



## **Exploring the European youth mosaic**

The social situation of young people in Europe

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My Life

I would like my life to be something more than a simple race,  
I would like my life to be not only full of summit and disgrace.  
I would like my life to be as an arrow in the sky,  
I would like my life to be as a chance for me to fly.

I would never let it go just as another day or two,  
I would never let it be something false and untrue.  
I would never let it take away all my happiness and dreams,  
I would never let it lose its way in the many streams.

*Penka Alexandrova*  
*16 years old, Bulgaria*

This report does not necessarily represent the official views of the Council of Europe and does not implicate the Council of Europe in any field of its activities.

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## Executive summary

This report is an overview of the social situation of young people in Europe. It is the first to try to include all the member and signatory countries of the Council of Europe, and so takes a global view against the background of rapid social change. Education, training and employment, family life and living arrangements, and social and political participation are the key themes. Achieving a balanced overview of patterns and trends across and between eastern, northern, southern and western Europe is a priority.

Encompassing diversity is the key problematic for European youth studies, but there are practical barriers along the way. Firstly, intercultural and comparative research is technically complex. Secondly, much more information is available for western Europe than for CEE/CIS countries. Thirdly, channels of communication and dissemination on youth issues are underdeveloped throughout Europe.

**To improve the quantity, quality and balance of information and knowledge** about young people in Europe as a whole, especially on a comparative and intercultural basis, **this report recommends:**

- establishing a comprehensive European database and a regular reporting system;**
- supporting European youth research by structured co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Commission.**

## Youth transitions

There is an overall trend towards longer and more complex transitions to adult life, to which extended education and training contributes significantly. Furthermore, gaps in young people's life chances and risks have widened, with educational attainment an increasingly important factor in influencing employment outcomes. However, socially vulnerable, marginalised and excluded young people are to be found everywhere in Europe, in the most affluent countries and regions as well as in the least prosperous ones.

Youth unemployment in northern and northwest European countries is increasingly associated with social and educational disadvantage, but in southern Europe and the CEE/CIS countries is a routine feature of young people's experiences regardless of their background and qualifications. Youth-specific labour markets are more visible in the northern part of Europe, but they do not take the same form everywhere. In southern Europe, labour markets include strong boundaries between stable and insecure employment. In the CEE/CIS countries, the vast majority of young people are in marginal employment. Across Europe as a whole, rising proportions of young people are combining their studies with some form of employment. Full-time and secure jobs have become scarcer for young people entering the labour force after compulsory education and training, who are also competing with students working part-time and, especially in the CIS countries, with adults taking second jobs to improve their earnings.

Young people are encouraged to develop life-plans and to choose lifestyles autonomously, but they remain dependent or partially dependent upon their parents for longer. In northern Europe, young people today are experiencing a relative loss of autonomy after a period of greater opportunities for financial and household independence for preceding generations. In

southern European countries, traditional patterns of living at home until marriage have been reinforced by more education and high unemployment. In CEE/CIS countries, established patterns of relatively early and predictable transition to marriage, family building and an independent household have changed rapidly in the 1990s. In some of the region's countries, over half of those in their late twenties continue to live with their parents. Young people everywhere say they would ideally like to live independently, but that they cannot afford to do so. At the same time, young people report that they are satisfied with their living arrangements, including when they are living with their parents. Highly disadvantaged young people, especially the unemployed, are likely to regard their living arrangements as unsatisfactory and too costly.

Young people seek 'life-wide' quality of life, but they expect neither government, nor employers, nor trades unions to provide the necessary measures and benefits to help them combine paid work, family and personal life. Our societies are far from creating positive social and working conditions in which they can do so – young people expect to rely on either their families or their own ingenuity and resources.

**This report recommends that studies be carried out on:**

- patterns, strategies and purposes of combining 'learning and earning' and 'living and working';
- the role and use of exchange and mobility in life and career planning, including young couples' strategies and decisions;
- strategies for 'mixing and matching' different sites and sources of information and practical experience, including the use of NICT and non-formal channels.

### **Social change and inequalities**

Current social change in Europe brings both more opportunities and choices and more risks and constraints for all its citizens. Young people, wherever they live and perhaps more than ever before, will need to gain and be able to use life management skills and the capacity for critical judgement. Many young people still do not have sufficient opportunities to do so, and this is a major challenge for youth policy in the coming decades.

Failure to acquire formal certificates and qualifications is an ever-surer route to economic and social exclusion in today's Europe. In the poorest and most unsettled countries, school failure rates have risen in the past decade. In the most affluent countries, it is becoming increasingly difficult to recoup the effects of school failure, which is concentrated amongst the most disadvantaged groups. Credential inflation aggravates the situation: those at the bottom of the qualifications hierarchy have the fewest employment options. Further, in CEE/CIS countries access to education and training beyond compulsory schooling is increasingly dependent upon the ability to pay.

Young women educationally out-perform young men, but participation rates still tail off at the upper levels and study choices remain gender-linked, especially in vocational education and training. Socialisation, schooling, occupational segregation by sex and the difficulties of combining paid work with family responsibilities influence these decisions. In the future, well-qualified young women may draw advantage from new and changing skills and competences demands. Unqualified young men are at particular risk of social marginalisation

and exclusion, whereas unqualified young women are more likely to withdraw into traditional family life.

Youth unemployment rates in EU Member States are generally twice as high as those for adults. In CEE/CIS countries, they are generally twice as high as the EU average, underlain with an emerging north-south gap. For those in employment, contractual conditions and pay levels have deteriorated, with increased rates of temporary, part-time and casual employment. This in itself leads to lower levels of social protection for employees.

Children and young people are over-represented amongst the poor, whatever the starting-point for the definition of poverty. When young people leave the parental home, their standards of living are likely to drop, and when their material circumstances are unfavourable from the outset, the risk of falling below the poverty line is very real. This risk is highest for those young people who are unable, in such circumstances, to rely on families, relatives and social networks for additional support. Young people in CEE/CIS countries are particularly heavily reliant on their families for financial support. In northern Europe, cumulative disadvantage results in extreme and intractable social exclusion amongst specific groups of young people.

**This report recommends that studies be carried out on:**

- mapping vulnerable trajectories more accurately and comprehensively as a basis for developing more effective prevention measures and support systems;
- monitoring the longer-term outcomes of poverty, unemployment and social marginalisation amongst young people, as they become parents and adult citizens.

## **Participation**

Young people throughout Europe widely support democracy but are distanced from and disillusioned with the channels of representative democracy, whose institutions and methods are neither willing nor capable of listening and responding positively to their needs and demands. Young people are generally in favour of European integration, but many are sceptical of the political and administrative machineries that go along with it. The majority of young people do not want to live in a 'Fortress Europe' and they would like to see a more equal distribution of resources throughout the globe. Young people across Europe have greater confidence in the courts and the police than in the institutions of representative democracy. In contrast with those in western Europe, young people in CEE/CIS countries place trust in the press and, above all, in the churches.

Lowering the voting age is not a priority for most young people, who place greater emphasis on more consultation, information and other ways of participation in civil society in order to secure a greater say. Similarly, young people in the EU do not place major importance on being able to vote for the European Parliament or in local elections as residents in other Member States. Mobility opportunities and social welfare rights in other countries are more important.

Few young people belong to political parties and voting levels are generally on the decline, as they are for older age groups. They are more likely to engage in 'protest politics', much more so in western Europe. Better-educated young Europeans are more likely to be involved in 'protest politics' and unemployed youth less than others are. Political transformation in the

CEE/CIS region has also enabled much younger adults to take prominent roles in public politics. There is no guarantee that this will become a permanent feature, but it may have a lasting effect in that young people have seen that it is possible.

Organised civil society is the forum in which young people are most active, with sports associations remaining by far the most popular. On average, no other category of association, social or political, draws in more than one in ten young EU-Europeans. Participation levels are much lower in southern than in northern Europe and young women participate less than young men do, except for in church groups. Participation levels are broadly similar in the CEE countries, but in the CIS countries especially, young people still lack trust in organised civil society and keep their distance. Young EU-Europeans see the education system, family and friends, and youth organisations in approximately equal measure as channels through which active participation could be encouraged.

Most young people across Europe support European integration, especially those in southern Europe and those living in regions with distinctive language and cultural traditions. Currently, this support is coupled with a greater awareness of national identity. Young people in the CEE countries have been particularly positive, placing more emphasis on the cultural aspects of integration in terms of shared values and traditions. Young EU-Europeans are more pragmatic and more sceptical, placing importance on the concrete and personally relevant benefits of European integration: currency, mobility and employment opportunities.

In the past decade, all European countries have had to face the fact that some young people hold highly intolerant political and social views, especially towards foreigners, immigrants and social minorities such as gays/lesbians and the disabled. Data for the CEE/CIS region give cause for real concern, against the background of the ‘ethnicisation’ of politics in some countries. In some parts of western Europe, one in five young people are prepared to say that “all foreigners should be sent home”, but overall the proportions lie well under half that level and have remained stable over the past five years. Young people are, for the most part, tolerant, liberal and cosmopolitan in their outlooks.

**This report recommends that studies be carried out on:**

- detailed inquiry into young people’s social and political participatory activities across the full range of national and cultural contexts, with a view to identifying ways to improve and reform existing democratic channels and mechanisms, both in the formal context (parties, parliaments, social partners ...) and within civil society (associations, mediation and advocacy, school councils ...);
- in-depth and longitudinal study of the social antecedents of the development of trajectories into intolerance during childhood and youth, in order to develop holistic counter-strategies.

## Being young in an ageing world

Three major factors are likely to influence what it means to be young in the coming decades: ageing societies; knowledge-based economies and societies; and new understandings of youth within the life-course.

Inequalities in the distribution of economic resources between the generations have become more marked. This creates imbalance in patterns of intergenerational reciprocities and contributes to existing polarisations in life chances and prospects between young people.

The under 25 age group is declining in the EU and CEE countries, whereas in the central Asian republics they still make up over half of the population. Immigration patterns have shifted towards a greater variety of origins and a higher proportion from outside Europe, especially from poorer countries. These changes mean that Europe's youth populations will become culturally, ethnically and linguistically more mixed. A generation gap could open up between a more cosmopolitan youth and older people lacking linguistic and intercultural skills and experience. Young people will also become a weaker electoral force in representative democracies. This may make it more difficult than ever to give young people an adequate voice within the channels of representative democracy.

A smaller active labour force together with rapidly evolving skills demands in the labour market may place young people in a more favourable position, in both employment and personal terms. Open and flexible societies with active and independent-minded citizens have to approach socialisation and learning differently. Multi-directional and continuous learning in more symmetrical, collaborative processes are better suited to the task. However, it is also possible that young people could come under greater pressure to become 'high-performance human resources' whilst employment opportunities may not recover and flexibilisation will undoubtedly continue. Access to and use of NICT is rising, with young people at the forefront, but the north-south and west-east divides remain marked and young women still lag behind young men on this count. In the EU, these gaps have not narrowed in the past five years. In most other respects, young women are the leading carriers of modernity, flexibility and open-mindedness.

Youthfulness seems to be drifting away from chronological age. The fixed sequence of life-course phases and their associated roles and tasks is loosening up. Within the youth phase, patterns of transition are more differentiated, less standardised. Identity building is becoming a more open-ended and fluid process. What it means to be 'adult' is far less taken for granted than it was half a century ago. Pluralized lifestyles and more varied family make-up influence how personal and family relations develop. We still know too little about the effects of these gradual changes upon children's and young people's quality of life and for identity building processes. It is possible that intergenerational solidarities in the private sphere will strengthen, whereas collective solidarities between age groups may weaken. Differentiations between young people may also splinter intra-generational solidarities and social relations.

We cannot know how young people will respond to all these trends, but rather than *being* problems and *having* problems in the eyes of the polity, young people in 21<sup>st</sup> century Europe should be at the forefront of *solving* problems as an integral part of the polity: the active agents of transforming the European mosaic. This requires that social organisation and public policies are capable of meeting the challenge of responding proactively to young people as citizens with equal rights and as those who will carry Europe's future.

**This report recommends that studies be carried out on:**

- assessing the quality and outcomes of non-formal learning;
- the impact of demographic change on patterns of sociability within and beyond households and kinship groups;
- the nature and consequences of extended (partial) dependency on parents;
- how the social contract between the generations works in everyday life;
- work-life balance and changing gender roles.

## 1 Introduction

This report provides an interpretive overview of the social situation of young people in Europe. It offers a selective synthesis of research-based information and knowledge on key topics, drawing on a very wide range of source material. It is the first time that a report of this nature covering the whole of Europe has been prepared.

The first report on the situation of young people in Europe appeared in 1991 and covered the twelve EU Member States; in 2001, a further report covering the now fifteen Member States was prepared.<sup>1</sup> The first reports on the situation of young people in central and eastern Europe, the Baltic states and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries became available in 2000.<sup>2</sup> **This report has faced the challenge of reviewing the situation for no fewer than the 48 signatory countries to the European Cultural Convention.** The outcome is inescapably incomplete, even more so given the necessary brevity of the text. **Each of the chapters might best be seen as an impulse to establish a systematic series of thematic reports in the future.**

Many readers will possess a wider and deeper knowledge and understanding of the patterns and issues presented, most particularly for their own country and others they know well. Some will find that their own country is not often mentioned, perhaps not at all. There are two main reasons. Firstly, this is a highly compressed overview. Instructive examples replace comprehensive descriptions. Secondly, the coverage of available sources is incomplete and skewed (see further below). This alone suggests that there is a great deal to do before genuinely comprehensive reports on the social situation of young people in Europe as a whole can be produced.

This report therefore seeks to take **a global view of the situation as a starting-point** for future work. Thematically, it focuses on education and training, employment, family life and living arrangements, and social and political participation. These topics are placed in the context of current social, economic and demographic change. Considerable emphasis is placed on existing and emerging patterns of inequalities in the patterns of chance and risk in young people's lives. The priority has been to maintain **a balanced overview of patterns and trends across and between eastern, northern, southern and western Europe**, wherever data sources permit and whenever appropriate. Therefore, some important topics have had to be sacrificed on this occasion (for example, health and well-being, leisure patterns and youth cultures). It has also meant that other key dimensions of differentiation are highlighted less systematically than would otherwise be possible and desirable. References to gender-specific patterns and issues are included, but are less detailed than they might be. Other dimensions are under-exposed simply because little comparative material makes the necessary differentiations. This applies in particular to the situations of young people from different

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<sup>1</sup> Lynne Chisholm and Jean-Marie Bergeret *Young People in the European Community: Towards an Agenda for Research and Policy* Report for the Task Force Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth, Commission of the European Communities, Brussels, June (now out of print); Antonio Schizzerotto and Giancarlo Gasperoni (eds.) *Study on the State of Young People and Youth Policy in Europe*, Report for the European Commission, Directorate General for Education and Culture, Brussels, January (<http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/youth/studies.html>)

<sup>2</sup> Siyka Kovacheva *Sinking or Swimming in the Waves of Transformation? Young People and Social Protection in Central and Eastern Europe*, European Youth Forum, Brussels; *UNICEF Young People in Changing Societies*, Regional Monitoring Report No.7, Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre

cultural and ethnic groups. This information gap should be of great concern to researchers and policymakers.

In the interests of readability, this report does not include in-text citation of sources, whether for specific figures or for particular studies. Given the report's scope, citations would have been either disturbingly numerous or unjustifiably over-selective. All figures and trends used in the text have been directly drawn from reputable and reliable sources in research and technical terms. All these sources, and many more besides, are included in an extensive bibliography at the end of the text.

## 1.1 The mosaic of youth in Europe

Amongst the numerous accounts that try to capture the nature of contemporary change in Europe, Castells' depiction of the network society<sup>3</sup> has caught the imagination of social scientists everywhere. **Network societies are societies of flows, offering a multitude of options for navigating paths through time and space.** Boundaries, whose purpose has been to separate people, groups, life spheres, territories, ideas, practices, lifestyles, and values – indeed social phenomena *tout court* – become more permeable. Boundaries, linked together in multi-dimensional ways, become more like communication arteries along which information, knowledge, ideas and values travel. They meet, exchange and move on at nodes in cultural, economic, political and social networks. The irregular and diverse spaces between the communication lines form the mosaic, made up of differently coloured contexts, ways of life and destinies. As the lines shift, so do the patterns of the mosaic. As ideas and experiences intertwine and recoil from each other, so do the individual colours and the overall pattern of the mosaic change their image.

Network societies are fundamentally open societies, although **this does not imply that inequalities of access, progress and outcome no longer exist or are less severe.** On the contrary, socially differentiated patterns of chances and risks become more complex, and hence less transparent – not only for researchers and policymakers to understand, but more importantly for young people trying to navigate their way through youth transitions. These changes present themselves to us in terms of the de-standardisation and fragmentation of the youth phase. They also underlie the blurring of boundaries between youth and the life-phases that precede and succeed it. As it becomes less certain how to define 'youth' precisely, and as we relax normative expectations about how young people should be and behave, so do we find it more difficult to answer the question 'what does it mean to be young today?' The task of describing and interpreting young people's social situation is challenging enough in any single national context. In comparative and intercultural context, it can sometimes seem overwhelming. **Encompassing diversity is the key problematic for European youth studies** and this is why we need new frameworks of understanding in order to grasp the complexities more effectively. Europe is a wonderful laboratory for trying out ways of doing so, as long as we do not forget that the empirical basis for research and policy is young people's real lives and the highly divergent life chances and prospects they face.

From the end of the Second World War, a clear-cut division seared the map of Europe, symbolised by the Berlin Wall and its real consequences. The division was never quite as clear-cut as all that, but it served a political purpose on both sides. **After 1989, everyone had to learn to read new maps.** The fact is that the crow flies more quickly from the English

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<sup>3</sup> Manuel Castells (1996) *The Rise of the Network Society* The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture Vol. 1, Oxford: Blackwell

Channel to the Black Sea than it does from Gibraltar to Stockholm. It is Kiev that lies halfway from the Atlantic to the Urals, and Prague lies to the west of Vienna. Everyone in Europe – researcher, policymaker, citizen and young person alike – has to relinquish the simple, binary and ‘boundaried’ images with which they had all grown up, wherever they had grown up. The European mosaic has changed its pattern logic, and we are still trying to grasp what we see. What, then are the emerging patterns of youth transitions, how do young people manage their lives, and what are the significant cleavages in chances and risks for young people within and across European societies? How can we make better sense of the East-West and South-North divides, which are often treated completely separately from each other in both research and policy communities?

The old divisions have not disappeared. **The east-west cut does not replace or negate the north-south divide.** We can no longer order our worlds – scientific, political, and everyday – as if there were predominant axes of similarity and difference. The mosaic is the richer metaphor for the open, plural, multicultural Europe of our aspirations, if not of our realities. Now, we are still looking for orientating clusters amidst the chaos – and progress is being made on that, whether in analysing social policies, paths to democracy or youth transition regimes. However, the real agenda is to move beyond the clusters, to release our understandings from the prison of thinking in boxes. What role do young people in Europe have in this vision? In ineptly trying to understand what youth is and what it means, **modern societies have thought of young people as *being* problems and as *having* problems.** If we now have the courage to dismantle the boundaries so that young people can accede to what is but their right – an independent voice in the polity, a sovereign group of the citizenry – then young people can become real actors of social change, along with everyone else in the community. **Young people in 21<sup>st</sup> century Europe should be at the forefront of *solving* problems:** the active agents of transforming the European mosaic.

## 1.2 Visibilities and invisibilities

What we see and how we see it is neither straightforward nor inclusive. This is no less valid for research-based information and knowledge than it is for everyday life, if in rather different kinds of ways. Building coherent, meaningful and comprehensive accounts of the social situation of young people in Europe faces at least three serious obstacles.

Firstly, **intercultural and comparative research is technically complex and must consider social and cultural specificities.** The information base is made up of data that has been collected at different times, in different ways, for varying purposes and building on specific systems of conceptual meaning. Macro-level trends may be discernable (such as the extension of education and training), but the contexts in which they take effect are largely dissimilar. Furthermore, whilst national or ‘EU’/‘CEE’ averages are useful initial signposts, these figures mask significant differences between countries, regions and social groups. The range of difference within a country can well be greater than the difference between the averages for different countries. Wherever possible, analyses should look closely at range, clustering, specificities and apparent aberrations in the data patterns. Small and seemingly atypical groups and patterns may be well-suited to throw light on key issues, especially since severe problems in young people’s lives are increasingly concentrated within particular groups that share a number of cumulative disadvantages.

In addition, **empirical data are often somewhat out-of-date by the time they get into print.** At comparative level, a five-year time lag until statistical tabulations become available is not unusual. By the time interpretive analyses appear, almost a decade can easily have passed by. Monographs published at the end of the 1990s typically refer to data sources from the early to mid 1990s.

Secondly, European youth research has to confront **serious imbalances in the amount of material available for different countries and regions**, in the themes for which material is available, and in the kinds of data that are available on specific themes. Both official statistics and research studies operate with different ages and age bands according to the norms and traditions of the country in which the information is collected or of the topic to be investigated. The sources used for this report refer to young people and young adults between the ages of 9 and 35. Most frequently, studies and surveys refer to those aged somewhere between 15 and 24 or 29. Social research in general also tends to over-study full-time pupils and students in upper secondary and higher education, since they are readily available captive populations for fieldworkers. Youth studies is fortunate to have a strong tradition of interest in socially disadvantaged or ‘unusual’ groups, but these kinds of studies are generally not comparative in nature.

In the text, we have largely dispensed with giving the exact ages to which a particular finding refers, because in an overview, a broader-brushed approach helps to clarify the overall picture. We have used **the term ‘young people’ and** (especially where it is evident that the topic is especially relevant for those aged 20+) **‘young adults’ as a signpost to a social life-phase**, rather than placing supreme importance on the particular age people have when they belong to it. This is not sufficient for more precise analyses, but it adheres to the notion of ‘functional adequacy’ as a methodological solution for the realities of technically and culturally divergent data sets. This means that researchers try to find the appropriate indicator for approximately similar concepts in different empirical contexts. In crude terms, this might mean comparing 18 year olds in one country with 20 year olds in another, because of differences in the structures of national education and training systems.

Furthermore, **the thematic coverage of large-scale survey and statistical sources in part reflects political and administrative priorities.** It is no accident that information on young people’s transitions between education, training and (un)employment is the most plentiful, even if youth specialists never fail to underline that the different aspects of young people’s lives must be seen holistically. Policy preferences rather than data availability in itself influences which dimensions of young people’s lives are highlighted. European Commission social policy reports, for example, rarely include age-specific analyses except for demographic trends and unemployment rates. Age-specific data usually exists at the aggregate level, but whether analysts and reports devote time and space to their interpretation depends on considerations extraneous to their relevance for youth policy, let alone youth studies. This is one reason for the current revival of the proposal to mainstream youth in European policy.<sup>4</sup>

In this context, we should recall that before 1989, youth studies in the CEE/CIS region was almost wholly identified with large-scale quantitative surveys carried out under the aegis of Komsomol-controlled research institutes. Research themes also differed from those in western Europe, since the political and cultural context was different. For example, transitions between school and work were officially unproblematic; this was not perceived as a priority

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<sup>4</sup> For example, see: European Commission (2001) *A new impetus for youth*, White Paper, Directorate-General for Education and Culture, COM (2001) 681, 21 November, Brussels, section 4.2

topic. After 1989, many research institutes were closed or turned to other topics and the scientific community was destabilised. A decade later, **the infrastructure for youth studies in CEE/CIS countries remains weak, and this contributes to the poor visibility of information about young people's lives in this part of Europe.** This report's own bibliography is therefore also imbalanced on a number of dimensions. Much information simply does not exist, nor does the necessary information exist in systematic form. Neither is what exists readily accessible to comparative researchers.

Thirdly, **channels of communication and dissemination on youth issues are underdeveloped throughout Europe.** Only a few countries, largely in northwest Europe, have specialised youth studies journals and publishing houses. The overwhelming majority do not, and rely on general, discipline-based social scientific exchange and dissemination channels. The 1990s have seen the establishment of specialised outlets that are known and used beyond their immediate national and linguistic reference communities, together with some regional initiatives and publishing ventures by individual research institutes, often in collaboration with quality publishers. For example, specialised national research institutes, themselves publicly funded, sponsor *DJI-DISKURS* (in German; from 1990) and *AGORA/Débats-Jeunesses* (in French; from 1995). Each tries to include articles from other countries and cultures, translated in-house. Similar channels exist in parts of central and eastern Europe, if in far simpler form, such as the bulletin *Mládež Společnost Stát*, published via the Institute of Children and Youth in Prague, and regular publications under the auspices of the Slovak Sociological Association in Bratislava.

Currently, the two leading research journals in Europe are *YOUNG* (since 1993), an interdisciplinary review managed through the Nordic Youth Research Information System (NYRIS), and the *Journal of Youth Studies* (JYS; since 1998), published commercially by Carfax Journals Ltd. and managed through the University of Glasgow/Scotland. Both are published in English and both aspire to an intercultural-comparative and international profile, although neither has quite succeeded yet. A review of all the issues published since their respective foundation shows that half of the articles published to date are empirically grounded in the country (JYS: UK) and region (YOUNG: five Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) from which they originate and whence they are managed. A further one-quarter of the articles in JYS come from North America and Australia. YOUNG attracts virtually no papers from these regions of the world. Rather, a quarter of its contributions is abstract in nature and is not explicitly related to a given context, although most have Nordic authors. Both journals publish a small number of articles from other European countries and regions (13% each). Both also publish a modest proportion of intercultural-comparative contributions (JYS: 10%; YOUNG: 14%). Neither can show, to date, many papers about or from CEE/CIS countries or from southern Europe (JYS: 3 from each region; YOUNG: 2 from each region). It is important to add that these distributions reflect, in the first instance, the distribution of articles received, and only subsequently those accepted. Journals cannot publish articles that are not submitted to them, although the reasons why writers decide to submit a paper or not are highly complex, with the question of having to prepare a text in English only one of the hurdles, if a very significant one in most cases.

Given the lack of good commercial publishing houses at European level in this field, it is clear that **information on and interpretation of young people's lives in most parts of Europe, especially in CEE/CIS and southern Europe, is in short supply.** These imbalances run directly alongside the knowledge that, overall, young people in these parts of Europe are especially likely to come up against obstacles and problems as they try to

formulate, plan, manage and realise their life-projects. We have been very conscious of these difficulties in preparing this report, but we have obviously not been in a position to solve them. This is clearly a priority task for the coming years.

## 2 Changing times and changing lives

The classic way to describe and compare the social situation of young people is to trace the paths they follow towards independent adulthood and full citizenship. These paths are usually described as **a series of steps from one set of social circumstances to another**, summarised as patterns of youth transitions. These patterns are made up of several core elements, which are always interconnected but which are typically described as if they were separate from each other. The core elements comprise moving

- from education and training towards employment, and
- from financial and residential dependency on parents (or their substitutes) towards economic independence, residential autonomy and establishing a household and family of one's own.

**Young people navigate their paths through these transitions**, whereby the balance of chances and risks with which they set out and which they encounter along the way vary considerably. This means that issues related to disability, ethnicity/race, gender, region, sexual orientation and social background tend to make a substantial difference to young people's prospects as they try to make their way through youth transitions. Accounts of youth transitions in given times and places also usually try to provide some contextual information on young people's standards and quality of life and about their leisure and lifestyles, but the main focus is on education/work and household/family patterns.

In the European context, the main aim is to describe and interpret the similarities and differences in patterns of youth transitions between countries, regions and social groups, together with their trends over time. The information base remains highly incomplete, but statistics and large-scale surveys do provide some basis for comparison on a range of key indicators. Broadly speaking, they chart **an overall trend towards longer and more complex transitions to adult life**. They document the fact that it has become steadily more difficult for young people to acquire economic and household independence and autonomy, certainly across the last thirty years.

There is also little doubt that the **gaps in life chances and risks have widened** amongst young people. A majority of young people in Europe are managing to make their way more or less successfully and a significant minority have highly disadvantaged lives now and very poor prospects for the future. These **socially vulnerable, marginalised and excluded young people are to be found everywhere in Europe**, in the most affluent countries and regions as well as in the least prosperous ones. They share a series of multiple disadvantages, in which educational failure and labour market precarity play significant roles in fixing their social situations in childhood and youth as long-term destinies from which it will be increasingly difficult to escape.

It is important to underline here that the CEE/CIS countries diverge at least as much from each other as do EU/western European countries. If anything, they have become more different from each other during the 1990s than they were before the collapse of the Soviet bloc. The key feature of change **in the CEE/CIS macro-region** has been **a very rapid and extreme flexibilisation of pathways** within the context of continuing uncertainty about life-planning outcomes. The contrast is particularly acute given the highly institutionalised and standardised pathways that young people followed before 1989. In addition, many of the countries in question are experiencing **very rapid cultural modernisation** alongside strong

economic turbulence, so that young people are beginning to relinquish longstanding ways of life, especially with respect to marriage and family building.

## 2.1 Education, training and employment

**More education and training is a key driver of lengthening youth transitions** in recent decades. Some would argue that it is the most important single factor of all. Many more young people stay in education and training for much longer than was the case thirty years ago, although in some countries (for example, in Portugal and the United Kingdom) participation rates beyond the age of 16 did not really take off until the 1990s. Furthermore, some central and eastern European countries saw declining participation rates in post-compulsory and higher education in the early 1990s, although these have since recovered in many countries (but not, for example, in Romania or Armenia) especially in the higher education sector.

The trend towards higher and longer participation rates in education and training is a long-term phenomenon that can be traced back to the beginning of the last century. The trend accelerated from mid-century onwards, especially in southern European countries, which began from much lower starting points. Young men's participation rates exceeded those of young women to their greatest extent around the 1950s. By the late 1980s, the gender gap had closed. Today, virtually everywhere in Europe, **young women out-perform young men as far as educational achievement and qualifications are concerned** – but not in terms of their distribution across or return from education and training.

All data from western Europe confirm the correlation between early school leaving and family or social disadvantage. **Educational success at any given level correlates with better quality employment outcomes.** Studies in CEE/CIS countries suggest that advantages also accrue from *nomenclatura* family backgrounds, whether in terms of educational success, employment chances or in making a success of self-employment. However, young female entrepreneurs are very rare indeed in at least some countries (such as Armenia, Georgia and the Ukraine). **Youth unemployment in CEE/CIS countries is a more generalised phenomenon** than it has become in western Europe. Periods of unemployment are a routine element of perfectly ordinary and typical transition biographies, whatever the social background and educational level of the young person concerned. The same could be said for young **people in southern Europe**, but the effects of regional and social disadvantage are probably greater than in eastern Europe. In other words, **polarisation tendencies are stronger** and more firmly embedded in the south than in the east.

We know that education and qualification levels offer some advantages on the labour market and some protection against the risk of unemployment on initial transition and afterwards. However, comparisons over time show that **access to employment** (especially stable employment) **has become more difficult for each successive generation since the 1960s in western Europe, whatever their level of education and qualification.** For young people growing up in the CEE/CIS transition economies in the 1990s, labour market access has changed out of all recognition. Almost overnight, circumstances shifted from predetermined job allocation and guaranteed employment to complete liberalisation and high rates of unemployment. Taking the longer-term view, it is young people in the northern half of Europe whose employment chances have deteriorated most severely in relative terms. In absolute terms, **young people in southern European countries have suffered the greatest difficulties for the longest period**, with little sign of real improvement. As far as initial

transitions to employment are concerned, we might well conclude that the different parts of Europe have experienced different routes to broadly similar destinations.

Completion of upper secondary level education is typically the key threshold for lowering the risk of unemployment during initial transitions between school and work. In some countries, however, this threshold is not such a significant marker. For example, in southern Europe unemployment rates are high regardless of qualification level. **In the CEE/CIS countries, an emerging polarisation of chances and risks between those who leave after completing basic compulsory schooling and those who go on to higher education** has become an important feature during the 1990s. In Slovenia, for example, about a quarter of each year's cohort either leave on completing basic schooling at age 15+ or do not complete secondary education through to age 18+.

The structures of national labour markets continue to differ quite substantially across Europe. Detailed information about their impact upon young people's transition to employment is more accessible for EU Member States than for Europe as a whole. Broadly speaking, **youth-specific labour markets are more visible in the northern part of Europe**, but they do not take the same form everywhere. Countries with 'dual systems' of work-and-learning based apprenticeships are organised around training contracts and associated fixed-term employment (as in Austria, Denmark and Germany). Other countries make greater use of youth-specific, flexible forms of youth employment (as in France, Luxembourg, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom).

**Young people are much more likely to have temporary or otherwise insecure contracts.**

It is not clearly known whether this is due to their age as such or whether it is a reflection of general trends towards the flexibilisation of employment. For example, in Spain, fixed-term contracts affect both younger and older workers to a high degree. In contrast, older workers in Belgium and France are very unlikely to hold insecure contracts, so the relative difference for younger workers is a significant one. It may be that the structures of 'southern European-type' labour markets include strong boundaries between stable and insecure employment. Young people are new entrants to the system and have to cross over that boundary, which takes a long time. In the interim, they accept a series of temporary and part-time jobs. In comparison, 'northern European-type' labour markets tend to accord young people a specific and relatively disadvantaged status because of their age, which acts as a proxy for lack of knowledge and experience. With increasing seniority, they gradually gain access to better-paid and more secure employment.

**In central and eastern Europe**, youth-specific labour markets have sprung up in a wholly deregulated manner. **The vast majority of young people, regardless of their level of qualification, are in marginal employment in both public and private sectors.** Some countries are well on the way to completing the jump from rapid de-industrialisation in the early 1990s to service-based economies (such as in Hungary and Estonia). Others (such as Bulgaria and Lithuania) lag behind. It is as well to recall just how dramatic the situation was in the early 1990s. Reports suggest that the early 1990s in Georgia's capital, Tbilisi, saw two-fifths of its workforce formally unemployed and its factories operating at 15% capacity. This is only ten years ago. Today's young adults (and their parents) will readily remember those days as they try to build their own adult lives.

The 1990s have witnessed **rising proportions of young people who are combining their studies with some form of employment**. Different sources offer different and unsystematic accounts of the numbers involved in different parts of Europe. Nevertheless, it is clear that this is becoming more common as part of young people's transition strategies. The **availability of part-time and suitably flexible working hours is the trigger** for higher rates of combining study and work, rather than being solely and directly a function of economic need. In Ireland, for example, working whilst studying was never a widespread option in the past, if only because the weak labour market offered few opportunities to do so. Today, with a strong economy, students are one of the strongest sources of employment growth. As elsewhere, they work largely in the service sector on part-time and non-standard contracts.

Youth unemployment rates in most EU Member States began to stabilise and decline at the close of the 1990s – although from widely differing levels, with differing degrees of success and with continuing very high rates in southern Europe. However, today's European labour markets offer very differently structured opportunities than they did at the beginning of the 1990s. **Young people are crowding into a small number of service sector jobs**, most especially in hotels/restaurants and in retail, and typically on flexible contracts. **This may suit quite well those who are students, but it also contributes to the polarisation of employment chances and risks**. Young people who enter the labour force on completing compulsory education and training find ever fewer full-time, stable jobs on offer. They must increasingly compete for the more insecure jobs that are available with those for whom this kind of employment is simply a 'staging post' on the way to better things.

**Some commentators have suggested that the situation of today's young people in central and eastern Europe indicates how the situation in Europe as a whole is likely to develop in the coming decades**. The trends described immediately above are now entrenched features of youth labour markets in all the CEE/CIS countries. Most young people making initial transitions to employment, whatever their qualification level, spend and expect to spend considerable lengths of time in insecure and marginal employment. They accept extended and uncertain transitions as an inevitable life experience for those living in societies that are also in transition. Typically, they see their employment situations as provisional and temporary – however long those situations last. **In other words, across the whole of Europe, youth transitions are increasingly taking on the character of open-ended processes in both objective and subjective terms**.

## 2.2 Families and Households

Patterns of stability and change in youth transitions for personal and family life highlight **complex and paradoxical experiences of dependence and autonomy for young people** in Europe today. Our societies permit and encourage high levels of individual autonomy as far as lifestyles and life-plans are concerned. Concurrently, economic and social policy changes have brought about higher levels and more extended periods of interdependence between family members. In particular, young people are dependent or partially dependent upon their parents for longer. Both social norms and social policy provisions exert looser control over how people should and do live and plan their lives. Yet turning aspirations and expectations into personal realities remain subject to financial and legal obstacles of various kinds.

The detailed picture is a very varied one, but available data show **two basic parameters of difference between**, firstly, the **northern and southern EU countries and**, secondly, **pre- and post-1989 patterns for central, eastern and south-eastern European countries**. Age and social circumstances together with gender, region and ethnicity crosscut and sometimes re-fashion these basic parameters. In addition, there are always exceptions and special cases. So, for example, Ireland is sometimes more similar to southern European patterns than those of northwest Europe, and Slovenia is often more similar to southern and middle Europe than it is to other CEE or southeast European countries.

Over the past half-century, both average age at marriage and the onset of childbearing have risen everywhere in Europe, although a few countries still have relatively high rates of teenage pregnancies (such as the UK). **Young people in northern European countries first experienced greater autonomy and independence in all spheres of life, followed by a gradual deterioration in their opportunities for financial and household autonomy**. During the same period, both **cohabitation and the single lifestyle** (whether actually living alone or not) consistently **gained popularity** at the expense of marriage followed by childbearing. Especially in the Nordic countries, in France and in the UK, marriage and the birth of a first child are increasingly independent events that do not necessarily occur in this sequence, nor does one necessarily imply the other. For example, by the mid-1990s, the mothers of two-fifths of all children born in Sweden and Denmark were not married when they gave birth.

**In southern European countries, the initial trend towards more autonomy and independence for young people set in rather later and developed in different ways**. For both economic and cultural reasons, young people always remained in their parents' home for much longer; this pattern is now stronger than ever. **Cohabitation and living an independent single lifestyle remain rare**. For these reasons alone, marriage has taken place much later – Italy is a good example here. It is also more likely that young adults will continue to live with parents, in-laws or other relatives after they marry, than is the case in northern Europe. On the other hand, there is evidence that the social climate within families has become more relaxed and open, so that young adults are largely able to lead their own lives, whilst still being part of a family household and in many cases being at least partially financially dependent on their parents. Generalisations are particularly difficult on this count, since, for example, young women still enjoy less freedom of action than do young men whilst living at home, quite apart from significant differences between southern European countries and regions within countries.

**In the state socialist countries of central and eastern Europe, family and household transitions were no less pre-structured than were transitions between school and work**. Establishing an independent household was largely dependent on being married and, in countries with severe housing shortages, on already having children and therefore living in crowded conditions. The predictable, controlled and protected quality of the course of people's lives maintained traditional patterns and sequences of youth transitions and ways of life. **Quite spectacular change has taken place during the 1990s throughout the region**. Overall, the numbers of **marriages and births have** respectively **fallen** by two-fifths and one-third. Average **age at marriage is rising**, especially in central European countries but less so in CIS countries, where the tradition of relatively early marriage continues as long as it is a financially feasible proposition. The Baltic countries are rapidly moving towards Nordic patterns, most clearly in Estonia, where marriage rates have fallen by two-thirds and where fewer than 15% of those aged 25-29 still live with their parents.

**Accommodation patterns in this part of Europe are now very varied.** In some countries, over half of those in their late twenties continue to live with their parents (as in Azerbaijan and Bulgaria). In others, such as Slovenia, privatisation of the housing market has made access to independent accommodation much more difficult than before. By the mid-1990s, two-fifths of those aged 25-34 were still living with their parents or relatives. But in the former eastern Germany, young adults have been able to set up their own homes earlier than their western peers can. Housing may be often lower quality, but it is relatively plentiful and rents are correspondingly lower.

With the partial exception of the Nordic countries, **public housing policies** everywhere in Europe **do not make specific provision for young people's needs** except in very particular circumstances. Provision may exist for the homeless and those without parents and families, but the 1990s have largely seen restrictions and cutbacks in social benefits and assistance for young people across the board. Otherwise, provision is linked to marriage and, especially, having children, irrespective of parental age. Young adults, who have lower incomes and are new entrants to the housing market, will inevitably be at some disadvantage and will have to invest a higher proportion of their income to pay for independent accommodation. Surveys and studies also consistently show that **young people everywhere say they would ideally like to live independently, but that they cannot afford to do so.**

**At the same time, young people report that they are,** on the whole, **satisfied with their living arrangements,** including when they are living with their parents. When they do move out, they are realistic about the fact that they will pay more for a lower standard of accommodation than they had with their parents – this is the price of establishing full personal independence. Some studies suggest that, in most cases, a strong desire to move away from home may have less to do with the quality of relations with one's parents than with unsatisfactory living standards, especially restricted space. In fact, young families are more likely to live in unsatisfactory and cramped conditions than are young adults aged under 25.

The picture is quite different, though, for young people who already suffer from a series of other disadvantages, most especially unemployment. These young people are very likely to regard their living arrangements as unsatisfactory and, if living independently, as too costly. **When young people have left home, are unemployed and are living either alone or with a non-working partner, their risk of falling into real poverty is very high.** This produces a seemingly paradoxical difference between northern and southern Europe. In southern Europe, far fewer young people leave home before their mid-twenties. Living at home protects most young people against real poverty regardless of their employment status. In northern Europe, despite rather more favourable social welfare provisions, the state and public policy does not or cannot provide the same degree of protection against trajectories into exclusion as families everywhere seem more able to do.

**Parents and relatives have always been an important source of support and financial assistance to young people** as they negotiate their pathways to economic independence and household and family formation. There is consistent evidence to suggest that Europe is returning to 'older patterns' in this respect, with the difference that an intermediate period of quasi-(in)dependence for young people has developed and is lengthening. Therefore, we might see the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the exception rather than the rule. In many (but not all) parts of Europe and for differing lengths of time, **buoyant employment and expanded public support systems** furnished significant proportions of young people with the

means to achieve greater independence and autonomy on their own accounts. This **dissipated towards the close of the century**, in some places dramatically so.

**Parents and relatives must now try to replace the widening gaps**, and to do so under changed economic and social circumstances. Parents are likely to help financially so that their offspring can set up their own home. For example, in mid-1990s France and Portugal, three-fifths of the under 25s living independently received such assistance. Young entrepreneurs in CIS countries during the 1990s were much more likely to be successful if they had been able to rely on start-up assistance from family and friends – banks have not been generous to the young self-employed. One-fifth of employed 15-24 year olds in the EU declare that they receive the major part of their financial resources from their parents and relatives. The majority of those who are neither students nor employees are in the same position. With the exception of those living in Nordic countries, **young adults considering how to combine paid work with family life expect neither government, nor employers, nor trades unions to provide the necessary measures and benefits**. Instead, they expect to rely on either their families or their own ingenuity and resources.

Finally, there is little solid evidence that achieving work-family balance will be notably easier for today's young people than for their parents and grandparents. There is little doubt about their aspirations in this respect. **Young people seek 'life-wide' quality of life and they want employment opportunities and working conditions that allow them to balance income and occupational satisfaction with pursuing their personal interests and meeting the demands of family life**. The realities are rather different, and they have implications for gender balance too. Although EU employees aged under 25 are less likely to work long hours than those in their early thirties, one-fifth of young men report working weeks of over 50 hours (most of all in Greece and the UK). Only one in ten young women is in the same position, and far more young women are employed on a less than full-time basis – especially, but not only, if they have children. Studies indicate that for the EU, parents in their early twenties are not noticeably different from those ten years older with respect to who looks after the children – namely, almost all the mothers do so, but on average only half the fathers. The average masks, as so frequently, a wide range of difference, with Nordic and Dutch young men as the models of best practice. This all suggests that even where young women and, to date less decisively, young men want to establish balanced lives in all respects, **we are far from creating positive social and working conditions in which they can do so**. In a variety of ways, current circumstances are more likely to contribute to maintaining traditional gender roles, at the latest once children arrive, and they are not conducive to planning for positive work-life balance for individuals or for couples.

## □ Youth transitions: Key Trends

- Young people in today's Europe experience longer and more complex transitions to adult life. Highly flexible pathways replace formerly more standardised tracks towards employment and family building.
- Young people stay longer in full-time education and training. In most parts of Europe, post-compulsory and higher education and training participation rates are steadily rising.
- It takes longer for young people to establish independent households and families of their own. Marriage rates have fallen, age at marriage has risen. Fertility rates have fallen, age at the birth of a first child has risen, and higher proportions of women remain childless.
- Young people everywhere in Europe stay longer in the parental home. Those in southern Europe and in most parts of the CEE/CIS region usually do not leave home until they marry. Their counterparts in northern Europe are more likely to cohabit and lead single lifestyles.
- Youth unemployment rates are significantly higher than general unemployment rates everywhere in Europe, but they are especially high in southern Europe, in the CEE countries and, most of all, in the war-struck zones of southeast Europe and the CIS countries.
- Young people are over-represented in marginal and precarious employment everywhere in Europe, but in different ways and to differing extents. In western Europe, part-time employment is especially frequent. In southern Europe, fixed-term contracts are common. In the CEE/CIS region, young people are particularly likely to be in casualised and unregulated employment – that is, having no formal contract at all.
- Rising proportions of young people combine studies with paid work. Some young people see this as a way to improve their skills and experience profile, but the key motivation is the need for income and the key facilitator is the availability of suitably flexible job opportunities.
- Both young adults and their parents expect neither the state, nor employers or trade unions to fill the gaps left by the reductions in social and welfare benefits that have taken place everywhere in the past decade. They expect to rely on each other and their own ingenuity.

### 3 New patterns of inclusions and exclusions

When making transitions within and between the levels and forms of the educational system, labour market and family and social networks, young people in Europe face significant patterns of social inclusions and exclusions. Economic and cultural globalisation processes, which affect all world regions, including Europe, are changing established patterns of social inequalities and how these are re-created generation for generation. These processes shatter and reshape some of the old patterns, but equally engender new ones. The most visible consequences of change cluster both at the core and at the margins of our economies and societies, providing more opportunities for autonomous and self-fulfilling life for some and precariousness and impoverishment for others.

Unresolved debate continues on the relative significance of the ‘old inequalities’ (such as social origin and gender) versus the ‘new inequalities’ (such as the digital divide and monolingualism) in shaping patterns of life chances and risks. The nature and implications of individualisation processes for personal identities and social solidarities play an important role in this debate, which seeks to describe and understand the major shift from industrial to post-industrial economies or, to use currently popular terminology, the transition towards information, knowledge and network based societies. We may not have the answers, but it is clear that social change is not a simple, clean process that moves consistently in one direction everywhere. Traditional, modern and future-oriented patterns exist side by side, frequently clashing with one another. For example, de-industrialisation is a common process in both the UK and Romania. In the former, this process leads to greater share of employment in the service sector, while in the latter the workforce shift is towards agriculture. Yet, the growth of employment in agriculture in Romania runs parallel with one of the widest spreads of mobile phones per head of the population in Europe.

It seems clear that **current social change in Europe brings both more opportunities and choices and more risks and constraints for all its citizens**, although these patterns are structured in very different and quite specific ways, both at individual and group levels. These changes affect young people in particular in that they must plan and live their lives under rapidly changing economic and social conditions. The changes also have specific effects on young people precisely because they are young, and therefore in a stage of their lives that makes a large number of simultaneous demands on their resilience and competences. In other words, **young people are not only growing up for the one and only time in their lives, but they are also growing up in a very particular time and place in European history**. This is most acutely visible for young people in central and eastern Europe, of course. The risks and uncertainties they face are described further below, but they also meet with many new opportunities for participation in public and state education, in Western type businesses, newly formed companies, privatised state institutions, and self-employment. These kinds of developments mean that **young people** in Europe today, wherever they live and perhaps more than ever before, **will need to gain and be able to use life management skills and the capacity for critical judgement**. Many young people still do not have sufficient opportunities to do so, and this is a major challenge for youth policy in the coming decades, if the risks of new patterns of inclusions and exclusions are to be countered effectively.

### 3.1 Educational inequalities

Young people are fully aware of the importance of education and training for assuring their social integration, even if they have many criticisms about current systems and their own experiences in them. **Failure to acquire formal certificates and qualifications is an ever-surser route to economic and social exclusion** in today's Europe. Paradoxically, the general rise in formal attainment is accompanied by and ultimately creates deepening inequalities for those who simply do not or cannot 'make the grade'. Indeed, non-completion rates have increased in some countries, particularly in the conflict-struck zones in the Balkans and the Caucasus, but also in the economically disadvantaged regions in many parts of the continent as a whole, and particularly in southern Europe. In northern and western Europe, dropout rates continue to fall, but it is becoming ever more difficult to reach those who are most difficult to help. Here, it is highly likely that only alternative options and routes grounded in non-formal and informal learning contexts and methods will succeed. There is also clear evidence that young men from disadvantaged backgrounds, and young people from at least some (but not all) ethnic minority and migrant origins, are most likely to drop out and fail.

**Regional disparities in educational opportunities are also widening.** In the Baltic and Central European countries, young adult enrolment rates in secondary and tertiary education rose in the 1990s, but in the CIS countries, in Romania and in the Czech Republic, they have fallen. In Georgia, compulsory schooling completion rates have fallen by a quarter. In Albania, Bulgaria and Romania, basic school failure affects a fifth of each cohort. Half of Roma children aged 7-16 who live in Bulgaria do not go to school. Dropout rates vary widely throughout the CEE/CIS region as a whole, generally rising from west to east and from north to south. These rates can also reach relatively high levels in countries that otherwise have high participation rates through to higher education, such as in the case of Slovenia. This is an indication of highly selective education systems, which produce access bottlenecks early on but then achieve high levels of participation for those who manage to 'survive the squeeze'. It is important to add that **in some countries, primary school completion rates remain problematic** – for example in Romania and Russia, especially in rural areas.

At both the top and the bottom of the qualifications spectrum, we can detect quite specific forms of inclusions and exclusions operating side by side. At the top of the spectrum – those with higher education diplomas – differentiations open up based on exactly which kinds of qualifications have been acquired from which institutions. At the bottom of the spectrum – those with the lowest or no qualifications at all – differentiations open up based on local labour markets and the ways in which institutionalised transitions systems pre-structure opportunities and risks. **Young people at both ends of the spectrum experience the impact of credential inflation, and in the process gaps open up between young people**, who are all struggling to establish a reasonable start in adult life. Those at the top unwittingly press down on those further down, whereas those at the bottom are pushed out of the game altogether.

In the CEE countries, public investment in vocational education and training has fallen, but employers and the business world have not compensated for this. Work-based training programmes are in short supply in this part of Europe, especially in rural regions. As ever, the contraction in training opportunities affects young people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds most strongly, with young Roma in the worst situation of all. In general, **access to education and training in the former state socialist countries has become highly dependent upon the ability to pay**. Privatised provision has mushroomed in the region, but

public institutions, too, have introduced course fees and school textbooks/materials are no longer provided free of charge to pupils. For example, in Bulgaria, Latvia and Romania, participation rates in secondary education now vary significantly between young people according to family/household income levels. Those from families in the top fifth of the household income distribution are far more likely to stay on than those in the bottom fifth of the distribution – the gap can be as wide as 40%.

### 3.2 Gender inequalities

As noted in the previous chapter, level for level, young women now out-perform young men as far as educational achievement and qualifications are concerned. However, their participation rates in education and training still begin to tail off after the completion of upper secondary education. **The patterns here do not necessarily follow north-south-east-west divides.** For example, Bulgaria, Estonia and Portugal show the highest rates of higher education participation for young women. In Austria, Germany, The Netherlands and Greece, young men still lead the field. In the CIS countries, young women are still significantly under-represented in higher education, with participation rates having, in some cases, fallen further in the 1990s.

In many parts of Europe, participation rates remain high through to completion of first university degrees, but then fall off significantly at postgraduate levels, especially for Ph. D. completions. Where higher education systems offer ‘short’ and ‘long’ cycle courses, young women are generally over-represented in the former. **Gender-specific distributions across degree subjects and specialisms remain marked, if somewhat less so in CEE countries** compared with the EU Member States. Once education and training systems permit subject specialisation and specialised tracks, gender differences open up in decisions on what to study and in which vocational direction to move. This is most noticeable of all in vocational education and training, at all levels. Young women are most underrepresented in scientific and technological specialisations, and in manual and technical craft occupations.

These patterns are long established and are change-resistant, despite many initiatives throughout Europe to achieve greater gender balance over the past quarter century. The reasons for this persistence are complex. They are linked both to family socialisation and to the quality of educational experience itself. Equally, entrenched gender-specific occupational segregation, underpinned by continuing inflexibilities in employment conditions and career structures make it difficult to combine work and family demands. **These circumstances all combine to lead young women to make study and vocational decisions that tend to reproduce existing patterns.** However, labour market and employment structures are now changing rapidly, and it may well be that young women will find themselves gradually better-placed to take advantage of new and changing skills and competences demands, which place greater emphasis on the kinds of qualities and capacities that are more closely associated with cultural femininity than with masculinity.

As noted earlier, **educationally low-achieving young men are particularly vulnerable to social marginalisation and exclusion, although this should not lead to neglecting the often desperate situations in which some young women find themselves,** regardless of their educational achievements. Very young mothers, for example, may still be excluded from completing their schooling; and young women from some ethnic backgrounds may be prevented from continuing their education. Data for the EU countries from the mid-1990s indicate that 5% of childless young women aged 17-25 describe themselves as full-time

homemakers or carers, and this proportion is higher for those with lower-level educational qualifications. Once more, differences between countries are marked. In the majority of cases, the proportion of young women in this situation ranges between 5-8%, but in Greece, for example, it reaches 15%.

In addition, between 3-5% of young women in southern European countries report that they are doing unpaid family work (that is, working in family farms and businesses without drawing a wage). These figures do not noticeably decline with age, which suggests that **a small minority of young women in at least some parts of Europe are wholly absorbed back into a family-based social and economic system very early on** and largely before having reached the key threshold level of completion of upper secondary education. It is very likely that figures for southeast Europe and the CIS countries are higher, but data is lacking here. It is also important to add that young men in southern Europe, most of all in Greece, also report themselves as doing unpaid family work, and they too are most likely to have lower-level educational qualifications – but with the difference that the figures fall consistently with increasing age, so that by the time young men reach their early thirties, virtually none are still to be found in this activity category. In sum, these young men are re-absorbed into the labour market whereas young women remain absorbed in the family, increasingly detached from the public sphere.

### 3.3 Unemployment

After 1989, general and youth unemployment rates rose rapidly and **sharply in central and eastern Europe**, and still more **in the Caucasus and Central Asian** newly independent republics. **On average, youth unemployment rates in the region are twice as high as they are in the EU** as a whole. They are highest of all in southeast Europe and the CIS countries, those parts of the region that have suffered both armed conflicts and are economically the poorest. In Azerbaijan, for example, half of those aged 15-25 are unemployed. In effect, **a north-south gap has opened up in the eastern half of the European continent**, too – unemployment rates in countries such as Bulgaria, FYROM, Georgia and Serbia and Montenegro are much, much higher than in countries such as the Czech Republic, Estonia and Hungary. It goes without saying that charting hidden and unregistered unemployment would raise the levels still more.

Despite the decline in **youth unemployment rates** in the late 1990s, these vary widely across EU Member States and **remain chronically high in countries such as Greece and Italy**, where one in three of those aged 15-24 are without jobs. **In the EU as a whole, youth unemployment rates are on average twice as high as general unemployment rates** (except in Austria, Germany and Sweden, where the difference is small; this is largely due to the ‘bridging’ function of education and training arrangements). It is also important to remember that employment trends have followed rather different paths during the 1990s, so that the relative situation for young people in given countries may have improved, deteriorated or remained stable across the decade – but against the background of very different absolute levels of youth unemployment at the beginning and at the end of the period. Therefore, young people’s assessments of whether their chances and risks are better or worse than they were for those just a few years older than they are now, depends not only on absolute but also on relative evaluations across time and space.

Estimates of the proportions of **young people** in each age cohort who are **neither in education or training nor in employment** vary according to the sources used, all of which are partial approximations. Recent analyses using official statistics suggest that **one in thirteen 16-19 year olds living in the EU** fall into this highly vulnerable group, again with significant variations between Member States, so that this proportion doubles to one in seven for countries such as Spain. Studies that try to consider hidden unemployment produce still higher figures, of course.

Differences between urban and rural youth also hinge on divergent educational and, even more so, employment opportunities. **Sufficient jobs are simply not available in the countryside** and young women have the poorest prospects. This is why so many young rural women are keen to pursue their studies and are particularly conscious that living in a rural environment limits their scope and freedom of action to lead their lives as they would like – as, for example, has been well researched in southern Italy. **Rural youth are therefore much more likely to want to move away to live in urban areas**, and to have to do so in order to find employment. In Estonia, some two-fifths of those living in small communities (under 10,000 inhabitants) want to leave for good, and only one-fifth definitely want to stay.

The urban/rural divide is even more pronounced in the most economically depressed countries and regions. For example, in Romania youth unemployment rates in rural areas are two and a half times higher than those in urban areas, which already run at well over 10%. Similar proportional differences between rural and urban areas exist in Russia in relation to young people who are neither in education/training nor in employment. These differences have to be seen against the background that **in the CEE and CIS region as a whole, very high proportions of 15-18 year olds are outside both education/training and (official) employment**. Where the average for the whole region reaches one-third of the cohort, this means that this is the normal situation for a majority of young people in the poorest countries. Large numbers of these young people, wherever they live, do not register as unemployed, because they know that the Employment Offices cannot help them and they are usually entitled to few or no unemployment or social welfare benefits.

EU data sources document quite clearly that **regional differences** (whether specifically related to the rural-urban dimension or not) **in young people's risk of unemployment have widened during the 1990s**. At the close of the decade, those 58 regions returning youth unemployment rates of under 10% were all in the northern half of the Union, the lowest of all in Lower Austria. However, in 18 regions, youth unemployment rates topped 40%; all of these regions, with the sole exception of a Finnish region, are in southern Europe, the highest of all in Italian Calabria. We do not have comparably systematic data for the CEE and CIS countries, but it is virtually certain that the overall rates would be higher and the range just as wide.

Many studies, especially smaller-scale qualitative inquiries, document that **young people from ethnic minorities, especially those of migrant origin, are much more likely to experience unemployment**. The lack of large-scale and systematic surveys and statistics makes it difficult to quantify and to compare within and between countries and groups, but there is little doubt about the realities of the situation. Prejudice and discrimination by employers certainly plays a role. Young people from these backgrounds are also more heavily represented amongst those with poorer levels of education and qualification, which is itself linked with social inequalities. The declining demand for low-skilled workers therefore

disproportionately affects ethnic minority groups. In the CEE/CIS countries, the rapid disappearance of state-owned enterprises has accentuated this problem.

**For those in employment, contractual conditions and pay levels have deteriorated**, with increased rates of temporary, part-time and casual employment. This in itself leads to lower levels of social protection for employees. Young people are also more likely to be employed in small companies in the private sector, where employee social protection measures are frequently less effective. Whilst the overall trend towards flexibilisation and non-standard working contracts affects people of all ages and young people from all parts of Europe, the ways in which this is taking place do vary. For example, **in southern and eastern European countries, the informal and grey employment market is** certainly more **widespread** than in the north and west of Europe. All figures can only be rough estimates, but it is not unreasonable to suggest that on average, one-third of national GDPs derives from the informal sector and considerably more in the CIS countries. Especially in these countries, **young people seeking main jobs are competing with adults who are seeking second jobs** – in other words, both groups are using the same kinds of jobs for different purposes and from very different starting-points. Many public service jobs have become low-paid ‘sinecures’ that provide a basic income, but which are insufficient to live on in any normal sense. Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that young people in this part of Europe place a higher importance on the income a job provides than do their western peers. In such highly competitive labour markets offering so few decent jobs and prospects, cultural, personal and social capital are also bound to accrete in importance. In other words, new kinds of social inequalities have opened up between young people in central and eastern Europe – not that inequalities did not exist before 1989, but rather that relatively unfamiliar disparities in life chances have appeared to join them.

### 3.4 Poverty

Throughout Europe (with the sole exception of under 16s in Denmark), children and young people are over-represented amongst the poor, whatever the starting-point for the definition of poverty. Since levels of poverty and affluence vary widely between countries and regions, **both relative and absolute vulnerability to poverty combine to produce wide differences between young people** along several dimensions – across countries and regions, relative to other age groups, according to their social or ethnic origins and family circumstances, and in connection with their educational levels and employment status.

Economic differences between western and eastern Europe and between northern and southern Europe are self-evident basic structuring features, but there is **only a partial correlation between national affluence and levels of economic inequalities within countries**. In other words, social and welfare policies and measures make a noticeable difference – but if resource levels are low to begin with, the scope for redistribution is small and the difference it can make is much less. In addition, if productivity in the formal sector is poor and a significant informal economy exists alongside, then there will be an inevitable drift towards the privatisation of resources and a corresponding fall in what is available for social investment and redistribution measures by the public purse. On whatever indicator we choose – economic output levels, household expenditure and savings practices, *Gini* coefficients, unemployment levels, welfare benefits and social transfers – **the very unfavourable position of southern, southeast and eastern European countries** in comparison with western and northern countries **is undeniable**. At the same time, **income inequalities in most EU Member States have also risen since the 1980s**, although it is difficult to draw overall

conclusions about whether this trend is continuing – comparable data for the last five years are not yet available.

Young people's unfavourable economic situation in comparison with those aged over 25 is in good part attributable to their lower income levels, which are a function both of the kinds of jobs they typically have and the fact that they are new entrants into both the employment and housing markets. Periods of unemployment and extended education and training depress income levels in individual and aggregate terms. On the other hand, young people who live with their parents are more likely than not to benefit from a combination of higher disposable income and a better standard of accommodation. In effect, these young people enjoy or endure the same material circumstances as other members of the family household. When young people leave the parental home, however, their standards of living are likely to drop (for the EU countries, most noticeably of all in Finland and The Netherlands), and when their material circumstances are unfavourable from the outset, the risk of falling below the poverty line is very real. **This risk is highest for those young people who are unable, in such circumstances, to rely on families, relatives and social networks for additional support.**

**Young people in CEE and CIS countries are particularly heavily reliant on their families for financial support.** In the late 1990s, over half of young Russians aged 18-29 were in this position, and a further one in ten received money from friends and neighbours. Almost four-fifths of young Estonians without jobs reported their parents as their main source of income. We noted in the previous chapter that young people throughout Europe must rely more on their parents for at least some of their income than was the case a decade and more ago, so similar trends are visible in EU countries too.

Here, we are concerned to identify the most poverty-vulnerable young people. The available evidence suggests that **one of the worst situations is to be without a job in countries where youth unemployment rates are comparatively low.** At the close of the 1990s, for example, at least two-fifths of the young unemployed in Germany and the UK lived in households where nobody had a job. Comparisons between the young unemployed in the Nordic countries also show that the experience of being unemployed is most stressful for those living in countries with low unemployment levels and a strong 'work ethic' tradition (as in Iceland and Norway). **This illustrates the strength of social polarisation processes in at least some of the most affluent European economies,** by which young people can 'accumulate' a whole string of disadvantages as they grow up that lead almost inexorably to marginalisation and exclusion.

Recent analyses of European Community Household Panel data from the mid-1990s conclude that **the best protection against poverty for 17-25 year olds is to have a job and to be living either with one's parents or with a partner who also has a job.** Only 13% of those in this situation are living below the poverty line (drawn at the lowest fifth of the relevant national income distribution). In contrast, almost three-fifths of those who have left home, are unemployed and have an unemployed partner are living in poverty. Furthermore, **the polarisation of risk** along these lines **intensifies with increasing age** – vulnerability to poverty at age 17 leads to still greater vulnerability at age 25; greater protection at age 17 leads to even greater protection at age 25. This is what produces the **paradoxical outcome of extreme and intractable social exclusion amongst specific groups of young people in northern European countries.** In southern Europe, far higher proportions of the youth population are living in unfavourable, but not necessarily desperate, material circumstances. Not having a job and not having a stable source of income apart from parental transfers for

extended periods is a widespread, virtually normative pattern; and the 'family economy' protects all its members to a certain degree. Comparable data for central and eastern Europe is not available, but it is reasonable to hypothesise that the situation there may be more similar to that in southern than in northern Europe. This certainly does not mean that poverty amongst young people is less prevalent in either of these macro-regions than in the northern half of Europe, but it does suggest that the risks are differently constructed and have different kinds of longer-term consequences.

### **❑ Inequalities: Key Trends**

- ❑ Current social change brings both more opportunities for inclusion and greater risks for exclusion. Acquiring life management skills is crucially important in order to be able to survive and cope well.
- ❑ The distribution of income has become more unequal in the past twenty years in western Europe, and very sharply so in the past decade in CEE/CIS countries. Young people are more likely to be in poverty as a result.
- ❑ Throughout Europe, young people's economic reliance on families and social networks is growing, and although parents step in willingly wherever they can, the load is heavy.
- ❑ Inequalities of educational opportunity and outcome persist unabated. The polarisation of outcomes and consequences is particularly disturbing: rising rates of participation in higher education are accompanied by intractable levels of school failure, with drop-out rates even increasing in the Balkans and the Caucasus.
- ❑ Access to education and training beyond the basics in many CEE/CIS countries is now conditional on the ability to pay.
- ❑ Young women have made the best of the opportunities provided by educational expansion in Europe, but gender-specific patterns of subject and vocational specialisation persist.
- ❑ Regional inequalities in access to employment persist in Western Europe between the North and South while new divides have emerged in Eastern Europe between the more developed North and Central labour markets and the more disadvantaged South and further Eastern markets, between urban and rural areas, between ethnic majority and minority youth.
- ❑ Significant proportions of young people aged 15-19 are neither in education, training or employment. They remain a small minority in much of the EU, but are more prominent in southern Europe and especially in southeast Europe and the Caucasus.

## 4 Young people and socio-political participation

The extent and nature of **young people's participation in society and in the polity has risen to the top of research and policy agendas** in the past decade. Interest began with the recognition that established forms of 'associational life' were losing membership and attraction for young people, no less so than their active involvement in trades unions had fallen. With the anti-nuclear, pro-peace and pro-environment social movements from the late 1970s onwards in western Europe, established mainstream political parties also found themselves losing support to new splinter groupings, some of which, most especially the Green Parties, were able to muster enough votes during the 1980s to become serious political competitors.

Gradually, politicians and policymakers began to ask questions about how far established youth organisations, social and political, were representative voices for young people beyond their active membership. After 1989, the questions accelerated. Young people had been at the forefront of the social movements that had brought about the collapse of state socialism in central and eastern Europe. They had clearly demonstrated their opposition to the former governments, and their critical judgement had not been tamed by the communist youth organisations. It was impossible to know what would emerge in their place, but it seemed unlikely that western-style youth organisations would be able to fill the gap. **During the course of the 1990s, young people across Europe have shown increasing distance and disillusionment with the channels of representative democracy.** Many do not see these institutions and methods as capable of listening and responding positively to their needs and demands – or indeed anyone's except those of politicians themselves, whose status and reputation in the eyes of citizens of all ages have fallen to very low levels everywhere.

In addition, **whilst young people are generally in favour of European integration, many are sceptical of the political and administrative machineries that go along with it.** These doubts are now reaching young people in the CEE countries, where the enthusiasm for joining the EU was initially very strong. It is important to add that young people's views are not so very different from those of older people – they are just somewhat more positive in overall terms, country for country. There is also a significant current of opinion amongst young people that European integration is following a mistaken path, firstly by putting economic interests before social interests and secondly by placing more importance on competition than on co-operation. The majority of young people are sensitive to the situations of developing and underdeveloped countries. **They do not want to live in a 'Fortress Europe'** and they would like to see a more equal distribution of resources throughout the globe, in the interests of humanitarian values and social justice. Large numbers of young people are prepared to invest personal time and effort in social, community and environmental projects that contribute to these aims, as the popularity of voluntary service and exchange programmes impressively testify.

Generalised usage of terms like participation inevitably risks loss of precise meaning. It is important that such terms do not accrete simplistic positive or negative connotations that subsequent discussion then takes for granted. For example, **there is a tendency to see participation as inherently positive** – social and political participation is 'a good thing'. However, **some forms of participation are distinctly anti-democratic and anti-social**, such as violence towards and between majority and minority cultural and ethnic groups, or engagement in neo-fascist political parties. Participation can also unintentionally produce

exclusion by creating networks, groups and structures to which others later find it hard to gain access.

However, we can simply try to describe how young people are involved in activities directed at influencing social change on a local, national, regional or European level. How do young people imprint their views on change processes and how can they help to shape those processes according to their own aspirations? **Young people's socio-political participation is a feature of their social situation, but no less an indicator of the extent to which our societies are open and able to listen and take account of the contribution of its young citizens in shaping the future.** In principle, the scope of participation is a broad one – it covers all spheres of social life, from family and neighbourhood activities through to formal politics. In the interests of manageability, this report looks only at participation in institutional politics (elections, campaigns and membership), involvement in ‘protest politics’ (social movements, demonstrations) and civic engagement (associative life, community participation, voluntary work). Interest in political life and trust in social and democratic institutions form the connecting thread, complemented by information on attitudes towards European integration.

#### 4.1 Modern democratic governance

**Young people across Europe widely support democracy.** Only one in ten take the view that democratic political systems are not a good form of government for their country and favour other options, such as government by experts, the army or a strong leader. Indexes that try to gauge the overall public acceptance of democracy show that levels tend to fall as one moves from the ‘consolidated democracies’ of central Europe, through the ‘emerging democracies’ in post-communist Balkans and the Baltic states, and finally to the ‘insecure democracies’ in the CIS countries. Significant proportions of young people in east and northeast Europe and in the Black Sea region support the idea of government through strong leadership, whereas in east-central and southeast Europe the preference of ‘non-democratic’ youth switches towards government by experts.

**However, young people everywhere in Europe are increasingly critical of how democracy actually works in practice.** In this respect, relatively high levels of trust still exist in France, The Netherlands and Norway, where over half of young people express confidence. Nevertheless, levels of trust in these countries too have fallen over the past two decades. In France, it is now those with the lowest levels of educational qualifications who are the most critical of political institutions – twenty years ago, the opposite was the case. These young people are also those most likely to espouse anti-democratic views. Levels of trust are lower elsewhere in the EU, and especially in Finland, eastern Germany, Greece and Portugal. Young people are somewhat more (and increasingly, it would seem) trustful of democratic flanking systems such as the law and the police, and a little more so again in the case of social institutions such as the churches and the social partners/business world – but much less so in the case of the press. Interestingly, in western Europe (except in Norway) young people accord the European Parliament greater trust than their own national parliament.

Young people **in the CEE/CIS new democracies** are also distrustful of formal democratic institutions. Overall, over half of the region's population approves of the democratic mechanisms introduced in their respective countries and three-quarters expect that the coming decade will see further improvements in this respect. On the other hand, **only one in ten**

**young people trust political parties and only two in ten trust their national parliament.** As in western Europe, young people place greater confidence in the courts and the police – but in contrast, they place very high trust in the press. The free press was one of the first achievements of the move to democracy in the former state socialist countries of Europe, and it remains one of the most highly valued symbols of political and social transformation. However, the churches receive by far the greatest trust of young people in the region, most especially in Croatia, Poland, Romania and Serbia. Slovenia is equally a case in point. In the mid-1990s, half placed trust in their parents, but otherwise in no social or political institution apart from the church – to a modest degree. In contrast, the low level of trust in the church amongst Bulgarian youth derives from ongoing conflict between the two Orthodox Synods, each of which claims sole legitimacy.

This is the background to young people's participation in elections. Virtually everywhere in Europe, the national franchise is set at 18 years of age (exceptions include Austria [19], Italian Senate elections [25] and local elections in some German *Länder* [16]). Voting levels in western Europe are quite low and declining amongst the under 25s, as they are for older age groups too. Young people do express a strong will to participate actively in social and political life, and they demand, amongst other things, improved legal and institutional frameworks that will enable them to do so more effectively. The question of **lowering the voting age**, especially for regional and local elections, is one of the measures that might be considered.

Interestingly, this **is not something that calls forth a clear consensus amongst young people**, nor does it constitute a primary platform in their demands for a greater say in social and political affairs. Offered a series of measures that should be taken to encourage their active participation, young EU-Europeans place lowering both the voting age and the right to stand at election at the bottom of the list, preferring consultation, information and civil society measures. In parallel, being a citizen of the EU does not especially connote having formal political rights in other Member States or at European elections. These rights are a minor part of the meaning of European citizenship for young people – mobility and social welfare rights are important for very many more of them.

**Voting patterns amongst young people in Europe's new democracies have shown sharp variations between countries and elections in the past decade.** The first free and democratic elections drew high participation rates amongst citizens of all ages. As the new governments proved unable to meet voters' high expectations and as disillusionment with the daily world of democratic politics set in, voter turnout has fallen. In 1997, the intention to vote in future elections varied from 92% in Albania to only 30% in the Ukraine. On average for the whole region, between half and two-thirds of young people intended to vote. Older age groups were only slightly more likely to say that they would do so.

However, the overall picture is complex and **it would be incorrect to conclude that declining participation in elections is an inevitable, consistent and unilinear trend.** For example, in the September 1998 Slovak elections, 80% of under 25s cast a vote, compared with only 20% four years earlier. In Bulgaria, the 1990s have seen high voter turnout at the beginning and end of the decade, with intervening falls. The 1997 Bulgarian election was called under special circumstances, and here voting levels were high. Major political crises with potential consequences for the future of democracy clearly mobilise young voters, whereas their participation falls when democratic political life is stable and seems to be running smoothly.

## 4.2 Institutional politics and its alternatives

**Few young people are members of political parties in Europe.** Membership levels range from a high of one in ten for southwest and southeast Europe to a low of under one in a hundred in Europe's east and northeast. Young people are more likely to be members of trades unions, at least in some parts of Europe. In northern and western Europe, membership levels have now stabilised at a relatively low level compared with twenty years ago, whereas southwest Europe has seen a marked rise in recent years and southeast Europe has experienced a sharp fall. The latest World Values Survey data show that current membership levels for most European regions range between 6% (in central Europe) and 12% (in the Black Sea region), but that in both northwest and eastern Europe over one-third are members. It is important to remember that although trades union membership was obligatory in many parts of state socialist Europe, these organisations were important channels of access to health, recreational, educational and housing services. This is no longer the case, and the new business world in these countries does not typically encourage the growth of democratic trades unions.

The most visible aspects of alternative forms of political participation underpin the generally held view that young people are the most committed and involved. This applies to demonstrations, peaceful or otherwise, and to more anarchic forms of protest that involve street violence and destruction of private and public property. However, surveys consistently report that the majority of young people do not noticeably engage in 'protest politics'. It remains the case that better educated young people are more likely to be involved here, in spite of the fact that in France, for example, a weakening correlation between educational level and political interest in general has been observed. Comparative data for the Nordic countries and Scotland show that unemployed youth report less interest in politics and are less likely to engage in political action of any kind.

**Across the whole of Europe, fewer than one in three say that they have ever signed a petition or taken part in a demonstration.** Fewer than one in ten have joined a boycott, gone on strike or occupied a building. Unsurprisingly, **political expression of this kind is far more common in western Europe**, where around two-thirds of under 25s have at least signed a petition. Figures for this, the most widespread and mildest form of alternative politics, fall to a maximum of one in ten in the CEE/CIS region. The same kinds of differences hold for the stronger forms of alternative political expression, some of which have become highly symbolic regular events, such as the New Year street riots in Strasbourg's poor quarters or the May 1<sup>st</sup> anarchist demonstrations in Berlin.

**Grassroots movements** to bring about social change **have become an important and consistent channel for young people's political participation in western Europe** since the anti-Vietnam movement in the 1960s, although it is important to remember that social movements in general have a much longer history. This is the province of 'issue politics', whereby the big three mobilising issues have been peace, ecology and now anti-globalisation. Environmental protection has been high on young people's political agenda for some fifteen years or more. Today, almost three-quarters would approve of raising taxes to support environmental conservation, and over half are prepared to pay higher prices for goods and services for the same reason. Every second young person favours environmentally friendly products, recycling waste and reducing water consumption. This kind of action is part of young westerners' everyday political life, and it is likely to hold more meaning for them than the more ritualised processes of elections.

**These kinds of political participation are less widespread in central and eastern Europe.** For example, ecological concern did act as one of the catalysts in mobilising youth protest against communist regimes during the 1980s and early 1990s. However, the problems and hardships that have accompanied the transition to market economies have deflected attention elsewhere and have probably dampened young people's motivation and energy for alternative politics no less than for their engagement with institutional politics. Young people all over the region have shown great courage and determination when it came to moving to topple communist governments – from East Berlin, Prague and Bucharest in 1989 through Sofia in 1997 and, most recently, Belgrade in 1999. Nevertheless, these are extraordinary actions in extraordinary circumstances.

Historically, **young people have always been at the forefront of civic action during revolutionary change and major take-overs** of governments and ruling systems – in whatever political direction and in whatever part of the world. The last decade has also seen remarkably young adults taking on high political and administrative office in the new democracies, perhaps especially in the smaller countries, such as the Baltic states. Such massive transformations sweep away the old and, for a while, spaces open up for those whose reputations are not sullied by the past and who promise a fresh start. With time, more institutionalised and regulated political normality returns. **There is no guarantee that the partial rejuvenation of the new democracies will become a persistent feature.** On the other hand, the very fact that young people throughout Europe have witnessed the possibility that representative democracy does not have to be representative gerontocracy may have lasting effect. Just as women in many countries have pressured successfully for greater equality in selection of electoral candidates, playing leading roles in political parties and holding government office, so are **politically active young adults drawing more attention to the poor representation of the under 40s in democratic life.**

### 4.3 Civic engagement

**Civil society is the social and political forum in which young people are most actively involved** and through which they seek to influence the shape and direction of social change. Involvement may be informal in nature, as in the case of participation in social and virtual networks or joining spontaneous activities that arise from time to time in everyday school and local community life. Membership and participation in more organised groups such as youth clubs and voluntary associations runs at a higher level than in political parties. NGO membership levels are broadly speaking and on average comparable between western Europe and central European countries, but fall off towards the east and southeast. In the Caucasus, widespread public distrust in civil society NGOs ensures that many young people keep their distance, suspecting them as 'foreign implants' and money-laundering mechanisms. In contrast, the Baltic countries are witnessing a resurgence of NGO-type engagement.

Throughout the whole of Europe, **sports associations remain by far the most popular participation channels for young people**, although the commercialisation of sports facilities in the former state socialist countries has begun to restrict access to activities that were formerly universally available free of charge. The picture for EU youth is a stable one over the past five years. Half of 15-24 year olds are active in associational life – or are not, depending on the preferred emphasis. Half of those who are active participate in sports clubs. No other category of association, social or political, draws in more than one in ten young people on average. **Even youth organisations attract only 7% of the age group.** However, **the north-south split is very marked.** Young people in southern European countries are not

very active at all in organised civil society as represented by social and political associations, even in sports clubs. In contrast, Dutch and Nordic youth are very active indeed. Fewer than one-fifth of those in Sweden report participating in no club or association at all. Membership of youth organisations, trades unions and even political parties reaches up to a quarter of the age cohort in Denmark. At the opposite end of the continuum, two-third of young Greeks are not involved in organised civil society. **Absolute levels of participation are also lower for young women**, especially in sports clubs, although they take part more often in church groups than young men.

However, considerable caution is advisable in interpreting what these data actually tell us. **Low levels of involvement in organised civil society does not necessarily mean lack of socio-political engagement**, but equally that civic life operates rather differently in northern and southern Europe. Informal family, social and political networks are an important element of the community fabric in the south, whereas the level of institutionalisation in everyday life is lower than in the north. It is simply not plausible, for example, to argue that Greeks are less socially and politically active than Danes – they are active in different ways, ways that are perhaps less amenable to inquiry by social scientists using standard methods.

Sources consistently report that, **on average, about a third of young people claim not to be interested in politics**, do not discuss politics with their friends and do not see politics as important. **Much smaller proportions report the absolute reverse** and the vast majority fall somewhere in between. However, precisely what this indicates is quite a different matter. ‘Politics’ means formal, institutionalised and elitist politics, whose concerns are seen to be distant from those of young people, whose mechanisms are experienced as obscure and inaccessible, and whose culture is judged to lack integrity. For example, nine in ten young Latvians do not see being active in political parties as relevant for their lives, and half think that political parties are not at all interested in young people and their problems. At the same time, 85% say that they are interested in the political life of their country. Therefore, it is far less clear that young people are disengaged in principle from socio-political life in the broader sense, whereas it is manifestly clear that they show high levels of commitment to social, caritative and humanitarian action on the grounds of ethics and solidarity.

Commentators therefore all conclude that the **established channels of democratic life are no longer attractive to young people, nor are they sufficiently open for young people’s participation** on an equal footing with older citizens. This applies most especially to public administration and party politics, but it is also the case that civil society channels are heavily populated by NGOs of long standing and which have become part of the institutionalised apparatus of representative democracy. It has also been argued that when young people must prioritise individualised pathways through youth transitions, established forms of participation in political life may not be expedient. They are too busy making their way in an increasingly risk-laden world. The shift from collective to individualised values together with the decline of grand political narratives has taken particularly strong hold in the CEE/CIS region. In these countries, the development of political institutions has moved more rapidly than the rooting of informal social networks and the growth of mutual trust. It is here that young people’s socio-political participation might make a difference in the future.

It certainly seems that **young Europeans have some clear ideas about how to encourage more active participation**. Those living in the EU think that the most important channels are the education system, family and friends, and youth organisations, in approximately equal measure. The educational system takes a particularly key role in Denmark and Finland, for

example, whereas family and friends are more important in Germany, Italy and, especially, Austria. No less significantly, under 5% see political parties as the most important channel of encouragement. More specifically still, **introducing targeted consultation mechanisms and information campaigns receive the greatest support** (with about 45% agreement), followed closely by making education for citizenship a compulsory feature of the school curriculum. Once more, it is not necessarily clear that young people in different parts of Europe understand and mean the same thing by this terminology.

#### 4.4 Attitudes towards European integration

The views of today's young people have been formed against the background of a decade in which two quite different processes have taken place. **Western Europe has experienced growing economic and political integration in the EU**, including the accession of three new Member States. Even Norway's decision not to join the EU was followed up by developing still closer co-operation with the EEA countries, to which Norway belongs. In contrast, **central and eastern Europe and the Soviet Union experienced sharp political disintegration and economic collapse**, followed up by ethnic conflicts and the splintering of former states, most dramatically in the southeast of the region. No fewer than 22 new states have emerged so far, full membership in the Council of Europe has grown to 44 countries and 12 countries are currently on the path to EU accession. Neither have all these processes taken place in isolation from each other, so that it has become increasingly difficult to judge accurately what is influencing young people's views in one direction or another.

Currently, we seem to be observing **both a rise in 'national feeling' and continuing support for European integration**. A range of sources supports the conclusion that the overwhelming majority of young people are in favour of European integration, whether for idealistic or pragmatic reasons, but that they have become more conscious of their national identities in the past decade. This does not mean that they have become more right wing or more xenophobic, but are rather responding to an overall climate in which contradictory forces are at play. In the mid-1990s, 14-15 year olds throughout Europe were very likely to take the view that nations are natural entities made up of shared origins, language and history. At the same time, they saw European integration as an imperative, especially those living in southern Europe and in regions that historically straddle multiple affiliations and traditions (such as Catalonia and South Tyrol).

Over the years, surveys have repeatedly shown that **young people everywhere are rather more positive about European integration than are their elders, but also that they** are less likely to hold nationalistic views, **are more tolerant and more cosmopolitan** in their outlook. **In** the early 1990s, young people in **CEE countries** were very enthusiastic indeed about European integration, undoubtedly unrealistically so. For the population as a whole, the decade saw the EU become an increasingly positive symbol throughout the region (except in some CIS countries such as the Ukraine, especially amongst older age groups). The sense of a shared European identity was much stronger amongst young people than older adults, and they held more positive ideas about 'Europe' than their western peers did. It is notable that **young people** in this part of Europe **have been more likely to see European integration in cultural rather than in purely economic terms** – in other words, their commitment has been oriented towards shared values and traditions. This, too, differs from the views of young EU-Europeans, who are much more likely to see European integration in pragmatic terms and are more sceptical of the idea of shared European identity.

**Being a citizen of the EU** means, above all, the right to study, live and work in any Member State, together with equal access to health and social security rights. **The concrete and personally relevant aspects of European integration are what young people find important:** the single currency, mobility and employment opportunities. Here, too, education makes a difference. Those who have continued their education beyond the age of 20 display richer understandings of what European integration means – they can relate to a broader spread of elements, both pragmatic and idealistic, and they are probably more realistic about what the EU can and cannot achieve. They are less convinced than their less well-educated peers, for example, that the EU is a way to create jobs.

However, over the past five years, with continuing economic problems in the CEE countries and given slow, uneven progress in the EU accession negotiations, attitudes towards European integration have become somewhat less positive – at least as far as EU integration is concerned. This trend joins the clear evidence for greater levels of scepticism and dissatisfaction with the EU amongst its Member State populations, young people included. Nevertheless, **negative images of over-bureaucracy, threats to cultural diversity and overly-utopian ideas do not attract agreement from more than about one in ten young EU-Europeans on average.** Furthermore, associating European integration with more specifically political dimensions, in particular a European government, is gaining more significance in young people's minds. It should be **of greater concern that one in ten young people can say neither what the EU means to them nor what being a citizen of the EU means to them.** This, too, is clearly linked to educational level. It would be surprising were more young people in the accession countries in a more enlightened position.

**Numerous inquiries give cause for concern about the levels of intolerance towards ethnic minorities, foreigners and social minorities in the CEE/CIS region.** These trends are particularly noticeable in the Czech and Slovak Republics, in Croatia and in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Xenophobic attitudes towards the region's Roma population are also widespread in all countries. The discovery in Slovenia during the 1990s that their young people had become more intolerant with respect to social minorities and foreigners/migrants compared with patterns going back to the 1960s met with considerable dismay amongst the citizenry as a whole. It was mooted that the cause lay in a post-1989 'values vacuum', which had been rapidly colonised by a crude notion of nationalism. Here as elsewhere, legitimated by the search for peace and security, there is a real risk of an 'ethnicisation' of politics that takes refuge in drawing strong boundaries of national inclusion and exclusion in a very rigid vision of exclusion and exclusion. Young people are not exempt from this, despite the simultaneous desire to pursue European integration as symbolised by accession to the EU.

It is particularly **important not to overplay the extent of intolerance and xenophobia in central and eastern Europe as opposed to western Europe.** Extremist and fundamentalist attitudes, together with shameful racially inspired violence, have become a very visible feature of our everyday social landscapes in the west. The youth subcultures associated with these attitudes and behaviours are a widespread cause of political and public concern. Furthermore, liberal views on socially controversial issues such as sexual orientation and the rights of foreigners or immigrants vary greatly across western Europe. The differences do not necessarily follow the regional clusters that often apply to socio-economic differences. For example, Spanish youth displays ultra-liberality on most controversial social questions, whereas Greek youth is quite conservative. In a few western European countries, up to one in five young people are prepared to agree with highly intolerant statements of the order that "all foreigners should be sent home". Yet this is the case for fewer than one in ten of young EU-

Europeans overall, a figure that has not changed in the past five years. As ever, young women demonstrate the greater commitment to democratic and humanitarian values in this respect. These kinds of outcomes should give our societies confidence in their **young people** and should underline that they **are, for the most part, ready and willing to work actively for a better future for all who call Europe their home.**

### ❑ Participation: Key Trends

- ❑ Young people are highly positive toward democracy as a form of government, although they are increasingly critical towards the way its institutions work.
- ❑ Young people manifest declining participation in elections but this is not a unilinear trend with peaks of youth mobilisation during major political crises.
- ❑ Young people's membership in political parties remains very low indeed, and little higher in the case of trades unions, except for northeast and eastern Europe.
- ❑ Participation in political protest is somewhat higher than participation in institutional politics, with activity in grassroots movements much more visible in western Europe than in CEE/CIS countries.
- ❑ Civic engagement is the form of participation that attracts the widest support and participation of youth in Europe, although membership in associations varies widely between north, south, east and west. Informal civic participation is also widespread, but takes different forms in different parts of Europe.
- ❑ Young people show attachment both to European integration and to national identities. In CEE countries, young people are more idealistic about integration, in EU countries they are more pragmatic, valuing mobility and employment opportunities above all.
- ❑ A sizeable minority of young people in most countries display intolerant social and xenophobic attitudes, but the overwhelming majority have open and positive attitudes towards cultural, ethnic and social diversity in Europe.

## 5 Changing meanings and experiences of youth and age

Definitions of youth itself, the relationships between youth and other life-phases and the social situation of young people in comparison with other age groups vary historically and culturally. Youth is not only a social construction, but it is also an evolving social construction – **youth changes as society changes**, both because of and as a contributor to processes of change. Many commentators argue that European societies are once more approaching a watershed in these respects, in that the scale of current social change will have a significant impact upon how youth is understood and lived in the coming decades.

We can identify **three major change factors: transition to ageing societies; transition to knowledge-based economies and societies; and transition to new understandings of youth within the life-course** as a whole. Taken together, they help to explain why research and policy debates are now giving more attention to the issues of generational relations. All modern European societies have developed ‘social contracts’ that regulate how rights, responsibilities and resources are distributed between different age groups, both within the family and in the public sphere. Some elements are informal, based on norms and values; others are formal, based in laws and policies. When rapid cultural, economic and technological change destabilises existing social contracts, tensions emerge and new solutions have to be found.

There is broad recognition that **the scales have tipped in favour of older rather than younger people in the past twenty years or so**, especially as far as access to employment and income distribution is concerned. It is less clear what the social effects of ageing societies will be for young people – some might be favourable, others less so, still others mere speculation at the moment. However, there is **a tendency to surmise that knowledge societies place youth in a more favourable position** than hitherto, in particular because of the value placed on flexibility and openness to change together with young people’s greater facility with the skills and competences required in complex, multicultural and high-technology worlds. Finally, new understandings of youth within the life-course do not necessarily imply positive or negative outcomes for young people, but rather describe how people see themselves and others in terms of belonging to social groups defined in some way by age and life-stage. Yet, **changing self-understandings do have implications for the construction of identity and, by extension, for youth cultures and lifestyles**. At present, we can only guess what these changes might bring for the quality of social relations within and between generations.

If we consider the extent to which young people’s relative economic circumstances have deteriorated in recent decades and the extent to which today’s young people feel excluded from and disillusioned with the established channels of representative democracy, it is **perhaps surprising that there are so few visible signs of an antagonistic ‘generation gap’**. There are some indications that relations between young people and their parents can be slightly less comfortable when social modernisation occurs very rapidly, with a gap opening up between values and lifestyles but under unfavourable conditions for economic and household independence (for example, in Portugal and Spain). However, this has to be seen as a minor trend against the background of the continued strength of family ties and respect for parents and older relatives in southern Europe.

In the CEE countries, rapid transformation has probably reinforced intergenerational family ties, given the need to pull together and pool resources. It is possible to argue that young people have lost ground relative to older people because of the radical changes in the patterns of education-to-employment transitions, making the initial years on the labour market very difficult for many of them. It is also possible to argue that young people have gained ground, in that they have much greater freedom of choice and can more readily adapt to the new conditions. The evidence supports the conclusion that **family relations are an important and positive source of emotional satisfaction and social focus for young people everywhere** in Europe. The pluralisation of family and household forms and ways of life has not changed this. In contrast, much evidence points to the high vulnerability of young people who cannot call on solid family and social networks, as noted earlier in Ch. 3.

Taking a generational perspective on youth turns the focus on whether social organisation and public policies are both just and effective in responding to young people as citizens with equal rights and as those who will carry Europe's future. But it equally raises **uncomfortable questions about whether youth is somehow 'socially disappearing'** as a consequence of more flexible roles and identities across the life-course as a whole, not to mention the numerical decline of young people that is well underway in most of Europe.

### 5.1 Youth in ageing societies

**The under 25s currently comprise just under 30% of the total EU population, and in the CEE countries figures are broadly comparable – as are those for the onset of demographic ageing in general.** If anything, population growth in the CEE countries (except in particular Poland and the Slovak Republic) is more sluggish than in the EU, but population distributions are ageing less rapidly because mortality rates are higher. However, **in the Central Asian republics, the under 25s still make up over half of the population.** On current trends, the numbers of 15-24 year olds in the CEE countries will fall by a third by 2020, whereas numbers in Central Asia will remain stable. At the same time, it is estimated that the cohort of 15-24 year olds living today in the whole region has lost one million of its members due to emigration over the past decade, largely to the west.

It is well known that fertility rates across Europe have been in decline for several decades: young women have their first child later and have fewer children overall. Furthermore, a **sharp downturn in fertility rates in the early 1990s has been one of the most consistent changes in the former state socialist countries.** The number of births per thousand women aged 15-49 in the CEE/CIS region as a whole fell from 78 in 1990 to 48 in 1998. The total fertility rate declined by at least a third in most countries – in Uzbekistan no less than in Poland, for example.

**In the EU, fertility rates** reached their lowest point in 1995 and have since begun to rise very slowly, but at 1.45 children per woman **are still well below replacement rate** (2.1 children per woman) – even in Ireland, with the highest fertility levels in the EU, the rate is only 1.92. This means **that the proportion of children and young people will continue to decline in the next 25 years, most sharply of all for the 15-24 year old age group and in southern Europe.** The Italian population as a whole moved into absolute decline from 2000 and, if immigration is left out of the picture, the population of the EU as a whole is projected to begin to fall from 2022. Population growth will remain buoyant only in Ireland and

Luxembourg, and significant regional differences are likely to emerge as depopulation is predicted to take hold in parts of Italy, Portugal and especially Germany and Spain.

In fact, **immigration is and will remain the most important factor in delaying the onset of a declining European population.** Within a highly diverse and generally stable overall picture, the last decade in the EU/EFTA countries has seen a clear decline in the proportion of young migrants, a mild diversification of the origins of foreign residents and immigrants, and **a growing proportion of migrants from outside Europe, especially from poorer countries.** Despite European integration, intra-EU migration by EU nationals is lower than it was thirty years ago, is rising only slowly and certainly more slowly relative to resident foreign populations overall.

**The proportion of young foreign workers aged under 25 has also fallen substantially in the last decade,** except in Germany, where their representation has risen to reach almost one-fifth of all foreign workers, the highest level in the EU (compared with under 8% in Finland, the lowest level). Only in Ireland and Greece are young foreign workers more likely to come from other EU Member States than from outside the EU. Furthermore, **post-1989 migration from eastern to western Europe has only taken on significant proportions where ‘ethnic-based’** (for example, from Russia to Germany) and is otherwise more typically short-term/intermittent in order to earn money. A ‘brain-drain’ has also taken place for the younger and better qualified, but this remains difficult to quantify in any precise way.

These trends have a number of potential implications for young people in the coming decades. Firstly, **Europe’s youth populations will become culturally, ethnically and linguistically more mixed** than they already are today. Some countries (such as Finland and Ireland) have remained relatively homogenous until the last few years. Others will see diversification beyond long-established national minorities, especially in central and eastern Europe. All will become more cosmopolitan, most of all in the cities, which also disproportionately attract young people in search of qualifications and jobs. It is possible that **a ‘generation gap’ could emerge between multicultural youth and their mono-cultural, monolingual elders.** We already see second-generation migrant youth acting as a cultural and linguistic bridge for their parents. Perhaps this could turn into a more widespread generational phenomenon.

Secondly, in sheer numerical terms, **young people will become a weaker electoral force in representative democracies.** The strategic importance of young people is generally less significant for political parties – only those aged 18+ may vote, they are less likely to cast their vote, they have less income and fewer financial responsibilities, and they do not have a powerful lobby. It is possible that **numerical scarcity might raise their political value,** but only if young people are seen to be a critical force for achieving something that society as a whole wants badly enough – such as the willingness to pay a higher proportion of their income over their adult years into public pension and social security funds. It is **also possible that young people will ‘hand in their notice’** if the terms of the intergenerational social contract, in economic or political terms, becomes too unfavourable. Democracies can work only if citizens actively participate in their channels and forums of debate and decision-making. Social democracies can only work if the community as a whole can find a consensus on an acceptable distribution of resources and living standards. Communities are sustainable only if channels of communication and understanding between different interest groups are open and mutually respectful. There is no current real crisis in any of these terms, certainly not in terms of disagreements between age groups, but, as noted in Ch. 4, tensions are not absent.

Thirdly, all sources confirm that **social inequalities in the distribution of economic resources between the generations have risen in the past thirty years, at least in western Europe**. Between 1970 and 1980, depending on the country concerned, the post-1945 trend for the income and spending power of each succeeding generation to increase, age for age, went into reverse. For example, figures for France show that in the mid-1960s, a 55 year old father earned (at 1999 prices) on average 244€ more than his son. By the early 1990s the difference had grown to 823€ – well over three times as much as a quarter of a century earlier. **In the CEE/CIS countries, such inequalities have emerged recently, rapidly and chaotically**: no systematic data is available.

We already noted in Chapters 2 and 3 that financial support to young people by parents has increased in parallel with these trends. It is not that parents are withdrawing support, quite the reverse. The problem lies, in the first instance, in the **extension of full and partial dependence of young people and young adults on their parents**, which creates imbalance in patterns of intergenerational reciprocities. This compromises young people's reasonable desire for autonomy and constrains their own prospects. Coming youth generations face a situation in which collectively they must contribute more of their own incomes to supporting larger numbers of the over 65s, but individually they must rely more on transfers from their more comfortably off parents and grandparents.

Following on from this, the distribution of life chances within current generations of young people is also affected. Some young people are fortunate enough to enter into a period of 'affluent partial dependence', which allows them to lead a relatively autonomous and carefree life, including perhaps independent accommodation. Others must enter into 'enforced partial dependence' as part of a family-based economic strategy or due to unemployment or low wages. Still others have no opportunity to enter into any form of partial dependence, because their parents are not in a position to offer financial support; and a few parents refuse to provide support at all. **These inequalities obviously contribute to existing polarisations in life chances and prospects**, amplifying trends that are already a cause for concern throughout Europe.

Demographic change as such does not directly and solely cause any of these, or any other, potential implications of ageing societies. Demographic change is the outcome of people's actions, which are in part a response to the cultural and economic environments in which they find themselves. We turn now to look at some of these features.

## 5.2 Youth in knowledge societies

**The size of the active workforce in Europe will contract in the coming decades**, as smaller age cohorts grow older. The next 25 years will see those aged 55-64 grow from 11% to a peak of almost 15% of the EU population, and the accession of CEE countries will not make much difference to this picture. The proportion of those aged 25-54 will decrease, especially after 2020. This explains the high policy interest in raising labour force activity rates, especially for adult women and older workers, and proposals in some countries to raise retirement ages. It also **explains the importance attached to lifelong learning** as applied to continuing education and training, in order to maintain, upgrade and renew job-relevant knowledge and skills throughout active life. Rapid technological change and, no less important, changing practices in the social organisation of work, mean that in many fields, knowledge and skills will have to be updated more frequently and people will need to gain and use their knowledge and skills in different, more active ways.

Our societies have seen and organised education and training as something mainly relevant for young people, taking place in specific contexts, under particular circumstances and largely happening before entry to employment. At the same time, **we characterise young people as the main way to renew and refresh knowledge, skills and practices** – both at work and in society as a whole. Nevertheless, we have defined young people as innovators within a context of controlled access to information, knowledge and skills that older people already possess and that the community designates as valid, desirable and useful. These patterns are beginning to break up, due to the kinds of developments summarised above.

Open and flexible societies, populated by active and independent-minded citizens who can positively manage changing living and working environments, have to approach socialisation and learning differently. **Multi-directional and continuous learning in more symmetrical, collaborative processes are better suited to the task.** The link between age/life-stage, the acquisition of knowledge and skill, and the ways in which teaching-learning relations are structured, is bound to weaken. Together with rapidly evolving skills demands in the labour market, **these trends may place young people in the coming decades in a more favourable position.** This might hold for employment and career chances, but no less so as far as gaining greater autonomy of identity and action as pupils, students, trainees and as knowledgeable young citizens in general is concerned.

Furthermore, all sources confirm that **young women are the leading carriers of modernity**, wherever we look in Europe. They are generally more open-minded and more flexible in their social and political attitudes and behaviours, and they are typically more accomplished multiple problem-solvers and team-workers at home and at work. This may help to improve young women's individual autonomy and their social situations in the future. It is becoming very clear that many young women are no longer prepared to accept an imbalanced double burden between family and employment responsibilities. This contributes to rising rates of voluntary childlessness and, very visibly, postponement of childbearing. Those countries with the most favourable social policies for promoting work-family balance and protecting parental employment rights tend to have higher fertility rates (such as France and Sweden). Where existing provisions disappear – as in eastern Germany after 1989 – birth rates fall very sharply and recover only slowly.

However, young adults will be a declining proportion of students and employees, whatever the relative improvements in their chances may turn out to be. It is possible to imagine that they could come under pressure as ever more older people busy themselves with the task of producing high-performance human resources and well-educated human beings from an ever smaller numerical pool of potential. This is just as likely to happen in the family as it is at school and in the workplace. One way to picture this possibility is to recall the cascade model of training, by which small numbers of people pass on what they have learned to ever-larger groups, stage by stage. **Young people might find themselves caught in its opposite – the funnel model of learning**, by which large numbers of people pour all they know into ever smaller groups. Human potential is by no means finite, but **youth spent in a pressure-cooker** is not necessarily the best way to develop it.

**Neither is there any guarantee that initial entry to employment will become easier for young people in the coming years.** Employment recovery in Europe remains slow and very patchy and the trend towards flexibilisation of employment contracts is unlikely to reverse itself. It is also possible that active working lives will once more lengthen, not only due to policy measures in some (but not all) countries to reduce early retirement and perhaps raise

the retirement age. It is worth bearing in mind that future cohorts of older people are likely to experience a fall in the value of their pensions, and that the retired are becoming a valuable source of flexible workers who can offer a number of financial and expertise advantages to employers. For example, today's European universities are beginning to fill up with officially retired professors on part-time contracts, which does not augur well for the future prospects of young university teachers and researchers. Finally, many companies are still inclined to see young employees more in terms of costs than benefits – training investments bring neither a guaranteed nor an immediate return. It is possible that the coming years will see the **spread of work experience placements as an added intermediate step along the road to stable employment chances**. These would offer low or no salary in return for access to training and experience, in turn becoming an essential element of a young person's c.v. and representing a further step towards the privatisation of education and training.

The most visible sign of the transition towards knowledge societies is, of course, the **momentous spread of new information and communication technologies**. There is no doubt that **young people are at the forefront** here, not only in using them but also in developing them and populating the new employment opportunities that are growing fast in parallel. In 2001, fully 94% of 15-24 year olds surveyed in the EU reported that they used at least one available access channel at least once a week, ranging from mobile phones (80%, by far the most popular) through the Internet (37%) to palm computers (2%, least commonly). Only four years earlier, in 1997, over half of the same age group did not use any of the NICT tools or equipment then available and only 7% used the Internet at least once a week. Between 1997 and 2001, regular use of a PC rose from 43% to 56%. Comparable information for CEE/CIS countries is once more not available, but we can safely assume that access remains at a lower level overall and the quality of hardware and connections is poorer. In some countries, however, access and usage rates fall well within the range for EU Member States – such as in Hungary and Slovenia, and not least in Estonia, where rates match the highest in the EU.

On the other hand, **the 'digital divide' remains very real** indeed. In Russia, half of regular Internet users are young people, but only 3% of the overall population have access to the Web. In Hungary, at least two-thirds of young people who are unemployed, or who are in neither education nor employment, are not digitally literate at even the basic level. Within the EU, access and use levels are on the rise everywhere, but absolute rates vary a great deal between northern and southern Europe and between the sexes. Furthermore, these **gaps have not narrowed in the past five years**. For example, in The Netherlands, three-quarters of young people use Internet and Email, but only one-fifth of young Greeks do so. Over half of young men are users, but still only a third of young women. It is likely that the digital divide will remain with us for some time. A recent study of 9-14 year old 'low PC users' in England and Wales shows that even where children have facilities at home, access, use and attitudes at school and at home reproduce gender differences and social inequalities. **Girls and pupils from working-class backgrounds are more likely to be low users**. Teachers, parents and 'more competent' peers contribute in a variety of ways to these outcomes.

The **prospects for young people in the CIS countries are much more difficult to assess and foresee**, partly because of the sheer diversity of the region and particularly because of the lack of systematic information about young people's lives in these countries that is accessible to outsiders. All we really know is that their overall social situation is by far the most unfavourable amongst the members of the Council of Europe, and that future prospects are likely to improve only slowly. If these economies develop positively, it is possible that a

generation gap will emerge as young people leap across the fault-line between tradition and modernity, rapidly adopting high technology and hybrid lifestyles, perhaps analogous to developments in parts of Southeast Asia. If not, then highly polarised societies could result, marked by widespread poverty and larger-scale westward migration.

Some western European countries are already planning for **controlled immigration** to counter the projected effects of population decline. As always, young, well-qualified adults between 25 and 40 will be the main target group. These trends **will strengthen the formation of a cosmopolitan and open-minded European citizenry, but if our societies are not watchful, we shall equally produce groups of those left hopelessly behind.** These are likely to be made up not only of highly disadvantaged communities of indigenous and migrant origin, but also of those who have grown up in areas and local economies cut off from wider social and cultural developments. These young people, whose lives and prospects are overburdened with risks and uncertainties, may well become a source of opposition and conflict in our societies at a number of levels.

### 5.3 Youth in the life-course

Recent decades have seen **a pluralisation of lifestyles and a loosening up of the life-course as a fixed sequence** of phases and their associated roles and tasks. So far, this has been especially noticeable for the youth phase: children adopt ‘youth lifestyles’ earlier; young people retain ‘youth lifestyles’ for longer. Within the youth phase, patterns of transition have become more differentiated and less standardised – but ‘normative clocks’ still have something of a hold for most young people, even if it is difficult to live up to them in practice. **Identity building is becoming a more open-ended and ongoing process**, provisional and fluid in character. What it means to be ‘adult’ is far less taken for granted than it was half a century ago. In the same way, becoming an old person is now becoming a more differentiated process: those over 50 are ‘older workers’, people may draw a pension from 60-65, but a sense of being ‘really’ old may not take hold until people move into their eighties. In all, there is plenty of reason to suggest that the boundaries between life phases and our expectations about how people of given ages should behave are more blurred than in the past.

The effects of increased longevity and the changing balances between the proportions of young and old can be felt across the full range of social contexts, not least within family and social networks. **Individual families may have become smaller and more varied in their make-up, but the number of generations in a family alive at the same time has risen.** These trends affect the ways in which personal and family relations can and do develop, because the numbers and the composition of those with whom one lives most closely are changing. Aunts, uncles, cousins and siblings are rarer, grandparents are more plentiful and parents do not have to divide their attention amongst so many children – when they are not busy with their jobs and domestic tasks, of course. **We still know too little about the effects** of these gradual changes upon children’s and young people’s quality of life and for identity building processes.

Some commentators conclude that the 1990s have seen some re-grouping of social relations, with a trend towards ‘micro-societies’ made up of young people, their parents and their friends. These groupings are close and tolerant within themselves, but are more indifferent towards those who do not belong. Whilst young people’s values do not differ very much from those of their parents’ generation, and are perhaps more similar than they were thirty years ago, differences do exist between young people’s values according to their level of education.

There is insufficient evidence to know whether this is a general phenomenon or not, but it at least raises **an interesting question about the nature and relative strengths of intra-generational versus intergenerational lines of solidarities in the coming decades.**

What is certain is that commercial interests are already turning towards growing leisure and lifestyle markets for older, active, affluent citizens. Elements of what have been more readily understood as ‘youth lifestyles’ (travel, sport, health and fitness, fashion) are becoming more accessible for older adults – in this sense at least, **youthfulness is drifting away from chronological age.** We cannot know how young people will respond to these trends, although the search for distinctiveness in youth cultures and lifestyles is unlikely to dissipate. Might we imagine that young people could cast off ‘youthfulness’ and adopt more sedate, serious lifestyle symbols in opposition to increasingly hedonistic older adults and senior citizens? This is always possible, but perhaps it is more likely that young people will become even more attached to the pursuit of beauty and physical prowess – these are, after all, the only things that older people can neither achieve nor buy, despite cosmetic surgery and aerobics.

### **❑ Young people in an ageing world: Key Trends**

- ❑ The proportion of young people in the population is declining in most parts of Europe, except in the CIS countries. Southern Europe's fertility rates are the very lowest, life expectancy is higher in western Europe, whilst CEE countries have experienced sharply falling fertility rates and emigration to the west, especially by young well-qualified adults.
- ❑ In Europe's ageing societies, social policy tends to under-privilege youth, especially as far as social welfare contributions and benefits are concerned.
- ❑ On balance, knowledge-based economies and societies tend to privilege youth – they are more flexible, up-to-date and open to change.
- ❑ Young people will find it easiest to adapt to lifelong learning, but teaching and learning will have to be organised more flexibly, to be effective and attractive.
- ❑ Young people are the main carriers of the spread of new information and communication technologies, but the digital divide in access and competence reproduces regional, social and gender inequalities.
- ❑ Young women are more open and flexible in their approach to life – they are the leading carriers of modernity.
- ❑ Intergenerational family ties have become more important, for economic and social reasons – the precise patterns and reasons differ across Europe.
- ❑ Immigration patterns will lead to greater cultural and ethnic diversity in Europe, most particularly in the younger age groups of the population.
- ❑ Chronological age is drifting apart from 'youthfulness' in terms of normative expectations and actual behaviours. Identity building is a more open-ended process that finds succour and expression in the pluralisation of lifestyles.

## 6 Conclusions and recommendations

The first and emphatic conclusion to be drawn from this report is that it is currently impossible to prepare a sufficiently detailed, precise and well-balanced comparative account of young people's social situation for Europe as a whole. The aim has been a modest one: to describe basic patterns for just a few key themes, and to cast an interpretive eye towards the coming decades.

Evidence-based policymaking is only possible if the evidence is available and accessible in the first place. **European youth research, the evidential reference for European youth policymaking, must currently work with a highly uneven and disparate information and knowledge base.** This cannot reasonably continue. Comprehensive, coherent and coordinated policies and action in favour of young people throughout Europe require comprehensive, coherent and coordinated evidence and expertise.

The paucity of good quality data for comparative and intercultural analysis means that over the past decade, many reports have been prepared that essentially cover the same ground at much the same level of detail. Most refer solely to western Europe, which is due both to lack of accessible material for the CEE/CIS countries and to the lack of funding sources for work in this part of Europe. The last decade has seen a significant rise in the number of research studies comparing two or more national contexts for specific topics (such as rural youth or youth unemployment), together with a number of edited collections that include contributions from a range of countries on a variety of topics. Once more, these sources predominantly refer to western European countries and they are, in any case, not only relatively few in number but also highly diverse in terms of content and method. Several countries in western Europe also run cohort surveys charting paths from school to work, and some (including one or two CEE countries) have regular or intermittent large-scale youth surveys covering a wide range of topics. But many more countries do not have these kinds of inquiries, and, in any case, those that do exist are of limited suitability for comparative analysis. The European Commission's Youth Eurobarometers are the only standardised and specialised inquiries into young people's lives and views. There have been five such surveys at irregular intervals between 1983 and 2001, but they cover only young EU passport-holders aged 15-24 and living in a Member State and are only partially comparable across time. Nor has the information from these surveys been used widely or, for the most part, imaginatively.

There is an urgent need, then, to improve the quantity and quality of information and knowledge about young people's lives for the whole of Europe. But to be really useful for policymaking, European youth research must be able to move beyond describing and summarising what has happened in the past towards solid and plausible accounts of what might happen in the future. This is never easy and it always demands taking interpretive risks. The complexity of **the task at comparative and intercultural level** is still greater, and it **requires, perhaps above all, a capacity for flexible and innovative reflection, problem-solving and communication skills. Young youth researchers will need to acquire these competencies in far greater measure** than their forebears have had to do. This, too, requires the exercise of policy foresight and concerted action.

Secondly, a number of **themes for more intensive research and action** emerge from this report. These are highly consonant with priority topics in current policy debates in the youth field and in closely related policy fields:

***Transitions***

- Patterns, strategies and purposes of combining ‘learning and earning’ and ‘living and working’
- The role and use of exchange, mobility and migration in life and career planning, including young couples’ strategies and decisions

***Socialisation and learning***

- Strategies for ‘mixing and matching’ different sites and sources of information and practical experience, including the use of NICT and non-formal channels
- Assessing the quality and outcomes of non-formal learning

***Intolerance, xenophobia and anti-democratic behaviour***

- In-depth and longitudinal study of the social antecedents of the development of trajectories into intolerance during childhood and youth, in order to develop holistic counter-strategies

***Social marginalisation and exclusion***

- Map vulnerable trajectories more accurately and comprehensively as a basis for developing more effective prevention measures and support systems
- Monitor the longer-term outcomes of poverty, unemployment and social marginalisation amongst young people as they become parents and adult citizens

***Family life***

- The impact of demographic change on patterns of sociability within and beyond households and kinship groups
- Work-life balance and changing gender roles

***Intergenerational relations***

- The nature and consequences of extended (partial) dependency on parents
- How the social contract between the generations works in everyday life

***Participation***

- In-depth study of young people’s social and political participatory activities across the full range of national and cultural contexts, with a view to identifying ways to improve and reform existing democratic channels and mechanisms, both in the formal context (parties, parliaments, social partners ...) and within civil society (associations, mediation and advocacy, school councils ...)

Thirdly, whatever research and policy priorities are pursued in the coming years, there are a number of **actions** that could and should be undertaken in order **to improve the quantity, quality and balance of information about youth in Europe**. We recommend that consideration be given to the following proposals:

- **Establish a comprehensive European database and a regular reporting system**

Options include founding a European Youth Observatory, establishing a regular European Youth Survey, and instituting a coordinated reporting process under the auspices of the Council of Europe European Youth Ministers Conferences. Initial tasks would certainly include mapping and assembling existing research centres, networks and ‘data producers’,

with a view to setting up a stable information and operational network (perhaps adopting a model similar to that of Eurydice, the European Union's information and research centre on education).

- **Support European youth research by structured co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Commission**

Options include the negotiation of a special or expanded Partnership Agreement to complement the existing arrangements in the area of training for youth workers and non-formal youth trainers. Initial tasks would certainly include an expert 'task force' to advise on thematic priorities, research training needs and improving comparative methods and indicators. Co-sponsorship of a dedicated interdisciplinary European Journal of Youth Studies would also be a positive measure to improve access to and dissemination of work from the whole of Europe (perhaps along the lines of the European Journal of Vocational Education and Training, sponsored by Cedefop, the European Union's information and research centre for the development of vocational training).

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