and competency acquired abroad, hoping that it will provide them with better work conditions, while being closer to the family is also another reason for most of the returns. Studies show that, to promote return, Spanish young people find it important for the government to take measures such as Assistance to find a job before return; a special talent attraction plan for those who have achieved high qualifications and experience abroad, additional points for each year of work abroad to access public employment in the exams for public services; subsidy for Returnees; unemployment benefits; state

Plan to promote access to housing (exists in some communities); ease of family return (residency for the relatives, partner or children, distance enrollment in schools)”; distance career guidance (personalised and specialised service in the professional field); facilities for bringing goods acquired abroad into Spain; active insertion income (exists for people over 45, €426 for 18 months).

Finally, given the aftermath of the global pandemics that affected the youngest and temporary workers in terms of job losses and economic, social and emotional instability, the measures that secure the autonomy of young people and strengthen their independent life plans are of utmost importance not only to improve the living conditions of young people living in Spain but also to create attractive conditions for the ones who want to return. In Spain, the recent labour reforms that limit the use of temporary contracts are one of the policies that serve this, and though this does not translate into permanent jobs. Spain is also part of the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) aimed at reducing youth unemployment rates, promoting young people's entry into the labour market through apprenticeships or other work experience, and aimed at increasing job opportunities for young people by favouring mobility across the EU in line with the Europe Youth Guarantee Schemes 2030. Further, other initiatives aim directly at young returnees to offer guidance on housing, health, employment and other matters such as private and public initiatives and aid programs.

- **Good practices:**

Volvemos

<https://volvemos.org/>

Was Founded in 2016 to facilitate the connection and return of Spanish emigrants.

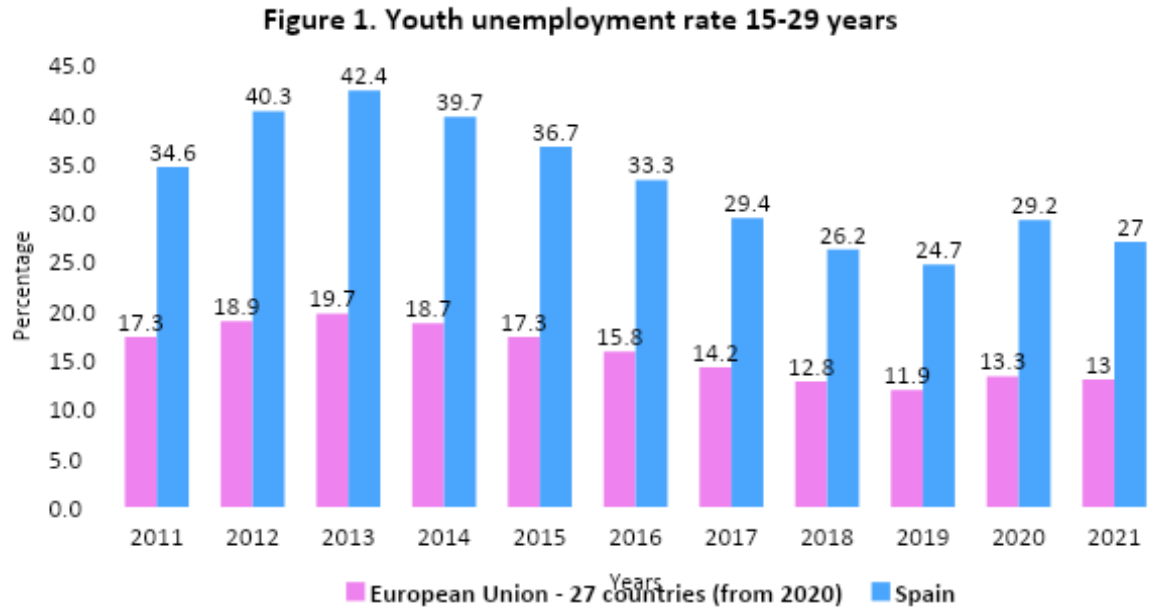
Aims to build new, more positive and constructive migration narratives. And introduces return Policies in the Spanish political agenda for the first time

Un País Para Volver:

<https://unpaisparavolver.es/>

The Return to Spain Plan is a project developed by Volvemos to promote the return of Spaniards in the best conditions and facilitate their return process. Under the slogan “A country to return to”, it wants to eliminate administrative barriers related to return, improve the employability of migrants so that they can find a job in Spain and promote entrepreneurship.

National overview in Spain: additional data



**Figure 2. Long-term unemployment for the 15–29 age category**

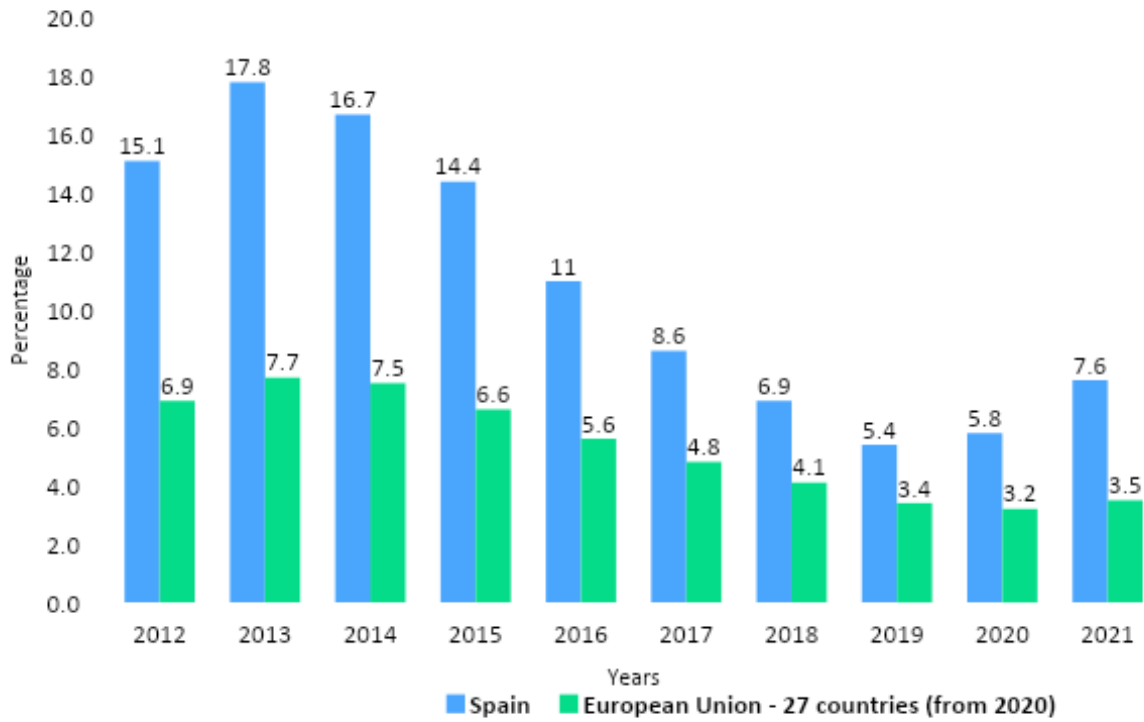
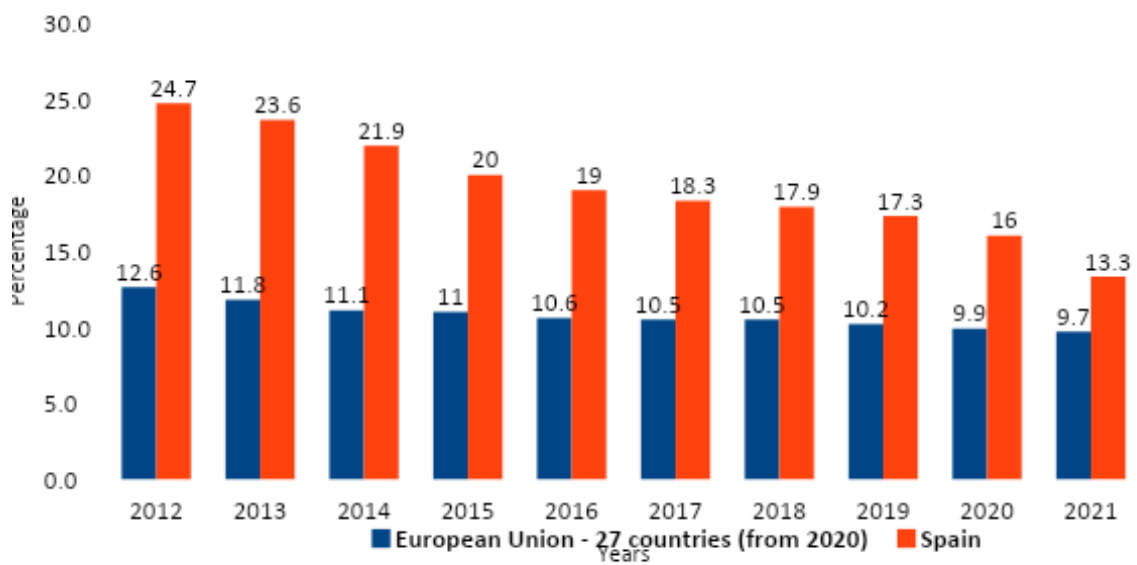


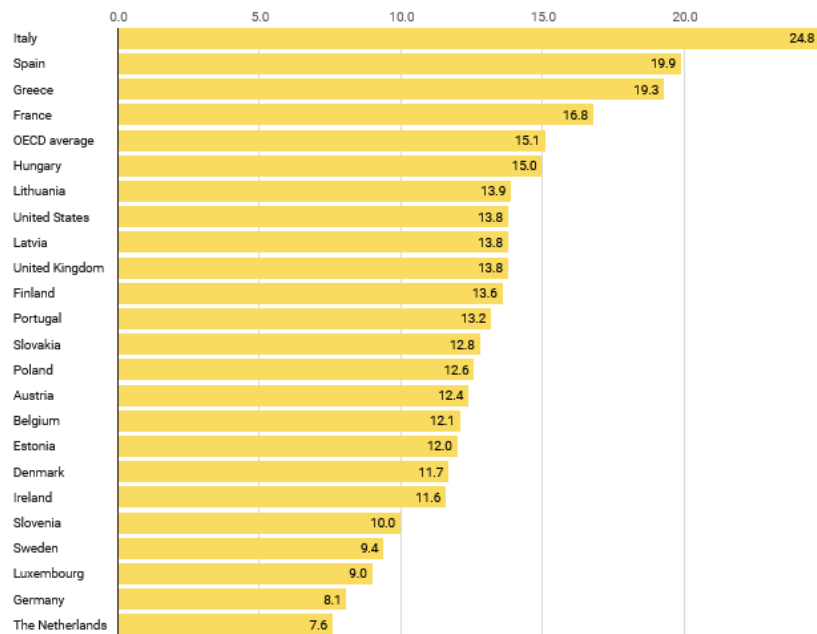
Figure 3. Early School Leaving



**Figure 4. NEETS in EU**

**Youngsters who neither study nor work**

In % of the 18-24 population



Source: OECD

**Figure 5. Migration Rates in Spain from 15 to 34 years**

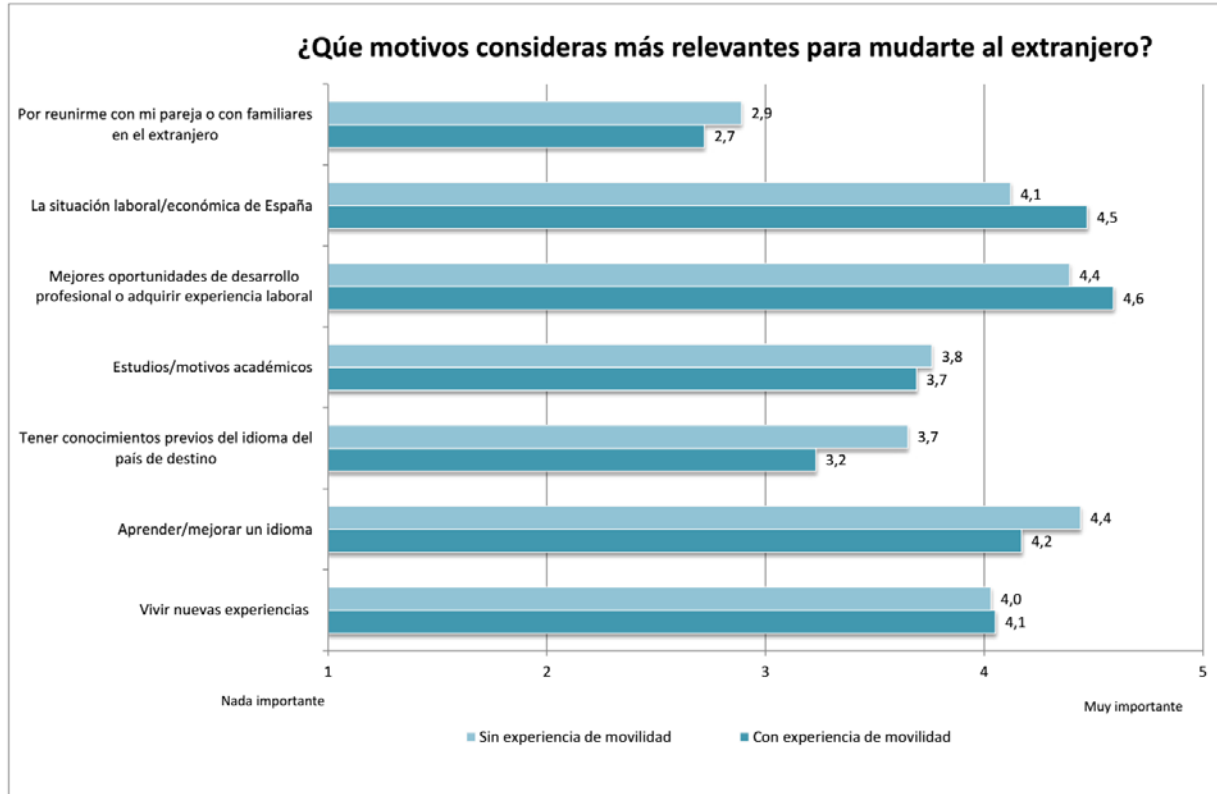
Migraciones exteriores			
Resultados nacionales			
Flujo de emigración con destino al extranjero por año, sexo, grupo de edad y nacio			
Unidades: Movimientos migratorios			
	2020	2019	
<b>Ambos sexos</b>			
Total			
De 15 a 19 años		10.089	11.506
De 20 a 24 años		18.757	21.976
De 25 a 29 años		30.124	38.079
De 30 a 34 años		30.870	39.339
<b>Hombres</b>			
Total			
De 15 a 19 años		5.378	6.072
De 20 a 24 años		9.785	11.132
De 25 a 29 años		15.074	18.838
De 30 a 34 años		16.243	21.014
<b>Mujeres</b>			
Total			
De 15 a 19 años		4.711	5.434
De 20 a 24 años		8.972	10.844
De 25 a 29 años		15.050	19.241
De 30 a 34 años		14.627	18.325

Notas:  
Con la entrada en vigor del Brexit a partir de enero de 2020, el agregado UE-27 sustituye al UE-28 a

Fuente:  
Instituto Nacional de Estadística

Figure 6. Principle Motives to migrate among young people Source: Navarrete et al. (2018)

Gráfico 104. Principales motivos para vivir en otro país (con movilidad exterior y sin experiencia movilidad)



## 2.4. National overview in Italy

In Italy, at a central level, competencies in the field of immigration and integration are divided among several Administrations such as The Ministry of the Interior, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, The Ministry of Justice, Education, etc, however, regions and local authorities also play an important role, not only in management but also in the planning of interventions. Regional competencies in the field of immigration are attributed to the Immigration Consolidation Act, after which the regions have legislated, defining pathways to ensure the integration of foreign nationals, including those entitled to international protection. Regions operate within the planning, addressing, coordinating and evaluating of policies and allocating financial resources for their full implementation, and have a central role in defining welfare policies and access to social rights.



Another important role is played by the nonprofit sector, which handles important aspects such as welcoming, assistance, information and guidance at local and national levels. Protection and promotion of rights, and Information and awareness-raising of the Italian population. Italy has equipped itself with a national strategy through the “National Social Plan 2021-2023 and Poverty” and “Social Services Action Plan 2021-2023”. Social inclusion policies dedicated to young people aim to facilitate occupational integration, improve living conditions and reduce social inequalities among young people- Youth employability and combating school dropouts are among the top priorities in tackling youth distress in Italy, as is the promotion of living conditions above the poverty threshold. Compared to the past, young people in Italy are currently facing numerous difficulties in gaining economic independence and therefore achieving satisfactory living conditions. The demographic dynamics of recent years will require today's younger generations to support the elderly, an inactive population of relatively disproportionate size. The younger generations will also bear burdens resulting from choices they did not make, especially in terms of public debt and the environmental situation. These factors have contributed to the impoverishment of the new generation compared to that of their parents, and in international rankings. Italy ranks last in terms of a wide intergenerational gap and low social mobility. Considering the Global Youth Development Index, Italy is placed 23rd in the world rankings (among European countries it is in 16th place), with a more critical performance in the domains of education (36th place) and employment (46th place), down to minimal political and civic participation (125th place).

In a country with a decreasing population of young people, the critical issues involving the younger generation are often greater than those faced by peers in other European countries. What’s more is that with the pandemic, young people living in poorer rural areas have suffered a greater separation from education, socialisation, work, culture, etc.

One positive aspect is the awareness that the youth have regarding topics such as the environment, as well as the opportunities arising from attention to collective health, digital skills, innovation, and the green economy.

In order to tackle the unemployment issues, many programmes have been implemented by the National Government, one of these is called “**RESTO AL SUD**” (I stay in the south)- the incentive that supports the establishment and development of new entrepreneurial and freelance activities in regions like Abruzzo, Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Molise, Puglia, Sardinia, Sicily, the earthquake crater areas of central Italy (Lazio, Marche Umbria) aimed at those between the ages of 18 and 55.

**Smart & Start Italia** is the incentive that supports the birth and growth of innovative high-tech startups in all Italian regions. The goal is to stimulate a new entrepreneurial culture related to the digital economy, enhance the results of scientific and technological research and encourage the return of "brains" from abroad.

The text of the Legge di Bilancio 2022 (Budget Law 2022) contains a number of benefits and subsidies for young people. Here below some examples:

- As of 1 January 2022, 18-year-olds will again have an electronic card for cultural expenses. This is the so-called 'Bonus Cultura' for culture-related expenses. The maximum limit is EUR 500.
- **Bonus Prima Casa** (First Home bonus) for young people under 36
- **Bonus Affitto** (renting bonus) for young people between 20 and 31 years of age
- From the year 2022, Parliament has also allocated resources of up to 20 million for the implementation of active labour policies for young people aged between 16 and 29, who are neither employed nor in education or training. The so-called 'needs' will be the recipients of specific active policies to help them find a place in the world of work through dedicated training courses.
- **Piano NEETs**: a strategic plan with the aim of reducing the inactivity of NEETs, i.e. young people between 15 and 34 years of age who are not studying, not working and not in training, through various aids provided by the government. The plan envisages achieving the objective through interventions divided into 3 macro phases: identification; engagement; and activation.

**Giovani 2030** is the digital home created by the Department for Youth Policies and Universal Civil Service precisely for those who are looking for new tools and new challenges to grow and find their way. The platform gathers all the initiatives and incentives for young people with a specific focus on: volunteering, training, education, culture, facilities and incentives, and National, European and International Initiatives.

**PNRR - the National Recovery and Resilience Plan**: is the programme drawn up by the Italian government that explains how our country intends to invest the funds made available by the European Union under the Next Generation EU to foster recovery from the post-Covid-19 pandemic. The PNRR consists of six missions and 16 components. The six missions are Digitisation, Innovation, Competitiveness, Culture and Tourism; Green Revolution and Ecological Transition; Infrastructure for sustainable mobility; Education and Research; Cohesion and Inclusion; and Health. The Plan is strongly oriented towards supporting the employment of young people and women, to facilitate

their entry into the world of work and foster gender inclusion. Actions are also planned to help the disabled and frail persons.

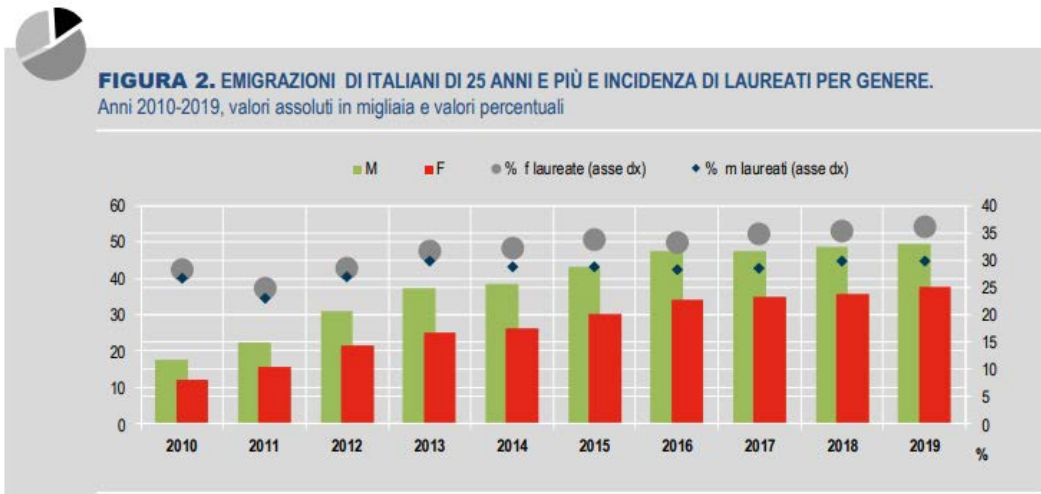
- **Programma GOL:** The GOL programme, which means 'Guaranteed Employability of Workers, was introduced to try to boost employment in Italy and combat unemployment. It envisages a series of measures for the re-employment of the unemployed, recipients of Citizenship Income, laid-off workers, disabled, women, young people, the over-50s and other categories. The GOL programme is part of the PNRR and will last for the period 2021-2025.
- The **Next Generation Eu (NGEU)** is a European instrument aimed at helping, through investments, member countries following losses due to the health crisis.
- Data on youth employment/unemployment, youth migration and Returnees in the country.

According to data released by Eurostat, Italy is the "oldest" country in Europe- more specifically, 22.8% of the total population is elderly, compared to 20.3% for the EU average. Moreover, in 2020, the employment rate of young people aged 15-29 was 29.8 %, far from the levels of other European countries (46.1% in 2020) and 2 percentage points below in 2019.

In terms of absolute numbers, the employment of young people aged 15-29 in Italy in 2020 was estimated at 2.69 million or so and registered, in comparison with the previous year, a decrease of about 187,000.

Furthermore, in Italy, young people who are not working too often are not even included in an education or training pathway, remaining trapped somewhere between unemployment and inactivity. So-called NEETs between the ages of 15 and 29 represent a 23.3 per cent share of the population in 2020, compared to 13.7 per cent on average in Europe. On top of it, in 2020, more than two million households found themselves living in poverty, registering an increase of about 86% over the pre-pandemic period.

According to the statistics, nearly three out of four Italian citizens moving abroad in 2019 were 25 years old or older, the average age of emigrants is 33 for men and 30 for women. One in five emigrants is under 20 years old, two in three are between 20 and 49 years old while the share of over-50s is 13 per cent. The rising trend of expatriates can be attributed in large part to the difficulties of the Italian labour market to absorb the supply, especially for young people and women.



(ISCRIZIONI E CANCELLAZIONI ANAGRAFICHE DELLA POPOLAZIONE RESIDENTE | ANNO 2019, 2022)

Slightly more than 40,000 young Italians between the ages of 25 and 34 have been expatriated in 2020; while the number of repatriations of young college graduates is at significantly lower levels (-3.5 per cent over 2019), generating a negative migration balance.

As regards returnees, the data in the table below concern registrations (i.e., returns from abroad) and cancellations (i.e., transfers abroad) made in municipalities by Italian citizens aged 18-39 for changes in residence.

	rimpatri (iscrizioni)	espatri (cessazioni)	saldo
2009	10.509	20.889	-10.380
2010	10.043	20.452	-10.409
2011	10.857	25.557	-14.700
2012	9.900	33.556	-23.656
2013	9.528	42.342	-32.814
2014	10.231	45.074	-34.843
2015	10.869	51.048	-40.179
2016	14.639	60.788	-46.149
2017	16.473	61.553	-45.080
2018	18.795	63.570	-44.775
2019	25.577	68.063	-42.486
<b>2009-2019</b>	<b>147.421</b>	<b>492.892</b>	<b>-345.471</b>

Between 2009 and 2019, there were more than 345,000 citizens who removed themselves from municipal registry offices to move abroad, with significant growth since 2013. The numbers distinctly mark the differences between Returnees and people who decide to leave.

However, thanks to Law 25.07. 75 no. 402, the Italian government provides an unemployment allowance for those Italian citizens repatriated workers who have worked abroad, and who have remained unemployed due to dismissal or non-renewal of the seasonal employment contract by the employer abroad (foreign or Italian, working or resident abroad). In practice, Italian citizens who have worked outside the national borders can apply for an unemployment benefit from the INPS, which will be granted to them, if they meet a series of requirements, once they return to Italy. To be eligible for the benefit, the Italian worker who has remained unemployed must be repatriated within 180 days, i.e. 6 months, from the date of end of the employment relationship he held abroad and must have made a declaration of immediate availability for work within 30 days from the date of repatriation. The amount of the sum that the worker will receive varies on the basis of the conventional salaries determined in the reference year of the benefit and is paid for a maximum of 6 months. Relevant economic support in a period, such as that of repatriation, is always delicate in terms of settlement and adaptation.

Moreover, the Italian government allows a temporary preferential taxation scheme, recognised for workers who transfer their residence to Italy and commit themselves to stay and work in Italy for at least 2 years (Article 16(1); Legislative Decree No. 147/2015). The legislation on the special regime for repatriated workers was enacted in order to foster the transfer of highly-qualified and specialised individuals to Italy and promote the country's technological, scientific and cultural development.

It is concluded by stating that the marginalisation of the younger generation in Italy has multiple mutually coherent dimensions of which fewer entrepreneurial opportunities, worse demographics, lack of effective policies, and decreasing entry incomes. It is imperative to realise that the marginality of young people is the marginality of everyone and therefore needs to be tackled before the scenario worsens.

- Good practices:

At a national level, there are many initiatives that have been implemented in order to actively engage young adults in the social and economic life of the country. As mentioned above, RESTO AL SUD is a very successful initiative, sponsored by INVITALIA.

Within **Resto al Sud**, the activities that are eligible for funding are many, such as handicrafts, processing of agricultural products, fisheries and aquaculture, provision of business and personal services, tourism, trade, freelance activities (both individual and corporate) but agricultural activities are excluded. **Resto al Sud** covers up to 100 percent of expenses, with maximum

financing of 50,000 euros per applicant, which can go up to 200,000 euros in the case of companies consisting of four partners.

**WEBSITE:** <https://www.restoalsud.it/>

Since National initiatives apply nationwide (Resto Al sud) another National Initiative that applies at a more local level is “Yes I Start-Up” Assists in building assets and starting one’s own business idea. Since National initiatives apply nationwide (Resto Al sud) another National Initiative that applies at a more local level is “Yes I Start-Up” Assists in building assets and starting one’s own business idea. The goal is to promote and support self-employment and self-entrepreneurship of NEET youth through training, preparation and mentoring. It is a free self-employment training course that gives you the skills you need to turn a business idea into reality and it consists of entrepreneurship training courses aimed at conveying the skills needed to build one's own startup, from creating the business plan to preparing the documentation required to start the business. The classes are conducted by ENM (National Microcredit Corporation) and Confapi Sicilia (The Italian Confederation of Small and Medium Private Industry) trainers and help young people structure their own business idea. “Yes, I Start Up” is available in all of the Italian regions in the same way, thanks to the homogeneous training of teachers. The “Self Employment” fund finances the creation and start-up of entrepreneurial activities through zero-interest financing.

**WEBSITE:** <https://www.anpal.gov.it/yes-i-start-up>

**Giovani 2030:** The Department for Youth Policy and Universal Civil Service has set up the GIOVANI 2030 project, a web platform for girls and boys aged between 14 and 35. The name of the project, GIOVANI2030, is dedicated to the UN Agenda 2030 goals, a benchmark date for making the planet a fairer, more just, cleaner place. The GIOVANI 2030 platform will offer news, and in-depth analysis on volunteering, training, education, culture, entertainment, and sport, telling young people about the opportunities to be seized in order to grow in a participatory way and welcoming proposals, ideas and ideas from those who wish to contribute.

**WEBSITE:** <https://giovani2030.it/>

'**ON - Oltre Nuove imprese a tasso zero**' is the incentive for young people and women who want to become entrepreneurs. The incentives are valid throughout Italy and provide a mix of zero-interest financing and a non-repayable grant for business projects with expenses up to EUR 3 million, which can cover up to 90% of the total eligible expenses.

**WEBSITE:** <https://www.invitalia.it/cosa-facciamo/creiamo-nuove-aziende/nuove-imprese-a-tasso-zero>

## 2.5. National overview in Ireland

The National Youth Strategy of Ireland is focused on enhancing the contribution of current and emerging policies, programmes, and services to improving the national outcomes for young people aged 10 to 24 years in order to respond to the diverse needs and aspirations of young people and in line with the vision for a better Ireland set out in Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures. It is based on the idea that youth is a distinct developmental stage that occurs between childhood and adulthood, and it considers the social and economic factors that have an impact on young people during this time as well as the significant role that communities, families, and other adults play in the lives of young people. The National Youth Strategy acknowledges the value of statutory bodies/agencies and non-governmental organisations working closely together to improve results for young people. It recognises the connections between all of these fields of endeavour and the maxim that young people gain the most when the efforts of all parties involved are mutually reinforcing. The National Youth Strategy's objective is to help all young people reach their full potential by respecting their rights, listening to their opinions, and assisting them as they grow from children into adults. An Irish emigrant support organisation called Safe Home Ireland offers a variety of services to returning and former Irish emigrants. In addition to conducting outreach visits and offering housing help to qualified candidates, they also offer guidance and information services. In order to help elderly, qualified Irish-born emigrants consider the possibility of returning to live in their home countries, Safe Home Ireland was founded in the year 2000. The "Back for Business" programme was created to support newly-returned Irish immigrants in establishing and growing their enterprises in Ireland. Back for Business is a government-funded development programme that was created to encourage and assist entrepreneurship among immigrants who were moving back to Ireland from abroad.

The Personal Youth Development Program (PYDP) seeks to assist young people who are at risk in acquiring life skills that promote positive interactions, increase confidence and resilience, and improve their employability. PYDP aims to link young people aged 16 to 25 to individualised learning, skills, and career opportunities with a focus on building positive relationships and preparing individuals for the workplace. It is interested in involving potential participants who encounter difficulties to participate in mainstream provision and are at risk of polarisation or recruitment to groups antagonistic to the peace process, such as young Returnees.

- **Data on youth employment/unemployment, youth migration and Returnees in the country.**

According to the Central Statistics Office, the Youth Unemployment Rate in Ireland decreased to 12.60 percent in February from 13 percent in January of 2022.





Related	Last	Previous	Unit	Reference
Unemployment Rate	4.70	4.80	percent	May 2022
Employed Persons	2532.20	2483.50	Thousand	Mar 2022
Unemployed Persons	127.90	127.40	Thousand	Mar 2022
Unemployment Change	-5101.00	-1992.00	Persons	May 2022
Full Time Employment	1997.10	1955.80	Thousand	Mar 2022
Part Time Employment	532.30	550.40	Thousand	Mar 2022
Labor Force Participation Rate	65.20	64.90	percent	Mar 2022
Youth Unemployment Rate	12.60	13.00	percent	Feb 2022
Wages in Manufacturing	1017.28	978.58	EUR/Week	Mar 2022
Initial Jobless Claims	50660.00	54372.00	Persons	May 2022
Average Weekly Hours	32.20	33.00		Mar 2022
Average Hourly Earnings	27.33	26.22	EUR	Mar 2022
Wages	880.37	864.51	EUR/Week	Mar 2022
Wage Growth	2.30	2.00	percent	Mar 2022
Employment Rate	72.80	73.00	percent	Mar 2022

12,500 persons aged 15 to 24 departed Ireland in the year leading up to April 2018. Compared to the numbers who immigrated at the height of the recession, this figure is glaringly different. Amid a bleak future in Ireland, 35,800 people in the same age range left between April 2011 and April 2012. Despite a sharp decline in emigration, the 2018 statistics, which the Central Statistics Office released in September, reveal that young people are still making the decision to leave Ireland. Others move in search of a higher standard of living, better employment opportunities, and more affordable and accessible housing, while some go in search of excitement and the chance to travel the world. According to a Grad Ireland study of students released in October, many students continue to feel as though their possibilities are limited despite significant advances in the Irish labour market. After graduation, 35% of respondents said it would be difficult to find a suitable job, which may be motivating some young people to leave in search of better employment possibilities elsewhere. The high cost of living in Ireland, especially in the cities where the majority of job prospects are located, contributes to this concern about job opportunities. For young individuals

wishing to live and work in any of Ireland's largest cities, rent is a key concern, particularly in Dublin, where rental prices have been steadily rising year over year.

By April 2020 nearly 29,000 Irish nationals returned home to live and work in, the highest number in 13 years. According to statistics released by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), the population as a whole increased by 55,900 persons, or 1.1%, from the previous year to 4.98 million. CSO statistician James Hegarty pointed out that because the data only covered the first several weeks, it did not adequately capture the full extent of the Covid-19 pandemic's effects.

- **Good practices:**

The National Youth Council of Ireland, the Arts Council, and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs have joined forces to create the NYCI Youth Arts Programme. It is devoted to fostering and advancing Ireland's young artists.

The Child Protection Programme is committed to helping the youth work sector fulfil its obligations with regard to child protection and safeguarding. The Program provides training, reference materials, assistance and guidance, as well as lobbying on behalf of the youth work sector, to support the industry.

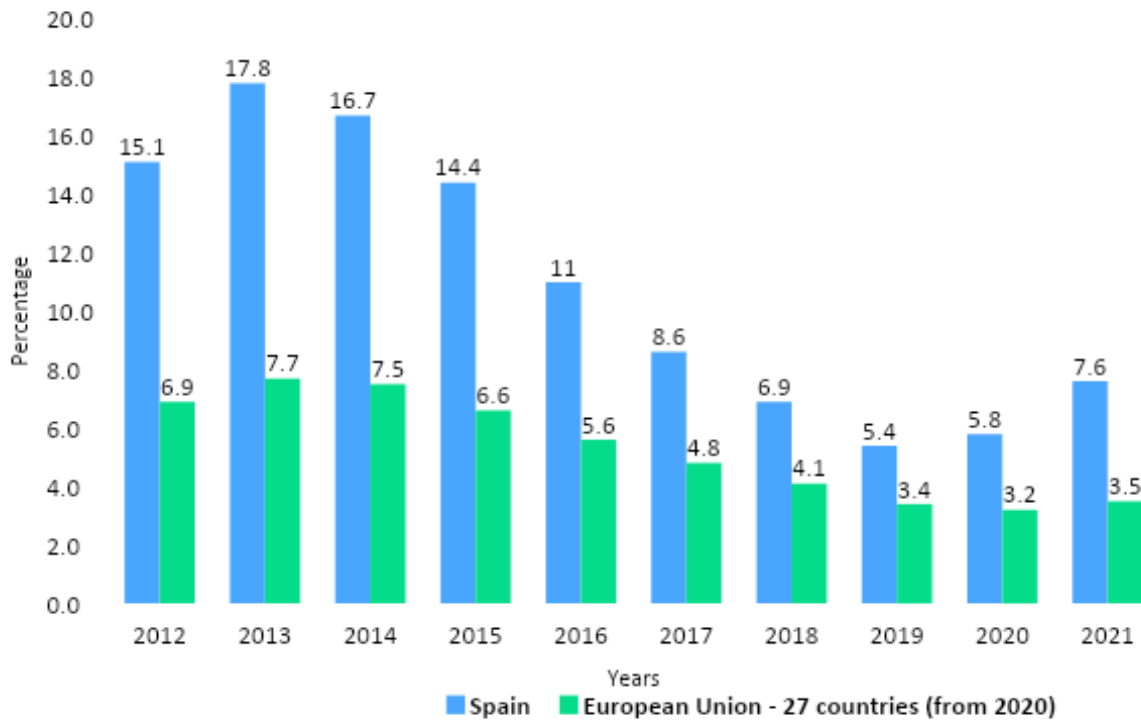
Global youth work aims to empower young people to develop the knowledge and skills to tackle global issues and explore their own values, beliefs, and connections with the wider world.

The NYCI's Equality and Intercultural Program offers a distinctive and cutting-edge selection of training courses, materials, policy creation, guidance, and networking opportunities.

The National Youth Health Programme is committed to strengthening the skills of youth workers and volunteers in order to develop and promote a culture within the youth sector that places a priority on health and wellbeing.

Fostering opportunities for the exchange of best practices in youth work and facilitating international collaboration, NYCI International seeks to facilitate and promote the participation of youth organisations and young people in international activities as well as to encourage youth

**Figure 2. Long-term unemployment for the 15–29 age category**



organisations to include an international component to their youth work.

Young people's lives are improved and their curiosity is sparked by STEAM programmes.

Through an endorsement procedure based on an in-depth analysis of the content and delivery of each programme, NSETS seeks to ensure and promote quality standards in the education and training of young workers.

The Future Generations – Climate Justice Project aims to investigate and raise awareness of the systemic and human rights concerns associated with the climate crisis.

The North-South Practice Development Hub was created to improve the learning opportunities for young people utilising youth services throughout the island by strengthening and developing long-term partnerships between organisations, staff, and volunteers in the north-south youth work sector.

## 2.6. National overview in Portugal

According to the United Nations, it's becoming more and more difficult to find a job that

matches the skills acquired at university for highly educated young Europeans. In Portugal, nearly two in five young people are unemployed, which translates into many young graduates being forced to find employment opportunities abroad. In 2019, Portugal was the first country in the European Union to have the largest percentage of emigrants in proportion to its population: 25,7%. This report, done by the Emigration Observatory, included data from the United Nations that indicated that in that year, there were around 2.6 million people born in Portugal living abroad. At this time, the United Kingdom was the main destination Portuguese people chose to move to. The Portuguese government has a dedicated program for those who have left the country looking for a better future but who are planning to come back, “Regressar” (translates to *return*). The purpose of the program is to support emigrants, as well as their descendants and other relatives so that they have the best conditions to return to Portugal and make the most of the opportunities that currently exist in the country. It involves all governmental areas and includes specific measures such as tax benefits for those returning, financial assistance for emigrants or relatives of emigrants who come to work in Portugal and a credit line to support business investment and the creation of new business ventures in Portugal, among others.

In terms of youth inclusion, the Portuguese Government had its first National Plan for Youth starting in 2018: a political instrument of intersectoral coordination of youth policy in Portugal. The main objective was the concretisation of young people's rights, in economic, social, and cultural terms. The Government committed itself to invest in youth, focus on inter-ministerial coordination with the tutelages and programs that have an impact on the lives of young people, in particular with regard to education, employment and entrepreneurship, higher education, housing, birth, health, quality of life, sport, culture, the environment, agriculture, transport, sustainability of social security, combating poverty, equality, inclusion and migration.

- **Data on youth employment/unemployment, youth migration and Returnees in the country.**

### **Youth employment/unemployment**

The general unemployment rate in Portugal is at 5.9% at the moment, according to the Portuguese Statistics National Institute, meanwhile, the rate amongst people between 16 and 24 is 20.6%.

### **Youth migration and Returnees**

According to the provisional results of the 2021 population census, the number of foreign residents in Portugal increased by 40% between 2011 and 2021, amounting to 555, 299 persons. Data from the Foreigners and Borders Office (SEF) have already documented the growth of the foreign population residing in Portugal, and now these census findings confirm the trend. In terms of emigration, Portugal is now the European Union country with the most emigrants as a proportion of the resident population. The number of Portuguese emigrants exceeds two million, which means that more than 20% of the Portuguese live outside the country of their birth. The period between 2010 and 2013 saw the highest rates of growth in Portuguese emigration since the 1960s. From 2014, emigration experienced a slight downturn even while remaining at a high level: over 100,000 departures annually, equivalent to 1% of the country's population.

In 2020, Portugal registered the lowest number of emigrants in the last 20 years: according to the Emigration Report 2020, the covid-19 pandemic crisis and the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union (Brexit) contributed to this decline. There are many Portuguese emigrants planning on coming back, due to the social and family life, the landscape, the climate, and many other reasons. The main reason they give for not coming back yet is the financial part. While the demographic loss due to emigration has left a mark on rural Portugal, there is an opposite movement happening: the return of emigrants to villages and remote areas. Amandine Desille, Marie Curie Fellow at the Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning of the University of Lisbon and MigRural project coordinator focused her research on the Trás-os-Montes region, where she collected testimonies and data from 21 families. She noticed that not only retirees returned to the villages, but also younger people came back, often to set up their own businesses: "For instance, I met with Returnees who opened a restaurant, a marketplace for farmers, a taxi company or rural accommodation." The EU-funded MigRural project has provided new tools for supporting Returnees with a view to strengthening the local social fabric and supporting the economy. This project started in September of 2018 and ended in February of 2021 and also resulted in a documentary: "I am everywhere and nowhere at once".

- **Good practices:**

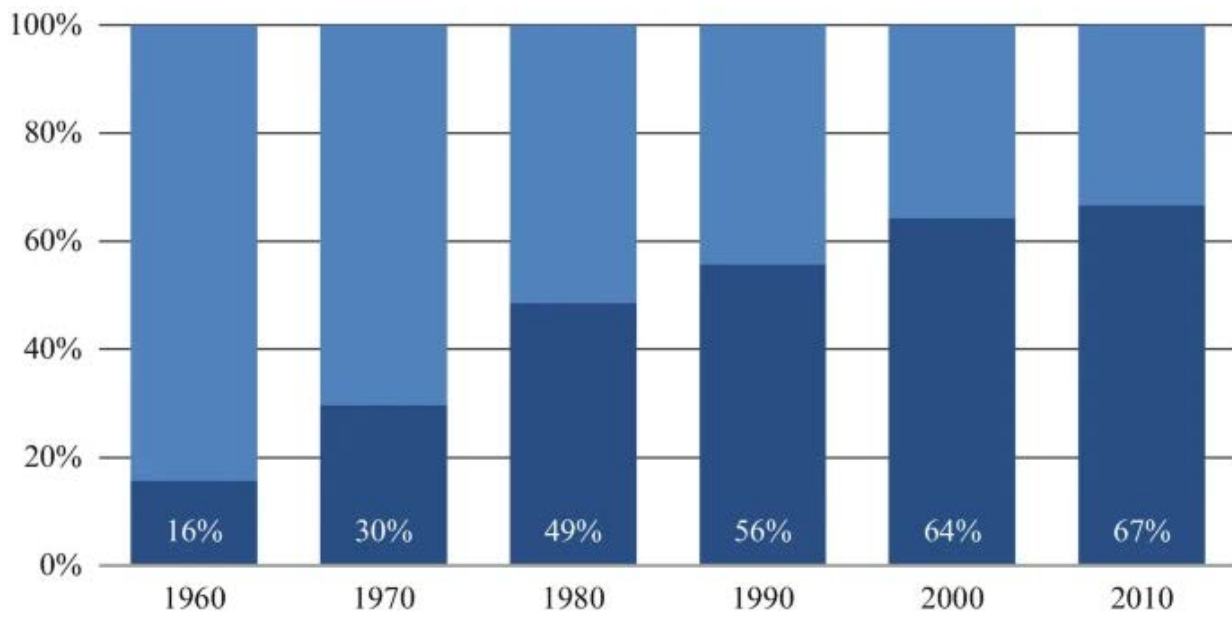
In Portugal, there are many different organisations that work with young people in order to integrate them into the communities. Three different examples:

- 1) The [Youth Support Program \(YAP\)](#) aims to contribute to the development and sustainability of Associations and NGOs. They offer services like Conscientious

Objectors Support; Attendance Desk; Office for Youth Health (Addictive Behaviours); Office for Youth Health (Mental Health).

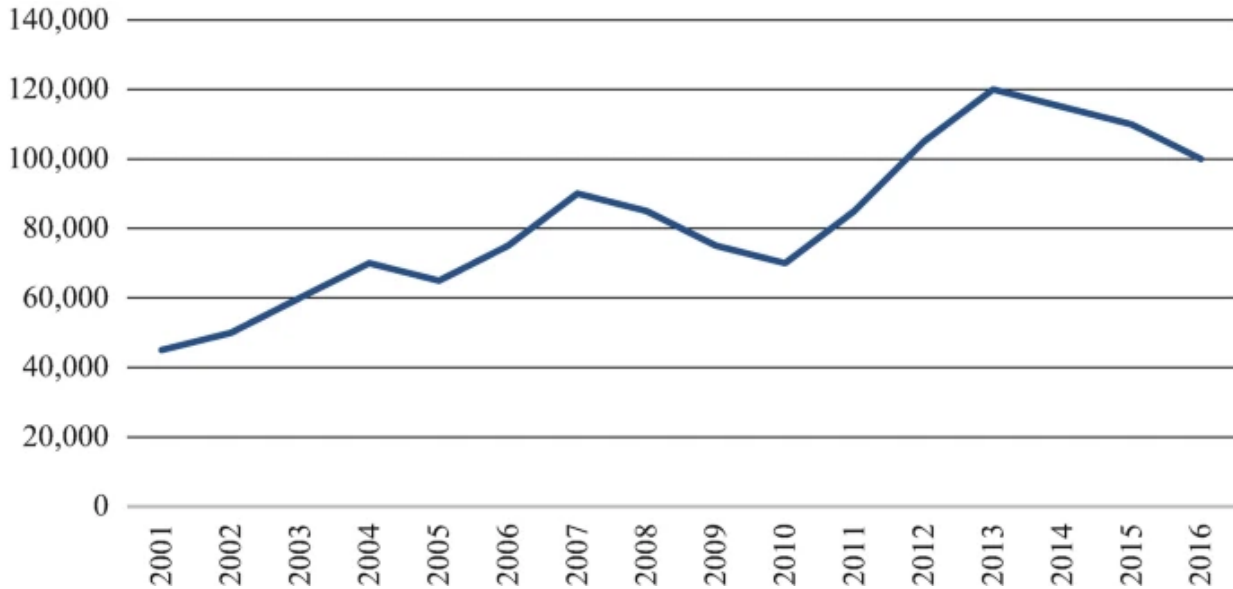
\*The organisation is divided, so every part of the country has its own office.

- 2) [Entraajuda](#) is an NGO that helps organisations with management and organisation problems; hosts trainings; promotes volunteer work; manages and organises donations of any kind. They have a lot of partner organisations, as they help them or cooperate with them.
- 3) [Salta Fronteiras Association](#), a non-governmental, non-profit organisation, was founded on July 21, 1999. Their goals are: to contact, know and understand different cultures, peoples and geographies; to promote the defence of the environment; to increase social practices of inclusion of disadvantaged groups (especially for children and young people, with a view to promoting social cohesion); to promote the practice of sports; to facilitate access to cultural activities and to promote the exercise of citizenship.

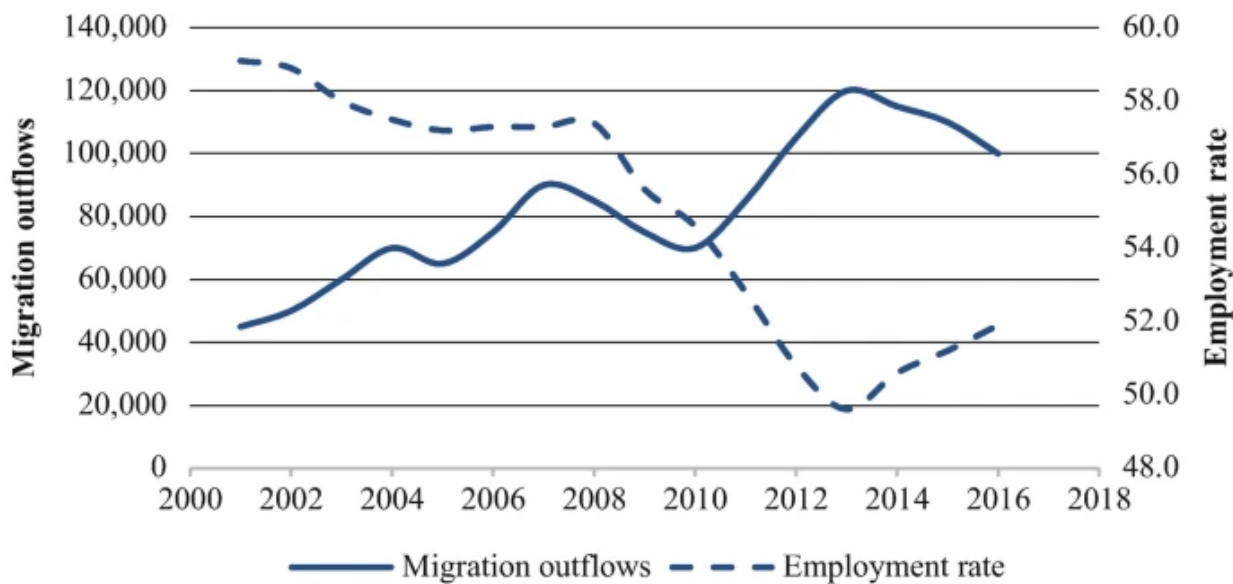


*Evolution of the Portuguese emigrant population in Europe as a percentage of the total Portuguese emigrant population, 1960–2010.* Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2012), Trends in International Migrant Stock: Migrants by Destination and Origin (United Nations database, POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2012); The World Bank, Global Bilateral Migration

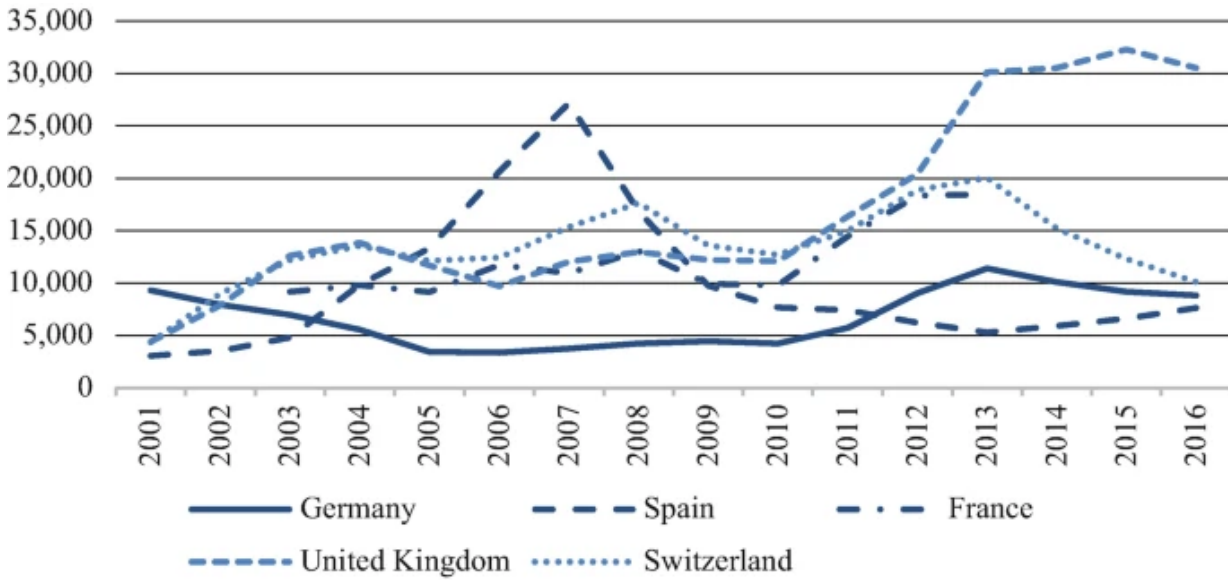
Database; INE, General Population Censuses of Angola and Mozambique.



*Permanent outflows of Portuguese emigrants, 2001–2016.* Source: Estimates by the Portuguese Emigration Observatory (Observatório da Emigração) based on destination countries' permanent inflows data

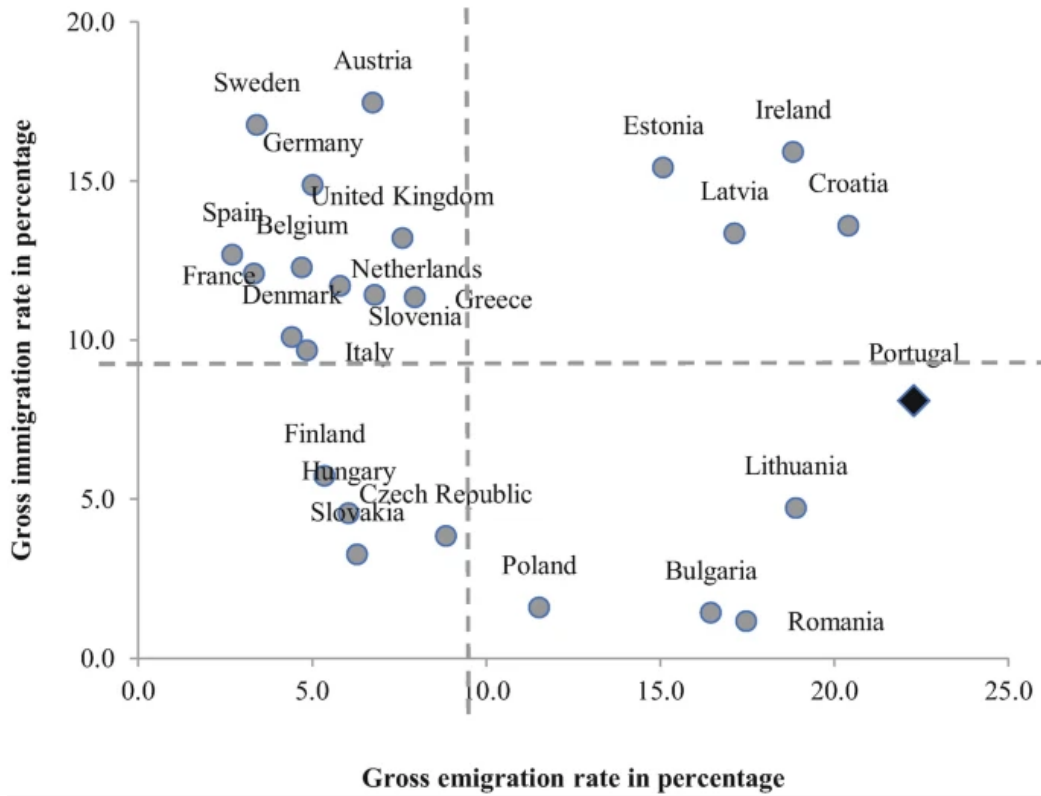


*Employment rate and migration outflows, Portugal, 2001–2016.* Source: Porta, data from Instituto Nacional de Estatística [National Institute of Statistics] (the employment rate) and the Portuguese Emigration Observatory (Observatório da Emigração) (outflows)

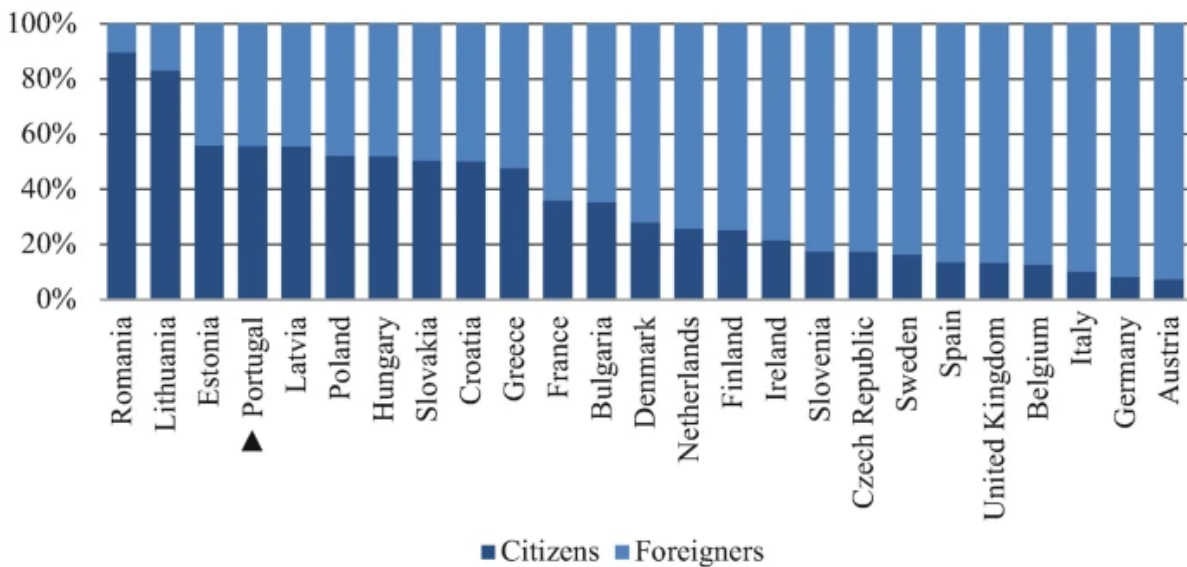


*Permanent outflows of Portuguese emigrants to main destination countries, 2001–2015.* Source: The Portuguese Emigration Observatory (Observatório da Emigração) based on destination countries permanent inflows data





Gross emigration and immigration rates in EU countries, 2015. (Note: Only countries with more than one million inhabitants) Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015), Trends in International Migrant Stock: Migrants by Destination and Origin (United Nations database, POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2015)



*Permanent inflows of immigration by citizenship, European Union countries, 2013–2015 (3 year average). (Note: Only countries with more than one million inhabitants) Source: Eurostat, Database on Population and Social Conditions, Demography and Migration (pop)*

## 2.7 National overview in Cyprus

### Overview of the situation

Cyprus holds among the largest percentage of young people aged between 15 to 29, namely 21% compared with an EU average of 16%, according to data presented by Eurostat, the EU's statistical service, on the occasion of 2022, the European Year of Youth. In general, young people appear to be concerned and stressed about their career prospects (76%), finding a job (68%), the future of the country (65%) and the pandemic (53%). Important to note that youth unemployment rates in Cyprus were 16% in March 2022, which also contributed to young people holding a negative perspective of life. The pandemic and the prolonged restrictive measures, appear to have had a significant impact on the daily life of most young people (86%), according to the Neo-Varometro (2022). The survey showed that the pandemic had a great impact on those aspects of their lives related to "entertainment/entertainment" (8.21/10), "psychological condition" (6.99/10) and "education" (6.02/10).

### Information related to NEETs in Cyprus

The population of young NEETs in Cyprus in 2018 amounted to 12.310 in total. Data from 2019 showed 15,7% (ages 20-34 years old) of the population, holding the 13<sup>th</sup> place among EU-28.

### Support Schemes in Cyprus

Some initiatives have been announced by the government, within the National Action Plan for Youth Employment and other schemes to support NEETs in their integration into society. These schemes include the following:

- a) Schemes for Subsidies: providing incentives to recruit Young People (aged 15-29) not in employment nor Education or Training (NEETs). The Scheme aims to combat youth unemployment (aged 15 to 29) years neither in Employment nor in Education or Training (NEETs) and the sustainable integration of young people in the labour market, by placing them in subsidised jobs and further gaining work experience. The Scheme is included in the

measures of active employment policy promoted by the Government for the implementation of the "Youth Guarantee". Information: <http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/dl>

- a) Youth Board of Cyprus programme for Youth Entrepreneurship Development aims to activate young people and promote and develop entrepreneurship. Specifically, it aims to support unemployed young people aged 15 to 29 who want to undertake entrepreneurship initiatives and become entrepreneurs. The programme provides personalised support to unemployed young people, develops a "doing business" culture, enhances social integration and improves skills and knowledge. Website: <https://youthentrepreneurshipcy1.projectsgallery.eu/specific-objective/>
- b) Other social practices: Social Practices include educational support such as professional training for communication and media skills (COMMEDIA), Human Rights Education (Aequitas), Exchange and Mentorship opportunities (YEU Cyprus), internship opportunities (InSPIRE). All these different ways of personal development will help young people improve or develop new competencies, find better job opportunities and become active citizens

## 2.8 Conclusions on national overviews

France has put in place a wide range of structures, policies, and initiatives to support young people's professional inclusion. What is referred to as the "brain drain" is a problem in France. Every year, a large number of recent graduates relocate abroad, particularly to North America (the United States and Canada) or other European nations (especially Germany and the United Kingdom). Many of them do so because of better living and working conditions, career opportunities, and/or pay. In France, excluding Mayotte, around 1.5 million young people between the ages of 15 and 29 are neither employed nor enrolled in school or other forms of formal training as of 2019. A 2018 Yougov research found that 70% of young individuals between the ages of 18 and 24 are thinking of migrating overseas, either for adventure or to pursue better career possibilities.

In Spain, the 2020 Youth Strategy incorporates the National Strategy for Youth Inclusion and has 8 primary areas of action: education and formation, employment and entrepreneurship, health and wellbeing, participation, volunteer work and social inclusion, youth in the global community, and creativity and culture. The Ministry of Health, Consumption and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Social Rights and Agenda 2030, as well as the youth institute (Instituto de la Juventud) INJURY, Instituto de la Juventude, support youth inclusion activities. According to INE, in 2019 23,000 young people aged 20 to 30 left the country for Northern European nations, including Germany, Belgium, the United Kingdom, France, and Switzerland, following a Southern Europe migration trend. Only

about 10,000 young people entered. According to studies, young people in Spain think it's important for governments to implement policies that will encourage return, like helping people find jobs before they return, creating a special talent attraction plan for people with high qualifications and experience abroad, giving people extra points for each year they work abroad when applying for public jobs, subsidising returnees, and providing unemployment benefits.

In Italy numerous programmes have been implemented by the National Government to address the issue of unemployment, one of which is referred to as "RESTO AL SUD" (I Stay in the South), which is an incentive that supports the establishment and growth of new entrepreneurial and freelance activities in areas like Abruzzo, Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Molise, Puglia, Sardinia, Sicily, and the earthquake crater areas of central Italy (Lazio, Marche Umbria), aimed The average age of emigrants is 33 for men and 30 for women, according to statistics, and nearly three out of four Italian nationals who moved overseas in 2019 were 25 years of age or older. For those returning Italian citizens who have worked abroad but have remained unemployed as a result of termination or non-renewal of the seasonal employment contract by the employer overseas, the Italian government offers an unemployment payment (foreign or Italian, working or resident abroad). In reality, Italian nationals who have worked abroad can apply for an unemployment benefit from the INPS, which will be paid to them upon their return to Italy if they meet several criteria.

To meet the diverse needs and aspirations of young people and in keeping with the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures vision for a better Ireland, the National Youth Strategy of Ireland is focused on enhancing the contribution of current and emerging policies, programmes, and services to improving the national outcomes for young people aged 10 to 24 years. Several services are available to returning and past Irish emigrants from Safe Home Ireland, an organisation that supports emigrants from Ireland. In addition to making outreach visits and providing qualified applicants with housing assistance, they also provide guidance and information services. 15 to 24-year-olds left Ireland 12,500 times in the year before April 2018. By April 2020, there were approximately 29,000 Irish nationals living and working back home, which was a 13-year high.

The Portuguese government offers a special programme called "Regressar" for people who have left the nation in search of a brighter future but are considering returning (translates to return). The program's goal is to assist emigrants, as well as their descendants and other relatives, to give them the best chance of returning to Portugal and taking advantage of the opportunities that are currently available there. It involves all branches of government and includes specific measures like tax breaks for people who return financial aid for people who come to work in Portugal who are emigrants or relatives of emigrants and a credit line to encourage business investment and the

launch of new ventures in Portugal, among other things. The nation in the European Union with the highest percentage of emigrants among its citizens is now Portugal. More than two million Portuguese people have emigrated, which indicates that more than 20% of Portuguese people are now living abroad.

In regards to Cyprus, the majority of young people (76%) express worry and tension about their career prospects, getting a job (68%), the future of the nation (65%), and the pandemic (53 percent). The government has announced a few programmes to aid NEETs in integrating into society as part of the National Action Plan for Youth Employment and other programmes.

### 3. FOCUS GROUP OUTCOMES

#### 3.1. Introduction

A focus group is a method of research involving a small group of people (usually five to ten participants) who are guided through a discussion by a facilitator. Focus groups can be used to explore a variety of different issues, test solutions, explore the group's perspective on a topic, and engender ideas.

These qualitative research methods can be used in order to:

- gather background information about an issue;
- produce and test ideas (which can then be explored further);
- stimulate new ideas and encourage creative participant-led solutions;
- identify potential barriers or problems with a new service or programme;
- gather client impressions of a service, organisation or institution;
- confirm or develop what has been found in the desk research.

The key to running a successful focus group is the facilitator's ability to make the participants feel safe and comfortable. A well-run focus group can provide a richer understanding than you may get from a personal one-to-one interview or a survey. A well-run focus group tends to lead to more contextualised and developed answers than participants are likely to share during individual interviews. Focus groups are adapted for qualitative (narrative) research but will not be useful for

generating fast numbers. If numbers are required to support the research then researchers should think about a complementary survey and a mixed method (using both qualitative and quantitative) approach. Focus groups as a research method allow picking up on nonverbal information which may be important to the research (for example, excitement, doubt, hesitation, or stress). They also help understand the causal link between why people behave in a certain way or hold a certain set of beliefs. This will be useful when designing the project learning material.

The objective of the focus groups, conducted in the project, was to understand the context of young people with fewer opportunities, their learning and motivational needs, and their level of access to the opportunities and tools that can help them get involved as actors of change in their local and international contexts. The active participation of target groups was a fundamental step for the co-creation of this Guide collecting several experiences and testimonies directly from the participants, allowing them to identify their needs, ambitions, and aspirations.

In total three (3) Focus Groups were carried out in each partner country:

1st Focus Group: 10 young people with fewer opportunities (Returnees, NEETs)

2nd Focus Group: 10 youth workers, youth leaders/social service providers, operators, teachers and trainers, and institutes

3rd Focus Group: 5 public/private institutions, youth OSC, NGOs, schools, institutes, and centres.

In addition, 60 personal interviews with Returnees/NEETs were conducted - 10 in each country.

## 3.2. Focus group with young people with fewer opportunities

### 3.2.1. Focus Group Discussion in France

In general the focus group discussion went well. All participants attending the discussion feeling comfortable talking about themselves.

Summarising the main points of the discussion, participants mentioned:

- benefits of coming back to France after their experience abroad, namely cultural habits and administrative issues (like social security or medical appointments) and also meeting their families

and friends. However, a person mentioned experiencing a cultural shock and difficulty in reintegrating in the society, as well as challenging being among friends and family;

- feeling a closeness to foreigners or french people with similar experiences, which in many times replaced real support (from institutions, communities, etc) when they returned to France;
- Covid 19 emergency affected their experiences negatively due to the isolation, change of habits, depression and other reasons;

Towards the end of the discussion the facilitator raised the question whether participants should leave again. The answers provided differentiated among them.

A person mentioned that he/she feels at home in Paris and another one explained that he/she wants to leave again. An interesting answer was the one from T. He mentioned, indeed, travels and experiences abroad are not similar between them. Every time experience may change, due to financial issues, different contexts, and different objectives at that moment in life. In addition, he mentioned that there is a new factor that affects his possibility of travelling and studying abroad; and this is ecology. Flying is not ecological, so he will stop because the ecological factor is important for him. Therefore he will favour closer travelling without using a plane to Europe. For example choosing destinations where he can go by train.

### 3.2.2. Focus Group Discussion in Spain

The conclusions reached from the Focus Group Discussion organized in Spain included really interesting findings, which are described below.

The decision to leave and return is a very personal experience, and every person has a different trajectory. Hence, the different life trajectories highlight different aspects of migration and return. Young people who have greater social, cultural and economic capital usually manage to have an easier period of reintegration back into society, with more access to resources, information and support. However, systemic barriers such as youth unemployment and the decreasing social aid affect most of them in the same way.

And the difficulty of knowing which institutions are responsible for providing assistance and information, the varying aids and programmes in different territories of Spain make it harder for young Returnees to get back on track, both on a professional and personal level. The differences in access to resources and services in urban areas and rural zones is another aspect that is mentioned.

While returning is usually considered positive due to proximity to support networks such as friends and family and safety nets, usually, the frustration lived during the transition is a common element in most of the return experiences.

While migration in some cases creates more professional opportunities, this is not always the case. Nowadays, most young people speak at least one other foreign language and are somehow part of international networks and go through some kind of life experience abroad, be it Erasmus, volunteering or traineeship, so these are not enough to create an upper hand, especially under the precarious and unstable working conditions in Spain.

In that sense, Returnees usually need employment assistance and help in resolving administrative issues, as well as validating their studies and formations abroad to get back into the labour market in Spain.

In most cases, family and friend circles are the first settings where young Returnees turn for help and support instead of public or private institutions, both due to the lack of official programs to support this group of the population and also the lack of information about the existing resources.

### 3.2.3. Focus Group Discussion in Italy

Having had the opportunity to exchange ideas with participants from various walks of life as well as from various ages and professional/educational backgrounds, was definitely an added value also to see how the contexts and the generation people are born in shape the way they see the future and the way they interact with our present.

What came about was definitely a strong sense of belonging (culturally speaking) that tied the participants to their country in a way that went beyond the bureaucracy and the administrative side of living in one country rather than the other. This sense of belonging was especially felt when it came to interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, however, not all of the participants felt valued and appreciated once they returned, as though having been away and having lived abroad did not represent an added value in their professional career. A problematic aspect that was mentioned by almost everyone, was the difficulty they experienced settling back down, from an administrative (“paperwork”) point of view—they did not feel supported enough and often had assistance from attendant personnel working for specific services (employment centres, municipality or the registry office for example).



An aspect that rose to the surface, then, was the importance of giving space to people returning after a long experience abroad, to allow them to feel welcome back in their home country by giving them some guidance that would eventually lead to a smoother return.

### 3.2.4. Ireland

The participants interviewed were NEETs or/and young Returnees with fewer opportunities from different backgrounds. They all shared many different perspectives, opportunities, and experiences. Regarding the engagement in the focus group, some of the participants had some difficulties in opening up at the beginning of the meeting. However, when they heard other stories, they could identify with some of them and therefore, it enabled them to also share their experiences. The output from the engaged participants of the focus group was very valuable and illustrated the context of this topic.

Many of the answers from the participants highlighted the issues of youth immigration, especially those returning from developing countries. They also highlighted the lack of support groups and the high level of discrimination present in the labour market. Lastly, a significant finding is that many of the Returnees who moved abroad when they were young faced a lot more challenges and hardships than others at different levels. They need a lot more support right after they return to their home country in order for them to be able to thrive peacefully in their lives: educational support, linguistic support and emotional support.

This focus group was also important to confirm that Erasmus+ projects like HEY are indeed crucial and important for young people with fewer opportunities as they give them support, tools and information that they struggle to find in their daily life.

### 3.2.5. Focus Group Discussion in Portugal

After this very interesting debate and conversation with the Returnees, the following conclusions were reached:

The most beneficial aspect of the return of the participants back to their country was the emotional connection to their community in Portugal. They mentioned struggling a bit in this aspect, due to the fact of feeling less connected to their previous friends and personal relationships, as they had just had a very intense and complex experience abroad and struggled to relate to their life back home. Other than this, they also mentioned safety factors: health-wise and society-wise.

Rita was abroad during the start of the pandemic and reported feeling safer about that specific context when she came back due to the difference in conditions in the place she was staying and Portugal. Valeria and Francisco mentioned they had different episodes where they felt watched and uncomfortable and in one case, followed in a store, due to the fact they didn't appear as locals in those places. So, coming back home they felt safer and more comfortable.

Upon their return, the participants realised they had grown and changed abroad and brought back a broader perspective, new skills and an open mind. It was an experience that helped them figure out their next steps and expand their perspectives and options, as opposed to staying in Portugal.

The participants had logistical and financial support during their experience abroad - the majority of them were on a European programme that provided those conditions, but had no support during their re-establishment. They mentioned mostly having emotional support, from their community, close circle and professional mental health help, in some cases.

The Returnees feel their experience abroad helped them to get better work opportunities or at least, to get more options and perspectives of the labour market. Between internships, volunteer projects and studying abroad, the participants learned more about what they truly like and want to pursue, but some of them also reported that they also learned what they didn't want to do - Anthea moved abroad to intern in a hotel, due to her background of a tourism professional course and came to the conclusion she does not want to pursue that area any further and prefers another career, related to languages and translations. Even though the experience abroad will not impact her next job opportunity, it was useful for her to understand this and to gain skills that will be useful for any job, such as social skills, soft skills and a new language.

Participants also mentioned learning a lot about how to manage conflicts and how important that is for the labour market - working with different people from different contexts and backgrounds taught them how to deal better with misunderstandings and how to communicate more effectively. In Francisco's case, his experience abroad contributed directly to his next work opportunity in Portugal: He was in the Netherlands, on a volunteer project, where he worked with elderly people and also handcrafts and bricolage. After his return, he started working in AKI, a bricolage chain store, and he told us how much his experience abroad had an impact on how he dealt with this job. Not only due to his technical skills, but also his social ones with the elderly, since he had a lot of clients in the age group back in Portugal. Another bonus mentioned was the language

side of it, as everyone felt they got better at English and some of them at a new language. Overall, the experience abroad helped them figure out their next step.

When asked about the main challenges they faced while trying to re-establish themselves back in their home country, the participants mentioned the following:

- Reverse culture shock;
- The feeling of being "lost", as they had just experienced a very intense and enriching experience abroad and adjusting back to the Portuguese reality was/is a big challenge for them;
- Reconnecting with old friendships and relationships who didn't have a similar experience, which led to the feeling of not being fully understood by their close circle;
- Having no occupation and/or challenge after the return, as it accentuated the feeling of being lost and not knowing what step to take next;
- The difference between the availability and pre-disposition of their community abroad and the one in Portugal - since most of them did the European Solidarity Corps programme, they met and developed relationships with people in the same context, which were naturally more available to do different plans. Back home, everyone has their own life and schedule already and it tends to get harder to combine time together.

Participants were asked how they managed to overcome these challenges and they mentioned:

- Trying to find a way to stay occupied and busy and start looking for the next opportunities - whether it be national or international;
- Communicating how they were feeling and reached out for help and support (including professional help);
- Building a new structure and routine that is exciting;
- Thinking of who they were abroad and how they can "recreate" that feeling in their home country;
- Finding a new balance between their old routine and the one they are building, as they are re-establishing;
- Taking the new learnings and put them into practice;
- Understanding and accepting it takes a while to readapt, that it's not instant.

The Returnees found their biggest support in the group of people who shared similar experiences with them, even if it is at a distance. This community helped them a lot while re-establishing in Portugal because they felt more heard and understood as the other people in the

group went through a similar life experience. They also mentioned the Focus Group discussion was a good help. For most of the Returnees, Covid did not affect their experience because they either had it before or after the major lockdown restrictions happened. For one participant, Rita, it affected mostly logistics as she had to stay abroad for longer than expected due to the borders being closed and lockdown restrictions.

Overall, the Returnees think of moving abroad again due to their previous experience and the desire of experiencing more freedom, new cultures, and new opportunities as they feel Portugal is still a bit behind in some matters. The main reason for not wanting to settle down in Portugal is the current conditions experienced in the country, especially for young people: low salaries, an increasingly higher cost of living and a big imbalance between work and life.

### 3.2.6. Focus Group Discussion in Cyprus

During the Focus Group Discussion in Cyprus, participants mentioned that the major beneficial aspects from their return to Cyprus were

- a) Better conditions regarding lock-down due to COVID.
- b) Being among family and friends.
- c) Free time to explore personal challenges.
- d) Psychological relaxation, rest and stress-free environment.

Participants mentioned that nobody requested any support.

All participants mentioned that their work experience abroad played a crucial role in securing a good job in Cyprus.

Regarding main challenges faced while trying to re-establish back in Cyprus, participants mentioned the following:

- Different social situations, circumstances than abroad.
- Difficulties in getting a proper job, due to the system.
- Small, conservative society full of stereotypes.
- Negative circumstances during interviews.
- Psychological negative feelings.
- Regrets coming back to Cyprus.

All participants mentioned family and close friends have been extremely supportive during the period of re-establishment in Cyprus. However, there are no organisations supporting young people in their reintegration process.

All participants mentioned that they have been negatively affected by COVID-19, due to lockdowns and due to the fact that by returning back to Cyprus, they had to separate from friends and partners, which was very difficult. Some participants expressed their wish to return back to the country they were living in.

### **3.3. Focus group with youth workers, youth leaders/ social service providers, operators, teachers and trainers, institutes**

#### **3.3.1. Focus Group Discussion in France**

The conclusions reached by the discussion was that in general the main issues concerning young Returnees were developed during last few years but only recently got more attention. For this reason, the different stakeholders are not completely ready to tackle the problem the young generation struggles with. As for the experience abroad, it depends on the level of education, since the higher the level of education, the higher the possibility to find a job after re-integrating into society. A Problem that occurs is when the Returnee is 25 years old or less, the system does not give them the right attention because they are supposed to be in charge of their families.

Moreover, the level and quality of information is another issue to focus on. Working on giving young people the right way of searching and having the opportunity not to create confusion and discouragement is a matter of great importance.

In conclusion projects such as H.E.Y! are a great opportunity to help people and the different stakeholders to make further progress in helping young Returnees finding a better place in the society.

#### **3.3.2. Focus Group Discussion in Spain**

Once more, the lack of a clear definition of Returnees and young people makes it difficult to develop policies that can reply to their current needs. Yet in any case, at this moment in Spain, there are no regulations aimed at young Returnees. The social aid and funds that exist are for people who have already returned, and not for the ones who would like to take the first step to come back. A multilayered regulatory framework that provides opportunities in every region but leaves a chance for the adaptation of these to regional needs would be a first step to help in the return and reintegration of young returnees.

On the other hand, systemic challenges such as the high unemployment rate among young people or precarious work conditions are impediments in the face of a return to Spain. On top of that, the lack of general frameworks and welfare politics that can support young people at large in their transition from youth to adulthood, making them dependent on kinship, family, and social networks to survive, is another element that in the Spanish context becomes an obstacle. This includes the lack of specific programs of traineeship, labour insertion, or career guidance. Besides, the disregard for culture as an important catalyzer of civic participation and a tool for the reintegration of young people as active citizens is a point that is highlighted alongside other kinds of material and immaterial aids.

However, there are many different subsidies and aids, yet they are very partial and different in every autonomous region or local context. Also, the many different institutions and public authorities responsible for social policies create confusion in terms of where to get clear and coherent information and where to apply. As such, the information disseminated is inconsistent and confusing. A national framework that could regulate specific policies and aids aimed at young people and specifically for young Returnees would be an important first step. Yet, it is also necessary to keep in mind the regional or local specificities in order not to impose regulations and programs that do not satisfy these changing needs and to be able to create flexible frameworks to facilitate young people's integration into society and the labour market.

In such a context there is a need to have a network to share all the available information and help not only the young people but also the service providers to resolve administrative issues and apply for relevant grants for the improvement of the living conditions, job opportunities and other needs of young people and Returnees.

Finally, partial and short-term plans and aids, whether on a national or European level, lie in the way of creating coherent and comprehensive solutions and rooted responses instead of temporary and stopgap measures.

### **3.3.3. Focus Group Discussion in Italy**

In conclusion, from social workers' and youth workers' points of view, the support measures proposed by the Italian system are already of satisfying number, but what is missing is a lot related to their quality in terms of updating content and impact on today's social and labour fabric of our community; and to their transparency and outreach. Most of the opportunities for young people are not very well promoted or known among youngsters themselves; moreover, their links to the

real and practical side of living, such as the entrance into the labour market, etc., are not working. This way, the impact is low.

The main challenges faced by youth sector operators in supporting Returnees and their integration into the Italian economic and social life are mostly related to the mismatch of experiences and competencies acquired and the possibility to align them with the local demand. Other challenges faced are related to practical issues experienced by youngsters in terms of public services and excessive bureaucracy, and the possibility of accessing the labour market.

Participants addressed these problems by helping young people find the resources they need to match their skills to the demands of the labour market. Or to encourage them to take initiative and develop communities around them that enable them to express their interests and build networks within the community they belong to.

### **3.3.4. Focus Group Discussion in Ireland**

The participants represented a diverse cross-section of the youth work and social service sector across Europe; they shared many different perspectives and experiences. Reflecting on the engagement in the focus group, some of the participants had technical difficulties and remained unengaged throughout; this made the process slower and less fruitful than anticipated. However, the output from the engaged participants of the focus group was very valuable and illustrated the context of this topic.

Many of the responses from the participants highlighted the issues of youth immigration, especially those with higher education and the unlikelihood of those returning - 'brain-drain'. They also highlighted the lack of support from civil society and MNCs which could prove very helpful as many young people trust these organisations especially if they are trans-European. Lastly, a significant finding is that many of the youth workers and other participants felt that even they didn't have access to or knowledge of all the available opportunities and that the information isn't always up to date.

In addition to this, current barriers existing in Ireland were identified and as it was understood from this focus group that these barriers are the main cause of why people are going abroad to look for better opportunities and ways of living. This focus group was also important to confirm that Erasmus+ projects like HEY are indeed crucial and important for youth workers and

young people with fewer opportunities as they give them tools, materials and information that they struggle to find in their daily life.

### 3.3.5. Focus Group Discussion in Portugal

Mostly, there seems to be a lack of projects in Portugal dedicated to supporting young people in becoming active members of society and joining the labour market. The City of Cascais, where this focus group took place, seems to be an exception in the national panorama, as the Cascais Municipality has a very strong department that invests heavily in programs direct to its youth – both in creating volunteering opportunities, in which young people can become active members of their community while gaining work experience; as well as in creating an initiative that helps young adults find their first jobs and jump-start their careers. However, that does not seem to be the case in the rest of the country, where young people find it very hard to navigate the struggles of transitioning into adulthood.

It was of general consensus that it can be very challenging for organisations to effectively communicate the programs they offer. Communication is often made through popular social media platforms, in which it is very difficult for small organisations to gain traction and engage with the audience. Moreover, because each organisation is trying to communicate their own initiatives through their own channels - there isn't a network of communication – there is an abundance of dispersed information. As such, the reality is that most young people are not aware of the opportunities available to them, especially those who belong to more challenging or marginalised communities. There is an urgent need to create new outlets of communication that effectively reach the young population. Part of that process could include the creation of a system or platform that aggregates all the opportunities available, similar to what is already happening in other countries.

The inclusion of young people from challenging or marginalised communities in current programs is also one of the biggest challenges that need to be addressed. These would be the people who would, arguably, would gain the most benefits from participating in the programmes but are also those who face the most barriers in accessing these opportunities. Not only because the information is not being made available to them, but also because there are perceived notions that these programs are not addressed to them or that they would never be able to compete with other applicants from more privileged social economic backgrounds. There needs to be a paradigm shift that makes sure that the programs are indeed inclusive and equalitarian in their communication, application and selection processes.



Portugal is also facing a problem of retaining youth which is also having an impact on the association that works with this target group. A significant percentage of young people who take advantage of the opportunities that allow them to work, volunteer, or study in other European countries choose not to return to Portugal. Or, in some cases, they do return, but only for a short period of time while they look for the next opportunity to take them abroad. And, while organisations try to put in place the resources necessary to support young people in returning to Portugal and re-establishing themselves, they face challenges that are very hard to overcome without a change in national policies. Some of the biggest challenges young people face in re-establishing themselves in Portugal are related to the difficulties in finding affordable housing or job opportunities that offer attractive salaries and work conditions. Without the proper resources and governmental policies directed at helping the youth, organisations are unable to adequately provide the support they need to re-establish themselves in Portugal and create a career and lifestyle comparable to the one they could have abroad.

### 3.3.6. Focus Group Discussion in Cyprus

In Cyprus, there are public and private programmes which provide support to NEETs/Returnees to reintegrate into society and join the labour market, but there are always margins for further evolutions. The stakeholders involved in these programmes face important challenges, which need to be addressed to increase the positive impact on target groups. These challenges include: lack of funding, networking and lobbying opportunities, to establish synergies and develop programmes for support, legislative changes and others.

Measures, mentioned by participants, to be taken to raise awareness about the opportunities for youth in Cyprus could include the following:

- Different NGOs, civil society stakeholders to continue organising events, exchanging good practices for awareness, and personal approaches, with NEETs/Returnees.
- Dissemination of information and exchange of information through different mediums, including websites, social media accounts and others. The different stakeholders should develop a common database with information about who they are and what they offer.
- Important to organise awareness raising campaigns including networking events, also inviting NEETs/Returnees to exchange views, ideas, information and develop new strategies, policies and activities. There are governmental stakeholders, like Nicosia Municipality Multi-purpose centre offers a venue for free for focus groups, meetings and other networking events.
- Digitised awareness raising efforts should also be designed and organised by different public and private stakeholders.

- More synergies among different stakeholders should be developed and organised to design practical activities to support NEETs/Returnees, taking into consideration the specific needs.
- Development of a common database for opportunities for traineeship, training, guidance and others.

### **3.4. Focus group with public/private institutions, youth OSC, NGOs, schools and institutes**

#### **3.4.1. Focus Group Discussion in France**

At the end of the Focus Group Discussion it was apparent that in France the topic of “Returnees” is a recent issue, and tackled in a very limited manner because usually it is not considered a problem. Young people who return after studying or working abroad have more opportunities and develop more autonomy and flexibility.

Moreover, there are institutions such as Local Missions (La Mission Locale) which aim to accompany and integrate young people into the workplace no matter their social context. As far as government measures are concerned, more help is needed for companies and enterprises to facilitate and increase workplaces.

#### **3.4.2. Focus Group Discussion in Spain**

In general, there is a lack of information and direct support for young people who would like to return to Spain. Nor is there a specific institution that specialises in young people. This has to do on one hand with the historical conditions of outward migration in Spain and the departure of young people from the 2008 crisis, who have not returned due to the instability of economic, political and social conditions. And on the other with the difficulty of defining “Returnees” as a group, with a consolidated migration trajectory longer than 2 years before returning, which is most of the time not the case in Spain where the young people who return tend to be students or international volunteers that are not the focus group of migration or return policies.

Although at a national level the Oficina de Retorno (Return Office) serves as the primary institution that develops policies on return, on a regional and local levels, there are few specialised institutions that focus on the subject, apart from the Return Offices that respond to the needs of

the general public. Most of the time the employment and social security offices try to respond to the needs of the Returnees, although not on a specialised level.

There is no national coordination that connects these regional offices, also due to the political and governmental structure in Spain composed of autonomous regions. However, there are certain regions, such as Galicia, that have specific organisms working on return and developing comprehensive return programs due to the historic conditions of migration and the critical mass of migrants. Also, there are private initiatives and NGOs that work with young returnees, although not exclusively. Correspondingly, it would be noteworthy to create mechanisms that help these institutions to share good practices and experiences that can help in developing policies in return.

Also, it is mentioned that there is a lack of reliable data on the nature of the migrant population abroad which makes it difficult to develop relevant policies. Most of the time people do not get registered in embassies as they prefer to receive social support and not lose their basic rights in their home country, such as health and employment aid, rather than abroad due to bureaucratic and administrative hardships pointing out the systemic barriers that apply to most of the EU countries.

Moreover, resolving administrative, bureaucratic and fiscal issues and getting basic information about the duties and rights is a good practice for Returnees at large, both in the host and home country and when it comes to returning. Legal support and assistance to integration in the labour market are also two main issues that need to be improved. Regarding all these procedures the discussions reveal that providing in situ assistance in the host countries through organisms such as “Peoples' Houses” or similar organisms that function as connection points with the home country would be an interesting approach and an innovation that would facilitate information about the conditions of return.

Another important aspect that comes forth is the need for psychological and emotional assistance, which is most of the time sidelined by many authorities and yet a very important element of procedures and specific policies.

Assistance in the immigration process for the partners and families of the Returnees, support to resolve matters of schooling and health services are also highlighted as handicaps when it comes to returning.

As regards to the labour market, homologation of the studies in foreign countries, including other EU countries, is a barrier that most of the time restrains the fast incorporation in the labour market once people are back in their home countries. Also, not knowing the code of conduct that

underlies labour relations in the home country is another problem highlighted by the discussants, alongside the lack of professional and personal contacts.

To respond to all these needs, the national and local authorities are encouraged to develop close relationships with the already existing actors, such as the private initiatives, NGOs and Returnee/Migrant organisations both in Spain and abroad, first to realise studies that help in having a better understanding of the conditions of migration and to develop policies accordingly to satisfy the needs of the specific populations.

It is also suggested that strategies such as the bonification of the companies and entrepreneurs that facilitate incorporation of the Returnees in the labour market and to attract talent should be implemented.

Finally, the discussions point out the need to address return in relation to inward migration to have a holistic approach to developing national and regional politics as well as the increasing importance of rural revitalization when it comes to attracting talent and creating conditions of employment in areas that need investment and labour force.

### **3.4.3. Focus Group Discussion in Italy**

Overall, the focus group revealed the structural difficulties that are existent nowadays on the territory. This proved to be an opportunity for those who work in similar fields, or better even, who are working towards the same goal, to get together and to openly discuss the challenges they face as well as the internal solutions they have applied.

While it is true that structural difficulties have a great influence on the productivity of the various regional/municipal departments, it is also important to emphasise and give credit to the employee's efforts, who individually ensure that a part of the services reach young people and, above all, spur them on to find their own path, one that is above all satisfying.

It is crucial to support these structures, and even though help does not come from above, it is often the public that organises themselves so that a balance is achieved. I believe this resourcefulness should be acknowledged and supported by "higher networks" that have the capacity not only to support them but to enrich them.

As mentioned above, youths need to be at the centre of the discourse, a discourse that needs to be raised more often and dealt with more thoroughly and from more angles.

### **3.4.4. Focus Group Discussion in Ireland**

The Focus Group Discussion provided the opportunity to learn more about the real current situation in Ireland regarding young Returnees, refugees, and migrants. Conclusions reached revealed that there is a very critical crisis and that nothing is being done by the government to solve the issues. Fortunately, a lot of support groups and networks exist and are available to support young Returnees' inclusion and employability.

European projects like HEY! could be used as a means to raise awareness, disseminate materials; increase communication and contact stakeholders to make things change at the local, national and European levels.

### **3.4.5. Focus Group Discussion in Portugal**

The overall conclusion of the focus groups was that there still has a long way to go in order to provide adequate support for young people who return from international volunteering experiences and want to resettle in their home country and get into the workforce. Participants believed that it is not easy for them to find the information and resources necessary to navigate the process of finding job opportunities.

There are some programs available to guide young people through this process but they don't seem to be widely known and are not nearly enough to meet the demand, in such a competitive workforce environment. Young Returnees should be able to count on the organisation that promoted their international experience to guide them through the return and to leverage their new-found expertise into an asset in the job searching process – which is not the case nowadays. In an ever-ageing society, it is more important than ever that young people are integrated into the job market as soon as possible to be able to make their contribution to society and, as such, it is important that every player – government, education institutions, employers, stakeholder and society as whole – works together to create a strong network that support young people in their journey to find a fulfilling and valuable career.

### **3.4.6. Focus Group Discussion in Cyprus**

Conclusions from the Focus Group Discussion, included that in general, there are different stakeholders providing national traineeship schemes, work opportunities, career guidelines and

validation of competencies in Cyprus, for NEETs and young Returnees. The most important stakeholders are the following:

- Department of Labour for work opportunities, career guidelines, support schemes and others
- Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus (ANAD) – employment support schemes
- Youth Board of Cyprus – different funding schemes for support
- Industry and Technology Service – Ministry of Energy, Commerce and Industry
- Ministry of Education – Validation of academic background and of qualifications.

Social Welfare Department – Support in receiving financial governmental benefits as unemployed NEETs/Returnees

There are governmental schemes supporting NEETs/Returnees and young people in general to be employed and become an active citizen, via various schemes a) to find a job, b) to launch and operate their own business, c) to enhance or acquire skills and knowledge and d) to network and build synergies for entrepreneurship collaboration.

The government could work in synergy with employers and stakeholders to support NEETs/Returnees in employment via

- Close collaboration
- Dissemination of information regarding different opportunities.
- Employment schemes
- Exploitation of international and European funding schemes.

### 3.5. Overall conclusions

The three focus groups conducted with the different target groups all over Europe, provided the opportunity to understand better the context of young people with fewer opportunities and their level of access to opportunities. Important to note that partner teams were able to identify what issues young people face and make the link with the causes stated by youth workers and people working in institutions.

Starting with the positive aspects of going abroad, all young people in the partner countries stated that these kinds of opportunities enabled them to expand their perspectives and knowledge, enhanced whole range of skills and open up their minds.

Unfortunately, however, there are many challenges and barriers they face on the way, such as cultural shock, discrimination, difficulties in integrating socially and lack of financial, administrative and emotional support, upon their return to their home countries. They perceive themselves as not being valued and appreciated enough in the labour market and they believe they do not get equal opportunities regarding their work and their level of education. This led to the conclusion that going abroad to receive work experience does not necessarily provide more advantage in getting a better job, when returning back home. Besides, many of the youth living in the southern part of Europe (Italy, Spain, Portugal) generally go abroad to look for better living conditions as they are fleeing problems such as precarity, high rate of unemployment, low incomes, inflation and socio-economic crisis. As a result, people who find better opportunities in other countries do not return to their countries. It appears that the majority of the young people who return to their countries see themselves as young people with fewer opportunities. This is due to the fact that they do not find the support they need to thrive professionally.

The youth workers and people working in institutions and NGOs confirm the statements of the young people interviewed. In all partner countries, the first main issue of concern is that there is no proper/clear definition of what a Returnee is. Thus, the interviewees feel there is a huge lack of policies and measures to meet the needs and requirements of people with fewer opportunities. Moreover, they said there is little or non-existent support and guidance available to Returnees and NEETS. Indeed, in the case when measures do exist and are available they are either not updated to the current situation of the target group or they are not or poorly promoted to the public. There is a big issue regarding the communication that is not sufficient, not visible and dispersed. According to them, the government, institutions and organisations lack coordination and need to have a common network where all the information and support needed can be disseminated at a high scale, in an efficient and clear way.

## 4. INTERVIEWS WITH RETURNEES AND NEETS

### 4.1. Interviews in France

The majority of interviewees showed an active approach to improving their lives and to find the best choice for themselves, leaving for a limited or long period. The interviews revealed different perspectives, sometimes also in opposition to them.

For example, “sometimes it is not easy to leave your own country”; as some interviewees mentioned, or being perceived as an “alien when you come back home”. On the other hand, it is

harder to come back too, above all when friends or families, even if they are glad to meet their son/daughter or friend, do not understand or do not accept the decisions why the young leave. However, this aspect is essential to demonstrate that living an experience of life in another country opens the mind, and challenges one's cultural habits, life and identity. Not everybody can understand the importance if they have not experienced it.

- the first person mentioned that he wants to remain in his own country and in his own city, with his own relationships and family;
- the second person revealed the desire to travel again, to continue the discovery of himself and to pursue his own objectives at a personal and professional level.

These two different perspectives reveal also different phases of life, but also different aspirations for themselves.

Another relevant aspect is the communication between young people and institutions. The majority explained that when they came back home, they did not ask for help to find another job or to orient themselves. This represents an important lack in society. Just a small part of the young people interviewed explained how to approach institutions, but at the same time, they used more informal online platforms or social media.

Indeed, the interviewees would like to receive a more active tutoring organisation to reinstate in their own communities, but also when they leave in another country, for example, financial, and legal procedures, the finding of an apartment etc...

In conclusion, all interviewees understood the importance of living abroad, even if for a limited period, and everyone advised to take the time to analyse their own choices of life. But they also understand that sometimes to find the world outside of your own country, means to find it again in your own country.

## 4.2. Interviews in Spain

The migration experience is very personal and variable, just like the initial motives to leave and return as well as the expectations from it.

In general, young people leave in search of more knowledge about different places, to make different connections, learn new languages, and acquire new personal and professional skills. And the economic and personal autonomy and development that the migration experience brings is considered an advantage and an important aspect of the transition to adulthood, despite the



negative experiences and hardship the young people might go through abroad or in another place away from their places of origin

Also, extended international connections are considered to be positive aspects of moving to another country/place. When the objectives of migration are accomplished young people usually prefer to return to their home countries where they have a social network of support, and the culture is more familiar, despite the administrative and economic hindrances of not having access to resources.

Besides, the disappointment of not getting integrated easily into the host country, due to language barriers, not finding a job or having to work in precarious conditions contrary to what they have been expecting is also another reason for frustration and return.

In order to ease the transition back into society as independent and autonomous individuals, young people first of all need financial and administrative support, as well as information about opportunities (employment, business ventures, social participation...etc) and social aids.

### 4.3. Interviews in Italy

It is safe to conclude by stating that most of the young Returnees whowere interviewed, felt an initial inner need to go abroad, that was dictated by professional reasons, personal and sometimes for academic purposes. Overall they all felt enriched by their experiences, by their struggles as well as their victories. While some returned due to COVID-19 reasons, the majority returned because they either had family commitments to attend to or because their study period had ended and therefore could return home and others because it was beneficial for them, from a fiscal point of view.

Despite the enthusiasm derived from these experiences, most of the interviewees felt a sense of slight disbelief regarding how little this wealth of knowledge was regarded by others/employers. In this sense, they were in disbelief as they felt they had acquired so much more than society was willing to admit to or appreciate.

What came to the surface was the need for assistance upon their return (informal assistance more so than formal) to help with all of the bureaucracy/administrative changes that usually come about with changing residence as well as occupation. If these returns were better cared for, individuals would be more motivated to come back.

#### 4.4. Interviews in Ireland

The majority of the interviewees were very open and were even sharing extra private information. In general, it did not feel at all like interviews, but rather like discussions. The process was a success as all interviews went smoothly. All had very pleasant discussions and it was very interesting to learn about their backgrounds and experiences. In addition to this, it was an opportunity to learn about the way of life of very different countries (England, United Arab Emirates, Canada, Mauritius, Egypt, and the United States). Moreover, it was very interesting to notice that even if their experiences were very different, they pretty much had similar reactions and feelings.

This research and the interviews, provided the opportunity to assert that Returnees need more emotional and psychological support after moving back home. It was demonstrated that being a Returnee is not a pejorative status. Indeed, they all had positive experiences and developed a lot of hard and soft skills, new abilities, behaviours and knowledge. All of them shared great advice and tips for people who are afraid of travelling. In addition to this, they all raised awareness about cultural identity, social inclusion, multiculturalism, and tolerance. Great values and points of view were enlightened and it will definitely help other people in the same situation.

#### 4.5. Interviews in Portugal

Conducting 10 interviews, provided the opportunity to reach different conclusions. Even though each experience is very different and complex on its own, there are some common grounds and shared opinions about living abroad and the process of returning home.

Firstly, everyone is deeply changed and transformed by their experience abroad and their adaptation period when they return, since they are two very different processes.

The Returnees reported a bigger change on a personal level, since it was the first abroad long-term experience for most of them, so they learned a lot about themselves outside their origin country and comfort zone. The changes they felt while away were brought back home and are present to this day in their actions and choices, sometimes without them even noticing. Their experience abroad made the participants much more independent and better at managing conflicts, on a personal and professional level. Also on a professional level, it was an impactful time for the youngsters to understand what they wanted to do next, gain more skills and network. They also reported that being in touch with a different culture and reality broadened their perspectives on different subjects and made them more understanding.

All Returnees , mentioned that it was a voluntary choice to move abroad and to return back in their country:

1. *On going abroad:* each participant had an institution guiding their abroad experience - to an extent - and they felt support from their community and close circle in making this choice.
2. *On returning:* the participants returned to their home country mainly due to the fact that their programme had come to an end. Some of them thought about continuing to live in the country they were in, but couldn't work out a way to do it at that time, so they returned. One participant mentioned he would have stayed abroad if it wasn't for the specialisation he wanted to pursue in Portugal. Another participant reported he also had to come back so he didn't risk losing the social house he lives in (the contract for it doesn't allow for the resident to be outside of Portugal for longer than x amount of months). The participants felt a big need to figure out their next steps, but in their home country, closer to their family/friends and comfort zone.

Upon their arrival, each participant felt like they were much different than at the beginning of their experience abroad. The majority reported a big feeling of “weirdness” and disconnection with their previous life, relationships and goals. Two participants reported a very difficult adaptation to Portugal, where they felt the need to ask for professional mental help, in order to process the experience and figure out what to do next. Everyone mentioned they took some time getting used to their new routine, after being abroad and experiencing so many different things, for a big and continuous period of time.

Even though the majority of the participants had a difficult time adjusting back to their origin country, they felt supported and that they were very welcomed back. Most of the close communities of the Returnees were expecting them to return when the programme they went on ended. One participant mentioned feeling no support on her return at all, which contributed negatively to her reintegration in Portugal.

Most of the Returnees mentioned they did not reach any public or private institution when they came back because 1) they did not know who to reach; 2) they did not know what kind of help they needed at the time, as they were processing what they had just experienced. 2 participants reached out for professional help related to mental health. 1 participant reached out to different youth associations to talk about his experience abroad and inspire the community to do the same - this was very useful and beneficial to “close the chapter”.

The participant who did the AFS programme, in the United States, explained to us their method of working: they had an orientation field weekend post-experience, which she feels was very beneficial. During this orientation weekend, she and other participants of the programme, could share their experiences, emotions, fears and goals, while doing reflection games and having orientation guidelines for the next steps. This is a very good example of a post-experience good practice and hopefully it will become more generalised.

What the participants felt would have helped and supported them the most after ending their experience was that the institutions who had sent them abroad helped out on their next steps: creating a directory of national and international opportunities (internships, where to look for jobs, volunteer projects, social projects), for example. They felt they needed a bit of guidance after being abroad for so long and not knowing much of the vast world of opportunities there are in Portugal and also outside of Portugal. Most of them mentioned it would have been very useful to have had an event or activity where people who lived the same experience as them shared their testimonials. This would make them feel heard and supported in a way that maybe other friends can't help since they didn't live the same experience.

The Returnees interviewed have no set plan yet on moving abroad again, but the big majority plan on doing it - especially since having done it before.

Lastly, the biggest advice these youngsters mentioned while making a decision whether to stay abroad or come back to the original country was weighing the pros and cons of each scenario and figuring out which one was a better fit for the person at that moment.

#### 4.6. Interviews in Cyprus

In general, most of Returnees stated that they gained a lot both in their personal and professional life, while living abroad. On a personal level, this experience helped them grow and evolve as people, widened their horizons and view of the world, as well as getting to know and understanding other cultures, customs and traditions. They learned how to live independently, facing different situations and stand on their own in society. Professionally, there is a huge difference working in Cyprus and working abroad. Working abroad provided more opportunities to acquire a high level of professional experience in their sectors, enhanced their knowledge on their field, in teamwork, in establishing collaborations with professionals from all over the world.

All interviewees mentioned that it was their own choice to move abroad, either for studies, or to gain work experience in another country, or to become acquainted with other cultures and customs, to widen their mind, and in general to acquire experiences and build memories.

In regards to whether it was their decision to return back to Cyprus, some met 6 reported that it was their decision, 3 said not that it was due to COVID and 1 just mentioned no. Referring to the reasons, 3 mentioned COVID, 6 due to their family and the last one because of financial needs.

All Returnees mentioned that it is difficult to come back to your country, after so many years living abroad. Some of them mentioned that it was extremely hard and they struggled. In time, however, it becomes easier, and more adjustable. Most mentioned having mixed feelings, from one hand it feels nice, but from the other hand it is strange.

Most of the interviewees mentioned that their family and very close friends were happy and excited to have them back. In regards to friendships, even though some mentioned that some friends were happy, some others mentioned that in time, communication changed and a distance was created with these friends.

Nobody reached out to any organisation or institution for support. In the question, however, what kind of support they would like to receive, Returnees mentioned that they would have liked to receive professional support in their sector, especially in finding a job, then psychological support and then support in re-integrating back into society.

In terms of settling in Cyprus permanently, even though all mentioned they have settled, most mentioned that they keep the door open as they would like to go abroad again.

All Returnees provided important advices to those who are thinking about returning back to Cyprus

- a) Give time for adjustment, upon their return to Cyprus, stay positive, relaxed and proceed to re-integration accepting social changes, re-build and/or adjust friends.
- b) Give time to evaluate options, make new plans and find themselves again within this new start.
- c) Considering returning to Cyprus, only if there is an important purpose.
- d) Take the risk returning home to experience things, to realise whether this is what makes them happy. At the same time they should not stop searching for opportunities.
- e) To make the effort, to give a chance while they are in Cyprus, being with their loved ones, who will support them even during difficult times.
- f) Evaluate everything before returning to Cyprus, measure everything including job, family etc and then take the decision.

- g) Returning to Cyprus is subjective as every person is different. People should be prepared, weigh the pros and cons and then make their decision. Change is always hard in the beginning.

#### 4.7. Overall Conclusions

The interviews conducted in all partner countries were successful and enabled the team to get to know more about the motivations and feedback of Returnees and NEETs in Europe. These interviews were the opportunity for young people to have a safe environment where they can share experiences and meet other people with similar stories. They all went abroad for different personal and professional reasons, especially to improve their lives. As a matter of fact, it is not easy to go abroad and even harder to come back to the home country because the person lost habits and needs to adjust again to society. This is the reason why Returnees need to have more guidance and be in contact with support groups. Nevertheless, for most of them, the statements were very positive. Without even knowing each other and coming from different countries in Europe, they still shared the same feelings. They all came back completely changed, more autonomous, independent and mature.

Their experiences abroad enabled them to have a more open mind and to gain new skills and knowledge that they can value on a personal and professional level. Most of all, they raised awareness about social inclusion, multiculturalism and diversity and they all acquired common strong values such as tolerance and respect.

### 5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Recommendations at EU level on fostering integration of young people with fewer opportunities in the society.**

The Council of Europe's youth policy aims to enable all young people to participate fully, without bias, and on an equal footing, in all aspects of life in society. Besides, the Council of Europe fully recognises the critical role played by youth work and non-formal education in supporting the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities and in developing skills for active citizenship and democratic participation.

As for the Council of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, they recommend several measures to be taken in order to ensure the support, social inclusion and integration of young people with fewer opportunities in society.

- **Make sure that young people from all backgrounds and profiles acquire and develop their knowledge and skills:**
    - improve the access to digital tools, technologies, and infrastructure that will support learning and enhance access to public services and the job market;
    - address any barriers, discrimination, or stereotypes in the field of education and training so that they can benefit from the same opportunities and aspirations;
    - put in place preventive measures, promoting accessibility of second chance and alternative education to help early leavers re-enter education or training;
    - provide teachers and youth workers with the necessary resources to provide young people high-quality formal, non-formal, and informal learning;
    - provide learner career orientation and assistance through interacting with businesses through workplace visits, career talks as well as by disseminating knowledge about the skills that are in demand in the workplace and the connection between education and employment.
  
  - **Support the integration of young people, especially those with with fewer opportunities and/or disadvantaged backgrounds in the labour market:**
    - tackle discrimination and foster diversity and inclusion by facilitating the provision of job opportunities for young people with severe labour market barriers like NEETs and Returnees by addressing barriers to labour market entry and transitions;
    - introduce mental health and wellbeing concerns into workplace policies;
    - provide assistance and make adjustments and accommodations in the workplace, including for young people with disabilities and medical conditions;
    - facilitate mentoring programmes, targeted guidance for young people in challenging situations, especially those without local networks, to help them break into the workforce.
  
  - **Promote the social inclusion, integration and youth wellbeing of young people, especially those with with fewer opportunities and/or disadvantaged backgrounds:**
    - use the potential of youth work, based on holistic strategies that support young people's personal and social development as well as their intercultural skills;
-

- support youth workers and organisations working with people with fewer opportunities to access training opportunities, including peer learning and the exchange of practises;
  - promote and make accessible information regarding the role of youth work and non-formal education learning among the institutions and organisations concerned;
  - encourage the collaboration between member states, youth organisations, youth work providers, local authorities, and other institutions involved with young people and non-formal education/learning;
  - promote sports, physical activity, and culture through local action in schools, youth centres, sports organisations, and cultural institutions while also investing in accessible infrastructure and removing obstacles to accessing open spaces and public areas.
- **Strengthen the trust between young people with fewer opportunities and the government and their relationship with public institutions:**
    - make sure that young people with fewer opportunities are aware and equipped to exercise their democratic rights and engage in public and political life;
    - support awareness-raising programmes to counter ageism and stereotypes against young people in public and political life that might act as a barrier to youth involvement and representation;
    - go against various types of misinformation, intolerance, and violence as well as the risk of polarisation from civic and democratic institutions, protect civic space and engagement for young people from disadvantaged groups
    - promote meaningful youth involvement in public decision-making and intergenerational dialogue spaces at all levels, with targeted measures to engage underprivileged groups for more responsive, inclusive, and accountable policy outcomes delivering targeted public communications that are relevant, clear, and accessible to young people.

## 6. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

As part of the Erasmus+ project “*HEY! Heightening the Engagement of Youth*”, the European partnership has conducted national desk-based research as well as focus groups and interviews to understand better the real and current situation of the social, political and economic inclusion of young people with challenging or difficult backgrounds, especially NEETs and Returnees.



The desk-based research has given an overview of each national context in the partner countries. The Member states and governments implemented a wide range of structures, programmes, policies and initiatives to support young people's professional and social inclusion, address the issue of unemployment, improve their economic situation and properly assist their return to their home countries. Unfortunately, it was also noted based on research results that there is a lot of brain drain in Europe. Most young people leave their countries in search of better living and working conditions and don't come back. This is because of the lack of opportunities and policies existing to support them which might seem paradoxical as governments are doing their best to put in place laws to help young people with fewer opportunities. As a result, it was understood that it is really important to have more coordination and policies to encourage more and in a more efficient way this specific target group. There are a lot of issues to tackle such as unemployment, validation of skills, hard administrative processes etc in order for Returnees not to become NEETs and in order for NEETs to have access to education and employment.

This is the reason why the consortium has conducted focus groups and interviews all over Europe with the young people concerned in order to identify their needs and motivations and understand the real current situation they are dealing with. It was very interesting to note that contrary to the desk-based research there is a huge lack of policies and measures that exist to meet the needs and requirements of people with fewer opportunities. This was not only confirmed by young people but also youth workers and members of local institutions and NGOs. The issue is that there is little or in-existent support and guidance available for Returnees and NEETs or they are either not updated to the current situation or poorly promoted to the public. There is also a huge lack of coordination and communication. This is the reason why it is recommended by different European councils to develop and foster the collaboration between member states, youth organisations, youth work providers, local authorities, and other institutions involved with young people with fewer opportunities. Moreover, to solve the issue of communication, it is also crucial to promote and make accessible information regarding the role of youth work and non-formal education learning among the institutions and organisations concerned. Besides, it is also needed to support youth workers and organisations working with people with fewer opportunities to access training opportunities.

Therefore it is asserted that the policy recommendations are in well concordance with the needs enumerated and shared by our participants during the focus groups and interviews. Young people, NEETs and refugees are very motivated to expand their perspectives and knowledge, improve a whole range of skills and open up their minds. Addressing any barriers they may face such as precarity, social exclusion discrimination and stereotypes in the professional and social field is

thus crucial as they must be given access to the same opportunities as any other young people on an equal footing.

In a nutshell, this Guide enabled the identification and understanding of what is the real current situation of young people with fewer opportunities, NEETs and Returnees and how to tackle the issues they face in all fields on a daily basis. Most of all, awareness was raised about social inclusion, tolerance, multiculturalism and diversity.

## 7. REFERENCES

- **National Framework - France:**

- [Young Commitment Contract](#): government measure aimed at supporting NEETS under 26 years old by giving them a monthly allowance and assigning them a dedicated counsellor to find a job.
- [Call for projects finances innovative](#): projects aimed at people who are far from employment, jobseekers with few or no qualifications, or young people who have left the school system without qualifications.
- [Returning back to France](#)
- [NEETS](#)
- [Key data on youth](#)
- [Data on youth](#)
- [Returnees profiles](#)
- [72% of young french people want to go abroad](#)
- [High rate of french migration](#)
- [Government measure for young people](#)
- [Expatriation](#)

- **National Framework - Spain:**

- Pérez, M. T., Simón, P., Clavería, S., García-Albacete, G., López, A., & Torre, M. (2020). Informe Juventud en España 2020. *Madrid, Instituto de la Juventud, INJUVE*
- INJUVE Report, 2020
- Navarrete Moreno, L., Cuenca García, C., Díaz Catalán, C., Díaz Chorne, L., Fernández Araiz, V., Flores Vidal, P. A., & Lorenzo Rodríguez, J. (2018). Balance y futuro de la migración de los jóvenes españoles: Movilidad, emigración y retorno; Martín, B. G., & Fernández, P. P. (2021). De vuelta a casa: el retorno de los jóvenes españoles desde Europa. *RES. Revista Española de Sociología, 30(4), 1.*

- Lulle, A., Janta, H., & Emilsson, H. (2021). Introduction to the Special Issue: European youth migration: human capital outcomes, skills and competences. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 47(8), 1725-1739. ; Martín, and Fernández, (2021)
  - Staniscia, B., L. Deravignone, B. González-Martin, and P. Pumares. 2021. "Youth Mobility and the Development of Human Capital: Is there a Southern European Model?" *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 47 (8): 1866–1882. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2019.1679417.
  - Samuk, S., Nienaber, B., Bissinger, J., & Vysotskaya, V. (2018). *Mapping mobility—pathways, institutions and structural effects of youth mobility, Final Public Project Report*. European Commission.
  - Navarrete et al. (2018); Navarrete Moreno, L., Cuenca, C., Díaz-Catalán, C., Díaz-Chorne, L., Flores-Vidal, P. A., Lorenzo, J., Gentile, A., & Zúñiga, R. (2014). La emigración de los jóvenes españoles en el contexto de la crisis. Análisis y datos de un fenómeno difícil de cuantificar. *Revista Metamorfosis: Revista del Centro Reina Sofía sobre Adolescencia y Juventud*, (1), 101-105.
  - OECD (2021), *Education at a Glance Database - Transition from education to work*, [http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?datasetcode=EAG\\_TRANS](http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?datasetcode=EAG_TRANS) (accessed on 8 June 2022).
- **National Framework - Italy:**
- *Migrazioni internazionali e interne in forte calo nel 2020, lieve recupero delle iscrizioni dall'estero nel 2021*. ISTAT.
  - *Le giovani generazioni in Italia dopo la pandemia*. [ebook] Uffi cio Studi Confcommercio. Available at: <<https://www.confcommercio.it/-/giovani-italiani-dopo-pandemia>>
  - *La condizione dei giovani in Italia e il potenziale contributo del Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza per migliorarla*. [online] Available at: <[https://www.rgs.mef.gov.it/Documenti/VERSIONE-I/Comunicazione/Workshop-e-convegni/PNRR\\_per\\_ridurre\\_divari\\_intergenerazionali\\_promuovere\\_giovani/La-condizione-dei-giovani-in-Italia-e-il-potenziale-contributo-del-Piano-Nazionale-di-Ripresa-e-Resilienza-per-migliorarla.pdf](https://www.rgs.mef.gov.it/Documenti/VERSIONE-I/Comunicazione/Workshop-e-convegni/PNRR_per_ridurre_divari_intergenerazionali_promuovere_giovani/La-condizione-dei-giovani-in-Italia-e-il-potenziale-contributo-del-Piano-Nazionale-di-Ripresa-e-Resilienza-per-migliorarla.pdf)>
  - *La condizione dei giovani in Italia e il potenziale contributo del Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza per migliorarla, 2022)*
  - *ISCRIZIONI E CANCELLAZIONI ANAGRAFICHE DELLA POPOLAZIONE RESIDENTE | ANNO, 2019*.
  - Invitalia.it. 2022. *Invitalia: Agenzia nazionale per lo sviluppo d'impresa*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.invitalia.it/cosa-facciamo/creiamo-nuove-aziende/resto-al-sud/cose>>
  - Invitalia.it.. *Cos'è Smart&Start Italia - Invitalia*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.invitalia.it/cosa-facciamo/creiamo-nuove-aziende/smartstart-italia/cose>>

- *Incentivi per il rientro dei lavoratori dall'estero* - E-Book Fisco e Tasse
  - Testo della legge di Bilancio 2022
  - <https://www.ticonsiglio.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/bilancio-2022-definitivo-camera.pdf>
  - Cos'è Smart&Start Italia - Invitalia, 2022
  - Invitalia: Agenzia nazionale per lo sviluppo d'impresa, 2022
- **National Framework - Ireland:**
    - <https://www.youth.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/20151008NatYouthStrat2015to2020.pdf>
    - <https://safehomeireland.com>
    - <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/44c78-minister-brophy-launches-back-for-business-support-programme-for-returning-emigrants-to-ireland/>
    - <https://ruralaction.co/what-we-do/personal-youth-development-programme-pydp/>
    - <https://www.cso.ie/en/>
    - <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/abroad/is-ireland-still-no-country-for-young-people-1.3738604>
    - <https://www.irishtimes.com/business/economy/number-of-irish-returning-home-at-highest-level-since-2007-1.4334849>
    - <https://www.youth.ie/programmes/youth-arts/>
    - <https://www.youth.ie/programmes/child-protection/>
    - <https://www.youth.ie/programmes/development-education/global-youth-work-and-development-education/#WHAT-IS-GLOBAL-YOUTH-WORK>
    - <https://www.youth.ie/programmes/equality-intercultural/>
    - <https://www.youth.ie/programmes/youth-health/>
    - <https://www.youth.ie/programmes/international/>
    - <https://www.youth.ie/programmes/steam-engagement-programme/>
    - <https://www.youth.ie/programmes/projects-initiatives/nsets/>
    - <https://www.youth.ie/climate-justice/>
    - <https://www.youth.ie/programmes/north-south-practice-development-hub/>
  - **National Framework - Portugal:**
    - [UN: "Portugal: Youth Emigration"](#)
    - [Portuguese emigration evolution](#)
-

- [Portuguese Government - “Return” program and Institute of Employment and Professional Training: “Support for the Return of Emigrants to Portugal”](#)
- [Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth: National Youth Plan](#)
- [Cascais’ Youth Department: National Youth Plan](#)
- [“Unemployment rate drops to 5.9% in the first quarter” and BPSTAT: Youth unemployment rate](#)
- [Portugal: 2021 census confirms growth in immigrant population](#)
- [Portuguese emigration today](#)
- [Portuguese emigrants want to come back](#)
- [How Returnees are reviving Portugal’s rural areas](#)
- [MigRural](#)
- [“I am everywhere and nowhere at once”](#)