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Social Situation of Young People in Europe

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Social Situation of Young People in Europe

Abstract

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Keywords

European Union, youth, labor market, social inclusion

Comments

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Foundation Findings

Social situation
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3rd
EQLS policy brief



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Telephone: (+353 1) 204 31 00

Email: information@eurofound.europa.eu

Web: www.eurofound.europa.eu

EQLS policy briefs

This policy brief highlights findings on a specific topic from Eurofound's European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) that is of particular interest from a policy perspective. It brings results of the analysis of these data together with evidence from other Eurofound projects to formulate a number of policy pointers. The focus of this policy brief is the quality of life of young people in Europe, focusing on dimensions such as living arrangements, social exclusion, relationships and sources of support, as well as participation in society and social/cultural activities. It has been prepared by Eszter Sándor and Anna Ludwinek. For further information, contact Eszter Sándor, esa@eurofound.europa.eu or Anna Ludwinek, alu@eurofound.europa.eu



Policy context



European policy context

The European policy debate about social policies for young people has been dominated by issues of employment and education (which are also addressed in the Europe 2020 targets). The economic crisis has affected young people particularly hard, with unemployment and inactivity rates consistently higher than for other age groups in most Member States. However, some disadvantaged groups of young people face exclusion in the longer term for reasons beyond the current crisis. Remaining outside the labour market has far-reaching consequences – not solely economic. These include a loss of confidence, an undermining of trust and expectations, and an increasing risk of social exclusion and disengagement from society.

Tackling youth unemployment continues to be a policy priority for European and national governments, but the need to directly address the risk of social exclusion and the need to look at the broader aspects of social inclusion are increasingly recognised in the public debate. Moreover, the views, priorities and perspectives of young people themselves have not been sufficiently considered. This report aims to contribute to the ongoing debate by providing

an up-to-date, comprehensive overview of the situation of young people aged between 18 and 29 years, based on findings from Eurofound's European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS).

European policy on the situation of young people is framed by the EU Youth Strategy 2010–2018, which has two overall objectives: to provide more and equal opportunities for young people in education and in the labour market; and to encourage young people to be active citizens and participate in society. The strategy is centred on eight activity fields, many of which reflect a broad social-inclusion approach, including voluntary activities, health and well-being and participation. This policy brief provides information on several of these dimensions.

The strategy is divided into three-year cycles. At the end of each cycle, the EU Youth Report (a joint report by the European Commission and the European Council) is published. The first of these (published in September 2012) found that since 2009 – due to difficult labour market conditions – more young people have been involved in education and fewer are in work, while the proportion of those not in employment, education or training ('NEETs') has also increased (European Commission,

2012). There has been a corresponding increase in the proportion of young people at risk of poverty and social exclusion. The Youth Report also suggests that young people are particularly vulnerable when they leave the parental home, and it calls for a greater focus on social inclusion, health and well-being in the second three-year work cycle of the renewed framework (2013–2015).

At the same time, the report concludes that the social participation of young people has not suffered because of the crisis. This includes their interest and participation in political activities – some of which is enabled by opportunities offered by new media – and involvement in voluntary activities. Their participation in cultural activities also remains high, again partly helped by new technologies.

The EQLS sheds light on many of these areas, including on the question of whether more young people are living with their parents now than in 2007. More importantly, it can be used to compare the situation of those who do and those who do not live at home. For example, social exclusion rates for young people may be high among those who have not left the family home, if they are remaining there involuntarily.

The EQLS also allows for the analysis of young people's social participation, in terms of cultural activities, political participation and voluntary work. It can provide details on their personal experiences and how they feel about their lives, and how has this changed since 2007.

Policy challenges and issues

A joint report on the implementation of the EU framework for cooperation on youth concludes that in the next three-year cycle of the Strategy, particular challenges to be addressed are young people's exclusion, alienation, and barriers to their independence and social inclusion (European Commission and European Council, 2012). Therefore, one focus of policy should be on boosting social and democratic

participation, personal development, and the sense of belonging to society.

More recently, the Council of the European Union adopted conclusions that focused on enhancing the social inclusion of NEETs (Council of the European Union, 2013). The Council highlights that young people in a NEET situation are at risk of isolation, lacking autonomy and having mental and physical health issues. It acknowledges that programmes such as youth work, voluntary work, active citizenship and non-formal training could be useful both in helping young people make the transition to the labour market, and in providing self-confidence and building social capital. The conclusions call for the Member States to further develop and implement strategies in the areas of prevention, education, training, non-formal learning and employment. These strategies should be evidence-based, should include all relevant stakeholders and be based on holistic and cross-sectoral cooperation.

European Quality of Life Survey

Eurofound's EQLS is a representative survey of those aged 18 and over in Europe, covering all EU countries and some acceding, candidate and potential candidate countries. The survey aims to present a multidimensional picture of quality of life in Europe, including questions on both the objective circumstances of people's lives (such as living conditions, income, deprivation) and their subjective feelings and perceptions (such as life satisfaction and feeling of social exclusion). Three waves of the survey have been carried out in 2003, 2007 and in 2011, enabling comparisons of quality of life before and after the crisis.

This report uses EQLS data to examine the quality of life of young people in Europe in 2011, comparing it with that in 2007. It concentrates in particular on their social situation, in particular dimensions such as living arrangements, social exclusion, relationships and sources of support, and participation in society and social and cultural activities.



Key findings

- In 2011 more young people lived with their parents than in 2007, with young men more likely to find themselves living with parents.
- Both unemployed young people seeking work and inactive young people would like to work if they could freely choose their working hours. This includes inactive young mothers and fathers looking after their children.
- Young people have more face-to-face and phone or email contact with friends and family than do older groups. In addition, young people in all life circumstances are more satisfied with their life in general, their social life and family life than people in older age groups.
- Unemployed and inactive young people give a comparatively low rating for their subjective well-being.
- Young people are more likely to face moderate levels of deprivation than older groups (not being able to afford new furniture, holidays or dinner guests), but less likely to face more severe forms of deprivation (in terms of lacking food, heating and new clothes).
- Deprivation has increased for young people of all social backgrounds since 2007 in nearly all EU countries, especially for those who are living in extended families with their parents and their own children; such people are likely to be unable to move out of the family home.
- Unemployed and inactive young people are more likely than others to feel socially excluded, to feel lonely, to face a lack of social support, and to have lower levels of mental well-being.
- Young people are less likely to trust institutions now (in 2014) than they did in 2007 – with the exception of the police, whom they trust as much as before.
- Young people are more likely than older people to perceive tensions between ethnic or religious groups, as well as between groups of different sexual orientation.



Exploring the issue



Family and living arrangements

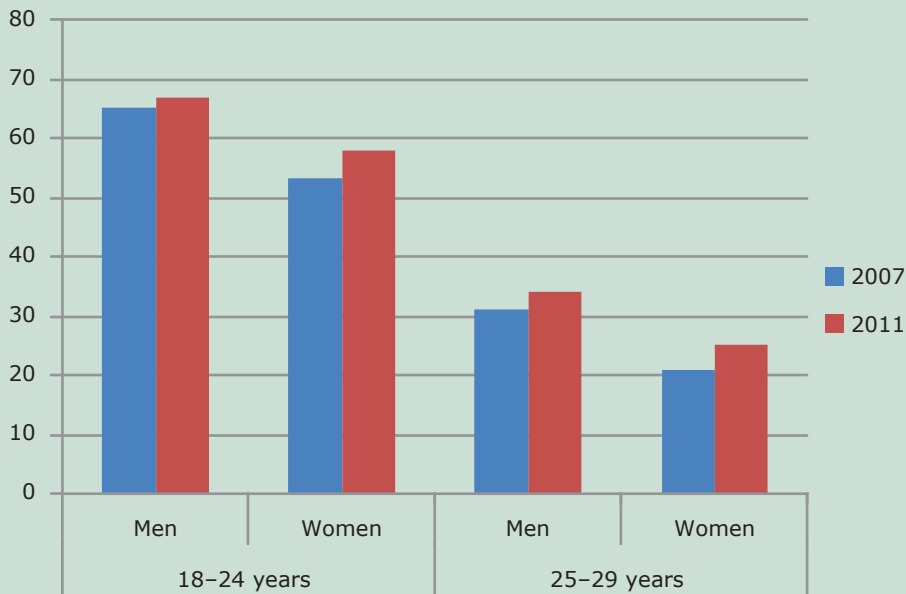
In most Member States in the EU28, more young people were living with their parents in 2011 than in 2007, the proportion of 18–29 year-olds doing so rising from 44% to 48%.¹ As Figure 1 indicates, this increase is significant for both

the younger age group (those aged 18–24 years) and the older group (aged 25–29), for both men and women. Young men are more likely to live with their parents than young women, and, as expected, those aged below 25 are significantly more likely to live with their parents than those aged between 25 and 29.

¹ The results regarding family and living arrangements are unweighted. Living with a partner's parents is also counted in the proportion living with parents.



Figure 1: Living with parents by age and gender, 2007 and 2011 (%)



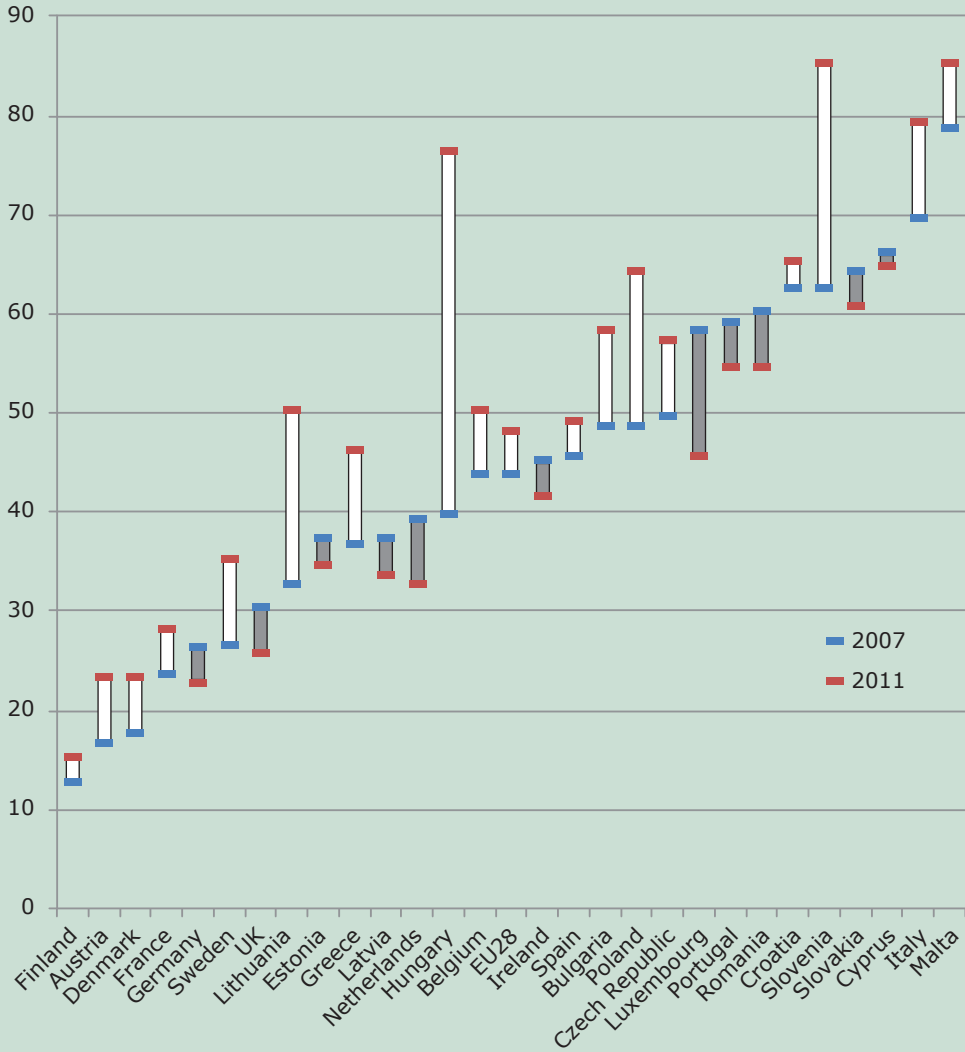
Note: All figures and tables refer to 18–29 year-olds in the 28 EU Member States.
Source: EQLS

These proportions vary greatly by country (see Figure 2). There were especially large increases in some countries: the greatest increase was recorded in Hungary (an increase of 36 percentage points), followed by Slovenia (+21 percentage points), Lithuania (+17 percentage points) and Poland (+15 percentage points).

The number of young people (aged 18–29) living alone increased in some countries between

2007 and 2011 (this was the case in Finland, the Netherlands and France) but decreased elsewhere – especially in most central and eastern European Member States. Meanwhile, in most countries, fewer young people live with their own families (their partner and/or their children) than did so in 2007, although there are some exceptions – such as the UK, where there has been an increase of 9 percentage points.

Figure 2: Living with parents by country, 2007 and 2011 (%)



Source: EQLS, 2007 and 2011

Note: The EQLS is a sample survey, and these unweighted results reflect proportions in the sample rather than the whole population. Official statistics from Eurostat, for young people aged 16–29 years also found a large increase in the proportion of young people living with (their own) parents in many countries, especially Hungary (+10 percentage points), France (+8 percentage points) and Bulgaria (+7 percentage points).



Employment

Youth unemployment rates are generally higher than the average unemployment rate, and the economic crisis affected the employment participation of young people more than that of older age groups (Eurostat, 2013). According to Eurostat data, between 2007 and 2011, the EU27 youth unemployment rate (for 15–24 year-olds), rose from 15% to 21%.

change in this since 2007. On the other hand, inactive young people are more likely to live with their parents now than before the crisis, and if they have their own family, they are more likely to live with their parents as well.

Young people with care responsibilities

Having children is one of the main factors behind gender differences in the employment

Table 1: Employment status of young people, 2007 and 2011 (%)

	Men aged 18–29		Women aged 18–29	
	2007	2011	2007	2011
Employed	59	52	53	46
In education	31	29	27	31
Unemployed	7	14	9	14
Inactive	3	4	11	10

Note: Data are unweighted.

Source: EQLS

The increase in youth unemployment measured in official statistics is also noticeable in the structure of the EQLS sample: a much greater proportion of 18–29 year-olds was unemployed in the sample for the third wave of the survey in 2011 than the second wave in 2007: in the case of young women, nearly twice the proportion and in the case of young men, exactly twice the proportion.

Living arrangements of young people differ depending on their economic status. Around 60% of those aged between 18 and 29 who are employed live either alone or with a partner and/or children, while one-third live with their parents, and just 7% with both their parents and their own family. In contrast, almost one-half of young people still in education live with parents, and are less likely to live with their partner and/or children.

Over two-thirds of unemployed young people live with their parents, the highest rate across all the categories, and there has been no great

rate. According to the EQLS, the unemployment rate in the EU28 is 19% for young mothers and 17% for young fathers, while 30% of young mothers and 8% of young fathers are inactive. Most inactive young mothers are homemakers (around 25%), while 5% are in education. However, as many as 88% of these inactive young mothers would like to work if they could freely choose their working hours, as would 80% of inactive young fathers.² This indicates that these young mothers and fathers are probably not outside the labour force by choice.

Across the EU28, 30% of young women and 13% of young men are involved in childcare at least weekly, while 11% and 10% respectively are involved in weekly care for elderly or disabled relatives. Among young people who provide care at least weekly, young women estimate that on average they spend 55 hours per week providing childcare and 10 hours on care for the elderly; the equivalent figures for young men are 23 hours and 8 hours (Eurofound, 2013a).

² This figure excludes students.

Young people caring for children give a relatively high rating for their life satisfaction. They are satisfied with their family life, but less so with their social life, and they feel more socially excluded than other young people. Young people caring for elderly/disabled relatives feel more socially excluded than others, and they also have lower life satisfaction than young people on average. Support for reconciliation between work, private and family life is highlighted in the Council conclusions on the social inclusion of NEETs as an important element in their smoother integration into the labour market (Council of the European Union, 2013).

Family and social life

Contact with people outside the household

In 2011, more than half of young people (53%) said they meet their friends every day or almost every day, and 89% meet them at least once a week. A unique characteristic of young people is that their rates of face-to-face contact are similar to their rates of contact by phone or internet (51% daily, 83% weekly). For older age groups, phone and email contact with friends is significantly less common than face-to-face contact. Understandably, young people still in education are the most likely to meet friends every day (94%). If they have moved out of their parents' home, weekly contact with parents is still relatively common among young people (69% face-to-face, 75% by phone).

Satisfaction with family and social life

Over a third (34%) of young people would like to spend more time with their friends (or on other social contacts outside the family), while 29% would like to increase the time they spend with their family. Interesting differences emerge between countries in this respect. In Cyprus, Slovenia and Malta (countries where living with one's parents is common, and most young people remain in daily contact with parents even when living apart) young people wish to have even more social and family contact. In contrast, in Portugal, Croatia and Greece, a comparatively large proportion of young people would rather spend less time with family

and friends. These three countries are also the only ones where many young people feel they should spend less time on their own hobbies and interests, while everywhere else in Europe most young people would like to have more free time to spend on these activities.

Nevertheless, young people on average seem more satisfied with both their family life and social life than older age groups in nearly all countries, and this has not changed significantly since 2007. In some countries, such as the Czech Republic and Hungary, young people are more satisfied with their social life than their family life, whereas in Ireland and the UK they are on average more satisfied with their family life.

Young people of all social backgrounds are more satisfied with their life and with the social aspects of their life than older people in the same respective categories. This is especially true for the youngest group (under 25) still living with their parents.

Unemployed young people are significantly less satisfied with their life overall than others. Young people who have their own family, and live with their partner and/or children, have comparatively low levels of life satisfaction, and the least satisfaction with their social life (probably due to the presence of young children, or the recent decrease in time spent with friends), but they have the greatest satisfaction with their family life. Probably for the same reason, inactive young people are usually very satisfied with their family life, but less so with their social life.

Social exclusion

The EU Youth Strategy sets out a range of indicators to be monitored to measure young people's social inclusion. These include the at-risk of poverty rate, the rate of severe material deprivation, and the proportions living in very low work-intensity households, with unmet medical needs and the proportion of NEETs (European Commission and European Council, 2012). Findings from the EQLS shed light on two of these: deprivation and unmet needs for medical care.

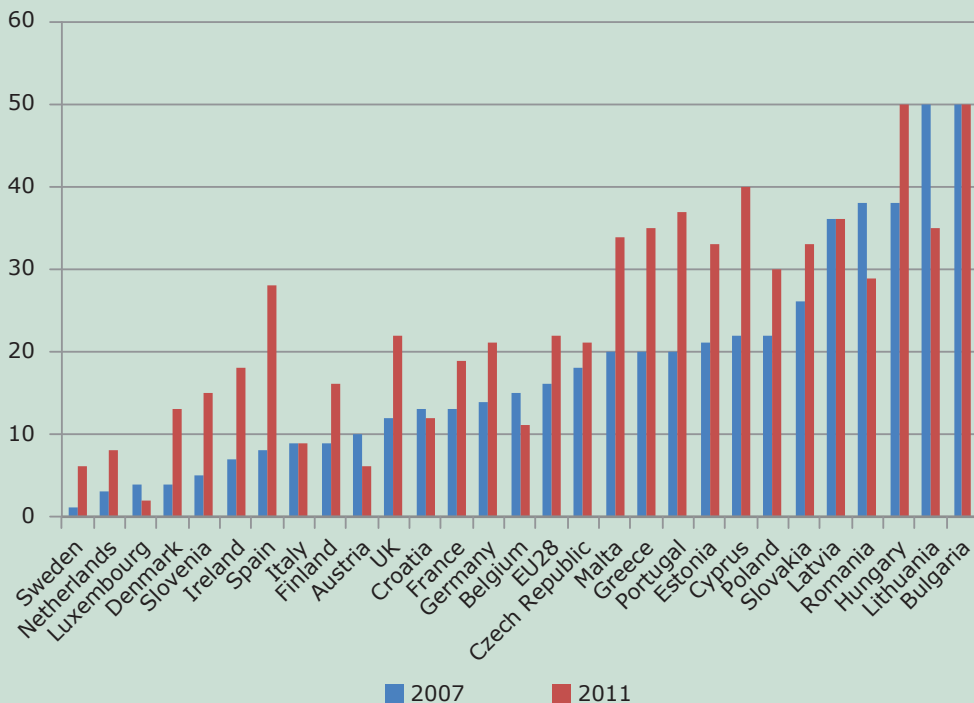


Deprivation

Nearly half of all young people in the EU live in households experiencing some form of deprivation.³ For 27% of young people this means being unable to afford annual holidays, invite friends over as guests or replace worn-out furniture. However, a further 22% experience serious deprivation, meaning that they cannot afford to keep their house warm, buy meat or fish at least every second day (if desired) and buy new, rather than second-hand, clothes.

The proportion of young people experiencing serious deprivation has increased by six percentage points since 2007. The greatest increase in deprivation has been experienced in some southern European Member States, such as Spain, Cyprus, Portugal and Greece. In nearly all countries young people are more likely to experience moderate levels of deprivation than the general population, but they are less likely to experience the more serious forms of deprivation.

Figure 3: Experience of serious deprivation, 2007 and 2011 (%)



³ Material deprivation is the inability to afford items considered essential. The EQLS asked respondents if their households could afford six basic items: keeping the home adequately warm; paying for a week's annual holiday away from home (not staying with relatives); having a meal with meat, chicken or fish every second day; replacing worn-out furniture; buying new clothes rather than second-hand ones; and inviting friends or family for a drink or meal at least once a month.

Young people in large households (such as those living both with their parents and their partner and/or children) are the most likely to experience a high level of deprivation and the greatest increase since 2007, suggesting that – for some – such living arrangements may be involuntary, and be a result of the economic

Of these, waiting time is the most common issue for young people in Europe, with 44% indicating this has made access to medical care at least a little difficult, while 37% indicate that they experienced a delay in getting an appointment. Finding time to go to the doctor (due to work or care responsibilities) is an issue

Table 2: Experience of deprivation, by living arrangements and employment status, 2007 and 2011 (%)

		2007			2011		
		None	Low	High	None	Low	High
Living arrangements	Alone	56	27	17	46	29	24
	Parents	66	21	13	54	27	19
	Partner	66	22	12	58	25	18
	Partner and children	45	35	20	43	31	26
	Partner/children and parents	40	32	28	36	24	40
Employment status	Employed	64	23	13	59	25	16
	Unemployed	36	30	34	30	29	41
	In education	64	24	11	53	28	20
	Inactive	41	32	27	31	37	32

Note: 'Low' deprivation means that the respondent cannot afford a week's annual holiday, to replace worn-out furniture, or to invite guests to their home. 'High' deprivation means that they cannot afford a meal with meat, chicken or fish, to buy new clothes or heat their home adequately. Red shading indicates greater deprivation, green shading indicates less.

crisis. Unemployed and inactive young people are significantly more likely to be deprived than others. Importantly, young people living with their partner and/or children are much more likely to face deprivation than other age groups with the same living circumstances.

Difficulty in accessing healthcare

The EQLS measures difficulty in accessing healthcare on five different dimensions.

for 32% of young people, and cost of medical care is a problem for 31%. The distance to travel to the doctor or hospital is a less frequent problem, experienced by 18%.

The extent to which these issues contribute to difficulty in accessing healthcare varies between countries. Table 3 shows the main barriers to access in each country.



Table 3: Reasons for difficulty accessing healthcare, 2011 (%)

	Distance	Delay in getting an appointment	Waiting time	Cost	Finding time
Austria	7	29	31	14	21
Belgium	10	20	33	26	31
Bulgaria	22	23	39	30	20
Cyprus	15	20	36	51	19
Czech Republic	19	35	53	22	25
Germany	19	41	52	27	37
Denmark	17	22	24	7	34
Estonia	21	43	36	23	19
Greece	38	65	68	64	39
Spain	11	26	37	10	14
Finland	18	32	29	22	19
France	11	26	34	32	37
Hungary	17	37	42	19	18
Ireland	12	21	43	51	30
Italy	36	55	61	53	36
Lithuania	8	28	36	30	30
Luxembourg	4	14	34	29	30
Latvia	19	25	37	29	23
Malta	16	41	65	58	38
Netherlands	13	20	26	25	19
Poland	24	47	42	39	26
Portugal	24	45	48	37	38
Romania	22	39	56	46	34
Sweden	12	32	24	16	21
Slovenia	25	35	38	11	13
Slovakia	30	33	55	50	31
UK	12	36	42	7	36
Croatia	22	42	48	18	19
EU28	18	37	44	30	31

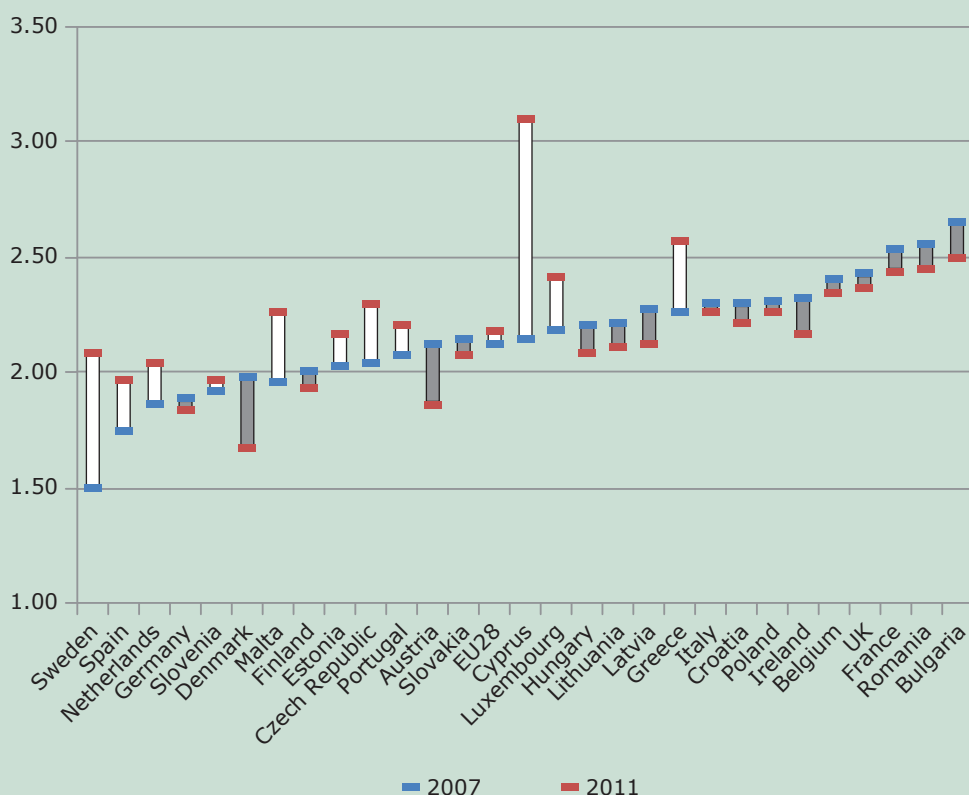
Note: Red shading indicates greater difficulty in accessing healthcare, green shading indicates less.

It is clear that in some countries multiple barriers to access exist at the same time: for example, in Greece and Italy, delays, waiting time and cost all seem to be issues experienced by a significant proportion of young people. Cost is the main problem in other countries, such as Cyprus and Ireland. However in some countries with universal healthcare, such as the UK and Denmark, cost does not appear to be a significant issue.

Compared with 2007, barriers in accessing healthcare, especially cost, have become more prevalent in some countries, especially Greece, Malta, the Netherlands, Ireland and

Slovakia. In Greece, this increase is likely to reflect the 2011 austerity measures, such as limiting the duration of free healthcare for the unemployed to a year, and people in general having to contribute more towards medical costs. In Ireland, free healthcare is limited, and the rising cost issues may directly reflect increasing difficulties in making ends meet. In Malta and Slovakia, universal healthcare is in place, and in the Netherlands universal health insurance is combined with private health plans, but the system has not changed since 2006 in any of these countries, so these results warrant more research.

Figure 4: Perceived social exclusion by country, 2007 and 2011



Note: Based on the EQLS social exclusion index.



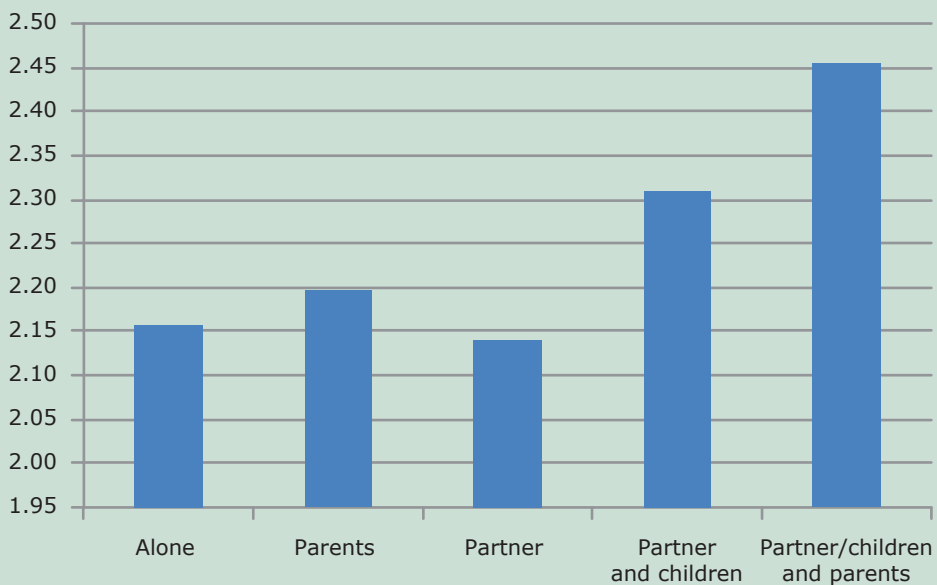
Perceived social exclusion

The EQLS includes four questions measuring perceived social exclusion, which have been used to construct an index.⁴ There is generally a large variation between countries in perceived social exclusion, but in the EU28 as a whole there is not a lot of variation according to age (Eurofound, 2012). Among young people, social exclusion in 2011 was greatest in Cyprus, Greece and Bulgaria and lowest in Denmark, Germany and Austria, similar to the findings for the whole population.

In most countries young people did not on average feel more social exclusion in 2011 than in 2007, but in some countries such as Cyprus, Sweden and Greece there was a significant increase.

The highest level of social exclusion is perceived by young people living with their partner and/or children together with their parents or other relatives (such as the partner's parents), which is probably a result of their inability to move to their own home due to financial constraints.

Figure 5: Perceived social exclusion, by living arrangements, 2011



Note: Based on the EQLS social exclusion index.

⁴ The perceived social exclusion index refers to the overall average score from responses to the four statements: 'I feel left out of society', 'Life has become so complicated today that I almost can't find my way', 'I don't feel that the value of what I do is recognised by others', 'Some people look down on me because of my job situation or income', where 1 = 'strongly disagree' and 5 = 'strongly agree'.

Table 4: Perceived social exclusion by economic status, 2007 and 2011

	2007	2011
Employed	2.2	2.1
Unemployed	2.6	2.5
In education	2.0	2.1
Inactive	2.4	2.5

Note: Table 4 uses the EQLS social exclusion index.

Lack of employment opportunities has been shown to have a significant impact on perceived social exclusion (Eurofound, 2012). Among young people, those who are unemployed or inactive feel the most excluded from society, with no significant change since 2007. Students are much less likely to feel excluded from society than those who are inactive or unemployed.

Looking at the different elements of the social exclusion index, relatively few young people agree that they feel excluded from society, but many of them say that their life has become so complicated that they almost cannot find their way (20% of all young people), and that the value of what they do is not recognised by others (21%). A feeling of being excluded from society is most prevalent for unemployed young people (13%), and feeling that their value is not being recognised is most common among inactive young people (30%).

A different measure of exclusion is loneliness, a type of negative effect that usually increases with age (Eurofound, 2012). While young people are considerably less likely to feel lonely than older groups on average, young people living alone – and those living with their parents as well as their partner and/or children – are the most likely to feel lonely more than half of the time (13% and 14% respectively). Young people living only with their partner or only with their parents are the least likely to feel lonely. In addition, unemployed and inactive young people are more likely to feel lonely than others (13% and 14%).

Mental well-being

Young people in Europe generally have slightly better mental well-being than older age groups, as measured by the WHO-5 mental well-being scale.⁵ People younger than 32 years have a rating of 66 on the scale; for people aged 30 or over, the rating is 62. This is true in most countries, though the difference varies, with young people having significantly better-than-average mental well-being everywhere in eastern Europe and in some southern European countries (especially Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and Slovenia). A notable exception is Sweden, where young people score six points lower than the average population on the scale.

Young people living with their parents, whether employed or in education, and aged under 25 have better mental well-being than other groups (though the difference between 18–24 year-olds and 25–29 year-olds has decreased since 2007); in contrast, those living with their own families and parents in the same home, and those who are unemployed or inactive have poorer mental well-being.

At EU level, young people's mental well-being has not changed significantly since 2007 overall and for these subgroups. However, changes are visible in some countries: there has been a decrease in mental well-being in Ireland, where mental well-being of young people was among the highest (-8 points), and in Sweden (-6 points). At the same time, young people's mental well-being increased in two countries where it had been relatively low: Italy (+8 points) and Denmark (+6 points).

⁵ The WHO-5 mental well-being scale is composed of the following items, all measured on a six-point scale and referring to how the respondent felt over the previous two weeks: I have felt cheerful and in good spirits; I have felt calm and relaxed; I have felt active and vigorous; I woke up feeling fresh and rested; my daily life has been filled with things that interest me. The scale ranges from 1 to 100.

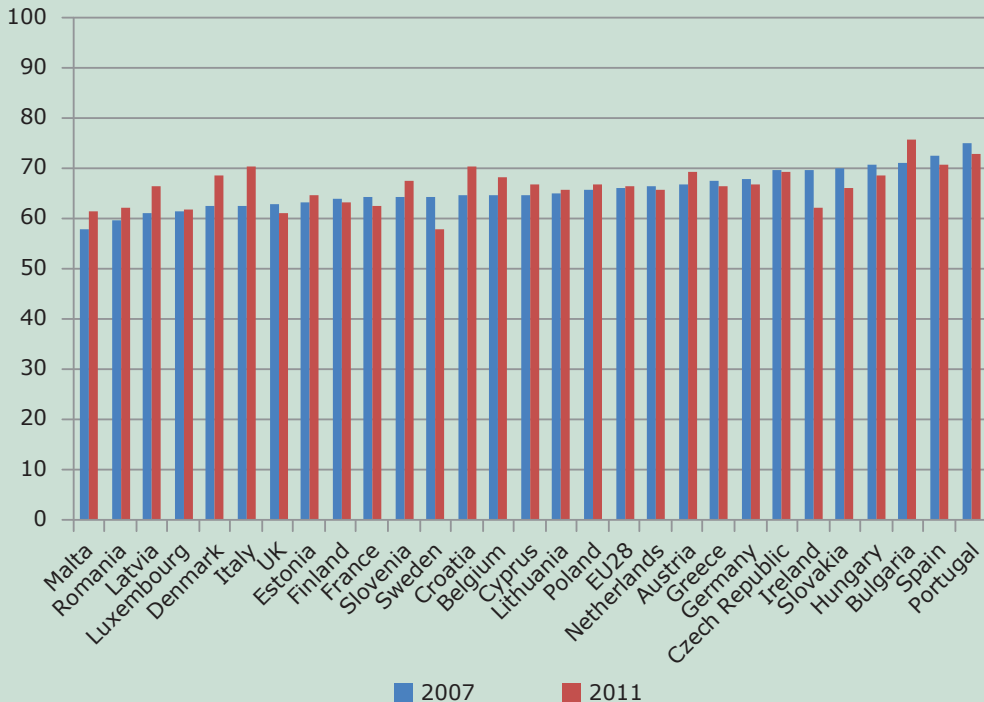


Table 5: Mental well-being by living arrangements, economic status and age (WHO-5 scale)

	2007	2011
Alone	65	65
Living with parents	67	68
Living with partner	67	66
Living with partner and children	63	65
Living with partner/children and parents	62	61
Employed	66	67
Unemployed	62	64
In education	68	68
Inactive	62	62
Aged 18–24	68	67
Aged 25–29	64	66
All aged 18–29	66	66

Note: Green shading indicates greater mental well-being (higher-than-average values); red shading indicates worse (lower-than-average values).

Figure 5: Mental well-being, by country (WHO-5 scale)



Sources of support

Respondents were asked who they would turn to in particular life situations if they needed help. The options to choose from included family, friends, an institution (professional), or nobody. The majority (85%) of young people would turn to their family if they were ill or if they needed to discuss a serious personal or family matter (66%). However, friends are almost as important a source of support as family when young people feel depressed and need someone to talk to (46% as against 48%). Friends are a more important source of support for young people living alone (57% of this group saying they would turn to their friends). And for young people still in education, who see their friends very often, they are also important (55%).

If they needed help in looking for a job, most young people would turn to family (41%) or friends (29%), while just under a quarter would seek professional help (23%).

Participation in society

Volunteering

In 2011 young people were asked whether they had participated in volunteer work for several types of organisations during the previous 12 months. Occasional volunteering is relatively common among young people: overall, one-third had participated in volunteering activities in the previous 12 months, while 11% had volunteered on at least a monthly basis. These are similar rates to those of older age groups, except that occasional volunteering becomes less common after the age of 50, while regular volunteering remains constant. Young people still in education are more likely to engage in volunteering, perhaps due to opportunities provided through educational institutions. Indeed, when looking at the type of volunteering organisations young people are involved in, most volunteer in education, culture or sports activities. Inactive and unemployed young people are the least likely to volunteer, probably because they have no access to volunteering opportunities through employment or education.

One-third of young people who volunteer occasionally or regularly would like to spend more time on volunteering, compared with a quarter of those who do not volunteer. Among those who do not volunteer, it is particularly those in education and who are unemployed who would like to volunteer more (31% and 28%), while those who are employed or inactive are less likely to wish to volunteer (both 23%).

Occasional volunteering among young people is most common in Finland, Austria and Ireland, where over half of all young people had participated in the previous year. Regular volunteering rates show much less diversity among the EU28 countries: the highest rate is 18% in Luxembourg, followed by 17% in France and Sweden.

Social activities and sports

Young people are more active than other age groups in social activities, with more than half active in sports and one-fifth active in clubs or societies on at least a weekly basis. Over three-quarters use the internet every day. There is a difference between the youngest age group (18–24) and next oldest age group (25–29) especially in daily internet use (81% for the younger group compared with 74% for the older) and in sports activities (59% compared with 49%).

Young people who are unemployed or inactive are less likely to use the internet daily than those who are employed or in education (perhaps due to lack of access). They are significantly less likely to be active in sports every week, most likely for reasons of cost or accessibility. They are also less likely to participate in clubs or societies.

Young people are most likely to participate in a club or society's social activities in Ireland (where 39% do so), the Netherlands (38%) and Sweden (37%), with Finland, UK, Croatia and Austria following closely behind (all over 33%). Weekly participation in sport or physical exercise is most common in Finland (83%), Ireland (71%), Sweden (69%) and the Czech Republic (68%).



Table 6: Participation in social activities, by economic status (%)

	Employed	Unemployed	In education	Inactive	Total
Internet (daily)	76	69	88	64	78
Sports (weekly)	54	45	66	34	55
Religious (weekly)	9	9	10	15	9
Social activities (clubs, societies) (weekly)	21	15	26	10	21

Political activities and trust in political institutions

Participation in political activities

Relatively few young people in Europe participate in meetings of political organisations, and a low proportion had contacted politicians in the year prior to the survey. While they are slightly more likely to have attended demonstrations, their typical way of participating in political activities is signing petitions. As with volunteering, young people currently in education are the most likely to participate in political activities (the largest difference is seen in the proportion attending protests or demonstrations). Young people who are unemployed or inactive are the least likely

to have participated in any kind of political activities in the past year.

Young people's political activity varies significantly between countries. For example, in Sweden over half of the young people participated in one of the activities in 2011, as against just 11% in Hungary and Bulgaria. Signing a petition is the most common form of participation by young people everywhere except in Bulgaria and in Cyprus, where attending trade union, political party or action-group meetings is more common. Young people were most likely to have attended protests or demonstrations at least once in the year prior to the survey in Greece, Cyprus, Spain and France.

Table 7: Participation in political activities by country, 2011 (%)

	Attended a meeting of a trade union, a political party or political action group	Attended a protest or demonstration	Signed a petition, including an email or online petition	Contacted a politician or public official	Any political activity
Hungary	1	0	10	1	11
Bulgaria	6	2	3	3	11
Malta	1	1	10	2	13
Poland	3	1	10	5	15
Portugal	2	7	10	0	15
Latvia	7	2	9	8	16
Slovenia	2	4	13	1	16
Lithuania	4	0	14	4	17
Estonia	3	3	13	6	20
Romania	6	3	13	4	20
Slovakia	0	4	20	4	22
Italy	7	11	16	2	22
Czech Republic	3	8	19	0	23
Belgium	4	8	21	3	26
Greece	2	22	12	3	27
EU28	6	9	20	6	27
UK	5	5	26	6	28
Spain	7	18	14	7	28
Cyprus	10	19	6	6	29
Germany	7	10	18	8	29
Austria	9	13	22	11	34
Luxembourg	12	12	24	11	34
Croatia	7	6	33	2	38
Netherlands	4	6	35	8	38
Ireland	11	12	26	7	38
France	10	17	30	7	39
Denmark	19	5	28	8	39
Finland	10	3	31	7	42
Sweden	15	12	48	13	54

Note: Green shading indicates higher levels of political participation; red shading, lower.



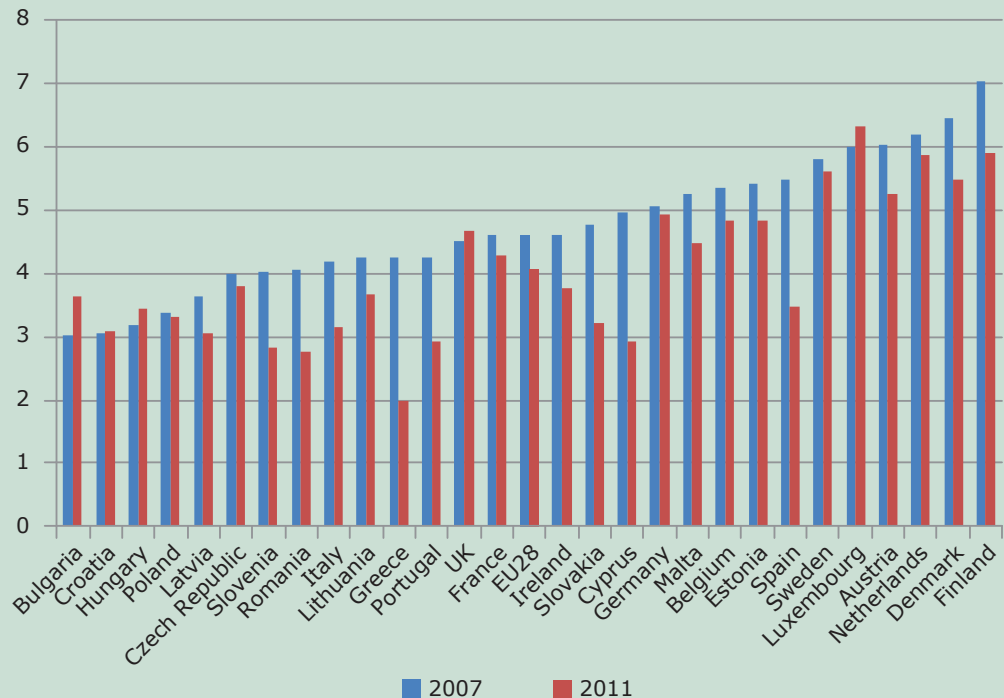
Trust in institutions

Young people in general trust institutions as much as older people do, with the exception of the police, whom they trust less. In 2011, young people rated their trust of the police at 5.7 on a scale of 1–10 (as against 6.0 for older groups). Interestingly, the police was the only institution that young people trusted as much as they did in 2007. Young people's trust in all other institutions has decreased in Europe since before the crisis: trust in the government fell by 0.5 points, in the parliament and in the press by 0.5 points, and in the legal system by 0.3 points.

In 2007, young people trusted the government most in Nordic countries such as Finland, Denmark and Sweden and in other advanced, high-income countries such as the Netherlands, Austria and Luxembourg. In contrast, trust in the government was low in many of central and eastern European countries.

The main change that had taken place by 2011 was that governments in some southern European countries that had been hit hard by the crisis, especially Greece, Cyprus and Spain experienced a huge decline in trust, whereas

Figure 6: Trust in government, 2007 and 2011 (scale of 1–10)



These declines in trust were a little smaller than those observed for older age groups.

Young people's trust in institutions depends considerably on the country context. Figure 6 shows levels of young people's trust in the national government, and how it changed between 2007 and 2011.

countries that had recently held elections, such as Bulgaria, Hungary and Luxembourg, showed a sizeable increase. Similar changes in young people's trust were recorded for other institutions (with the exception of the police, as already discussed).

Interpersonal trust and social tensions

Trust

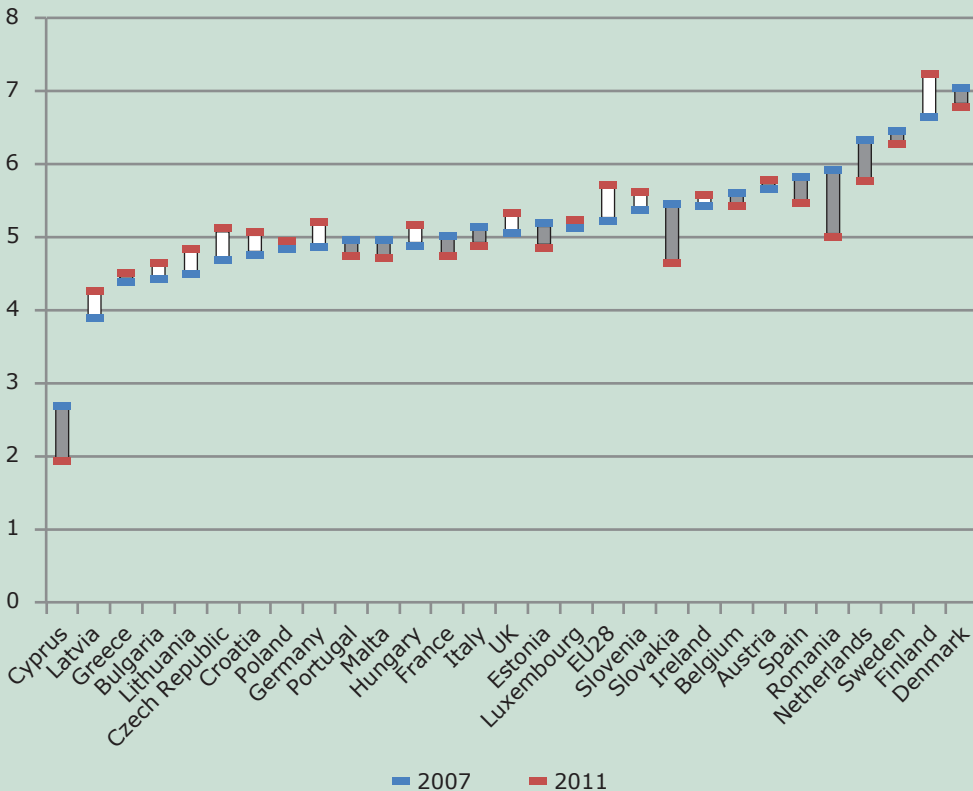
Overall in the EU28, young people trust others as much as people in other age groups do. There has been very little change since 2007 in interpersonal trust, and young people do not differ significantly in terms of gender and age in this respect. However, employment status clearly matters for trust, with students being the most trusting and those unemployed or inactive being the least.

There are also significant country differences in the level of young people's interpersonal trust. In some countries, such as the Czech Republic, Austria and Hungary, young people

are more likely to trust people than are older age groups, whereas in Sweden, the UK and Luxembourg, young people are less trusting than others. This may be explained by the finding that in many of the former group of countries young people generally have a better quality of life than older people (according to measures of subjective well-being, social exclusion and poverty), whereas in the latter group older people are generally better off (Eurofound, 2012).

While levels of interpersonal trust changed little in the EU28 overall, in a few countries significant change was recorded. For young people, trust has decreased in Romania, Cyprus and Slovakia, while it increased in Finland, Slovenia and Germany.

Figure 7: Interpersonal trust, 2007 and 2011 (scale of 1–10)





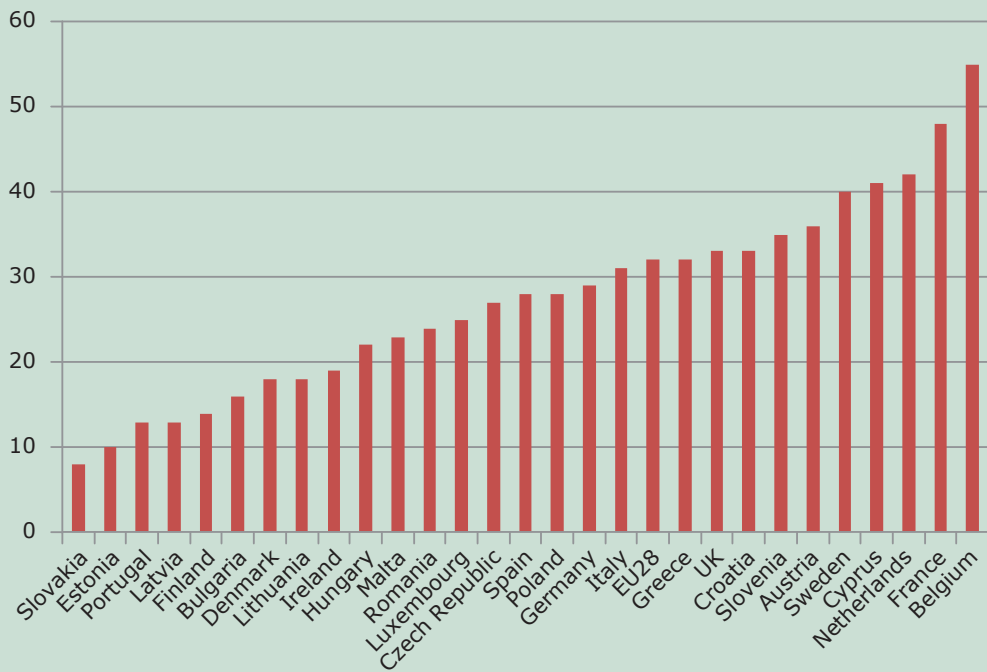
Social tensions

Perception of social tensions is very country-specific. Figure 8 illustrates the proportion of young people perceiving tension between different ethnic groups. As with the general population, young people are most likely to perceive ethnic tensions in countries with a lot of immigration, such as Belgium, France and the Netherlands. However, since 2007 the proportion of young people perceiving this type of social tension increased significantly in a number of other countries (Cyprus, the

Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Romania) while it decreased in others, most notably Denmark and Luxembourg.

Young people in the EU overall are similar to the general population in their perception of certain social tensions – namely, those between poor people and rich people, management and workers, and old people and young people. On the other hand, they are more likely to perceive a lot of tension between different racial and ethnic groups, different religious groups and groups with different sexual orientation.

Figure 8: Perception of ethnic tensions, 2011 (%)



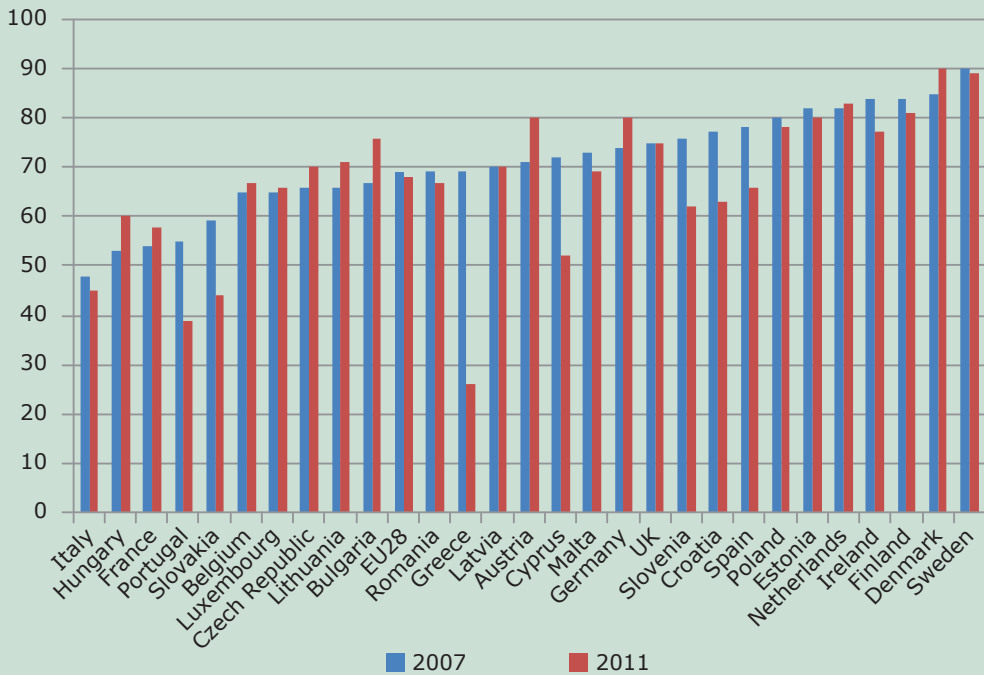
Note: Figures refer to the percentage of 18–29 year-olds who perceived ‘a lot’ of tension between ethnic groups in their country.

Optimism about the future

Over two-thirds of young people are generally optimistic about the future – a figure that has not changed much since 2007, and is significantly higher than the average for all age groups in the

EU (just over half). However, in many countries young people are less optimistic than before, and these are often also the countries where they seem to be facing the most difficulties in terms of deprivation and social exclusion, and perceived social tensions.

Figure 9: Optimism about the future, 2007 and 2011 (%)





Policy pointers



- The EQLS as well as other surveys such as European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) show that young people in many European countries are now more likely to live with their parents than before the crisis. More research needs to be carried out into the determinants of young people's living arrangements (for example, whether they live voluntarily with their parents or for how long they remain at their parental home). However it is clear that unemployment is still the key barrier to independence, with most unemployed young people living with and depending on their parents. Similarly, inactive young people are more likely to live with their parents now than in 2007, even if they have their own family. European and national policies (both employment and social) should recognise the importance of the successful transition of young people into adulthood and work.
- Young people who are actively looking for work, and inactive young people, would like to work if they could freely choose their working hours. This includes inactive young mothers and fathers looking after children in their home. National policymakers as well as social partners should support and where possible accommodate flexible arrangements to allow those who want to work to combine it with caring or other obligations.
- Young people have more face-to-face and phone or email contact with friends and family than older groups, and most remain in weekly contact with their parents even if they have already moved out of the family home. In addition, young people in all life circumstances are more satisfied with their life in general, their social life and family life than older groups in the same circumstances. However, unemployed and inactive young people give a comparatively low rating for subjective well-being. A number of studies, including a recent EQLS report on subjective well-being (Eurofound, 2013b), point to the negative and possible long-term impact of the crisis on mental health and well-being. If not recognised and mitigated early this could have negative and far-reaching consequences for young people in particular. In addition, in light of the current budgetary cuts to public services (including healthcare), governments and service providers should take into account the growing need for services among young people.

- At the same time, unemployed and inactive young people (whose levels of subjective well-being is lower than average) are also more likely to feel themselves socially excluded, to feel lonely, and to face a lack of social support; they also have lower mental well-being. Unsurprisingly, they also trust other people less, in general. This may mean that young people are less likely to seek help and assistance from organisations or service providers. The staff of such organisations should be particularly sensitive and reach out to potentially disengaged young people. The role of youth organisations and civil society should be emphasised as an important interlocutor.
- Volunteering activities and active citizenship are promoted as tools in EU policy to help young people get back to work and build social capital. However, young people who are not participating in employment (whether inactive or unemployed) are also the least likely to participate in society

through volunteering. They are also the least likely to participate in social activities (for example, in clubs or societies), participate in sports, and even to use the internet on a daily basis, probably due to difficulties with access to all of these activities. However, a significant proportion of unemployed young people would like to spend more time on volunteering activities.

- Few young people in general participate in political activities that involve attending meetings/demonstrations or contacting public officials: more commonly, they sign petitions. In general, young people are also less likely to trust institutions now than they did in 2007. Policymakers should recognise that some forms of political or social engagement may, for various reasons, not be popular or trusted among young people. More attention should be given to new forms of interaction. This is particularly valid when trying to connect with the most disaffected and disengaged.



Further reading

All Eurofound publications are available at www.eurofound.europa.eu

Council of the European Union (2013), *Council conclusions on enhancing the social inclusion of young people not in employment, education or training* (Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting, Brussels, 25–26 November 2013).

European Commission (2012), *EU Youth Report – Status of the situation of young people in the European Union, 2012*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

European Commission and European Council (2012), 'Joint report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field', COM(2012) 495 final, Brussels.

Eurofound (2012), *Third European Quality of Life Survey – Quality of life in Europe: Impacts of the crisis*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Eurofound (2013a), *Caring for children and dependents: Effect on careers of young workers*, Eurofound, Dublin.

Eurofound (2013b), *Third European Quality of Life Survey – Quality of life in Europe: Subjective well-being*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Eurostat (2013), Unemployment statistics, available at http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics

'Young women and men are an important resource of Europe. They represent potential for today and the future; however, they face many challenges such as unemployment and related social problems. In order to emerge from the current crisis and to prevent similar problems in the future, all Member States have to take immediate actions aimed at promoting youth employment, education and training, participation and social inclusion of young people.'

Council of the European Union: *Council conclusions on enhancing the social inclusion of young people not in employment, education or training*, Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting, Brussels, 25–26 November 2013

Foundation Findings provide pertinent background information and policy pointers for all actors and interested parties engaged in the current European debate on the future of social policy. The contents are based on Eurofound research and reflect its autonomous and tripartite structure.



**European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions
(Eurofound)**

Wyattville Road
Loughlinstown
Dublin 18
Ireland
Telephone: (+353 1) 204 31 00
Email: information@eurofound.europa.eu
Web: www.eurofound.europa.eu

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