



Regional Office for  
Europe and Central Asia

## YOUNG PEOPLE AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

Report on the National and Regional Events on  
Youth Employment in Europe and Central Asia



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## Foreword

This report provides an overview of the main discussions and outcomes of nine national and regional events on youth employment that took place across Europe and Central Asia between March and April 2012, in anticipation of the *Youth Employment Forum* organised by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Geneva on May 23-25, 2012.

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The results presented here are the product of the work of a great number of officials of ILO Offices in Europe and Central Asia, most notably Olga Koulaeva, Natalia Popova, Ozan Cakmak and Rudi Delarue. Special thanks also go to Gianni Rosas, Coordinator of the ILO Youth Employment Programme, for his guidance and support in the organization of these events, as well as Raymond Torres, Azita Berar-Awad, Donna Koeltz, Sara Elder and Valli Corbanese who valuably contributed to their success. Finally, we are grateful to the many young people who provided first-hand accounts of the obstacles and difficulties that they face in finding a decent job and who contributed to a dynamic debate about possible solutions to the youth employment crisis.

The views expressed in the report do not necessarily reflect those of the Organization or its constituents.

## **1 Introduction**

In order to support and strengthen the consultation processes leading to the General Discussion on the “Youth Employment Crisis” of the 101<sup>st</sup> Session of the International Labour Conference, a series of national events across all five ILO regions were held in spring 2012. Within Europe and Central Asia Region, eleven events were scheduled for the months of March and April 2012. This report summarizes the discussions and conclusions that emerged from nine national events on youth employment in Brussels (regional event for the European Union), France, Spain, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Ukraine, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), and Turkey. The national events in Serbia and Italy are not covered in this report as they had not yet taken place at the time of its drafting.

Key region-specific messages stemming from these national events cover both the main barriers that young people face in gaining access to decent work and the programmes and policies best able to address those challenges. Obstacles faced by youth in their pursuit for decent work include, (1) a low level of labour demand and a lack of decent jobs; (2) segmented national labour markets that penalize young people - who are disproportionately represented among temporary workers - in terms of wages, career prospects, training provision and job stability; (3) a mismatch between the education and training that young people have received and the skills demanded by the labour market; (4) a difficult school-to-work transition, often linked to a lack of work experience which makes youth less marketable to employers; (5) and a lack of knowledge among young people concerning where and how to look for work.

At the events, young people, social partners, civil society and government representatives discussed ideas, initiatives and policies for addressing the youth employment crisis and helping young people overcome the barriers announced above, these included: (1) better career guidance, targeted training, skills needs projections and labour market analysis systems to reduce the skills mismatch; (2) more effective education, work-related apprenticeship and vocational training programmes and quality internships to facilitate the school-to-work transition; (3) collective bargaining, quality standards, minimum income guarantees and inclusive social protection systems to strengthen decent work; (4) better targeted services of Public Employment Agencies, increased offers by the social partners and the use of social media to effectively reach out to the young; and (5) the use of social dialogue, increased institutional representation of youth organizations and greater inter-ministerial coordination to ensure policy coherence.

## **2 Regional Context**

### **2.1 Characteristics of the Youth Employment Challenge**

Beyond global figures on the youth employment crisis, the economic crisis has had a differentiated impact across regions. Measured in terms of youth unemployment alone, the crisis' impact on youth was largest in the developed countries. Youth unemployed rates increased by 4.1 percentage points in the Developed Countries and the European Union between 2008 and 2009 and by 3.4 points in South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

In December 2011, the youth unemployment rate stood at 22.1 per cent in the EU27, reaching a level which is more than twice that of adults. Spanish and Greek youth is particularly hard hit since the youth unemployment rate in these countries doubled between 2007 and 2011 and now stands at 49.9 and 48.1 per cent respectively (November 2011). In Ireland, it increased from 8.5 to 31.9 per cent over the same period. In France, the youth unemployment rate increased by more than 4 percentage points between 2008 and 2010; in 2011, it stood at 22.9 per cent. However, the picture is not uniformly bleak. In Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands, youth unemployment was below 10 per cent, almost half that of the EU average. A recent analysis of youth employment in selected countries of South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia showed that the average youth unemployment rate reached 29% in 2009<sup>1</sup>. Specifically in the six countries in which national events on youth employment took place, estimated national youth unemployment rates were: Ukraine 17.4 (2010), Georgia 36.4 (2009), Armenia 48.9 (2009), FYROM 53.7 (2010), Azerbaijan 11 (2010), and Turkey 18.4 (2011) per cent<sup>2</sup>. Similarly, the constant rise in the numbers of unemployed, combined with fewer opportunities for a speedy return to employment, has also aggravated the risk of higher long-term unemployment among young people.

The crisis has also led to an increase in "discouraged" youth across the region. In the EU, some 7.5 million people aged 15-25 are neither in employment, education or training (NEET). This represents an increase from 10.8 per cent in 2008 to 12.8 per cent in 2010 for the EU as a whole. In South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the share of NEET youth in the countries for which data are available averaged 25 per cent in 2009<sup>3</sup>.

Youth unemployment is only the tip of the iceberg. Beyond the simple measure of unemployment rate, young people suffer disproportionately from decent work deficits and lower quality jobs measured in terms of training provisions, career prospects, working poverty, low pay, and employment status (including the incidence of informality). Within the EU, the part-time employment as a percentage of total employment among young

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<sup>1</sup> ILO: *Youth employment in Eastern Europe: Crisis within the crisis*, Background paper for the informal Meeting of Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs during the 100<sup>th</sup> Session of the International Labour Conference (Geneva 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Sources: "Section 5 Annexes", summary notes of national events on youth employment and ILO: *Youth employment in Eastern Europe: Crisis within the crisis*, Background paper for the informal Meeting of Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs during the 100<sup>th</sup> Session of the International Labour Conference (Geneva 2011).

<sup>3</sup> ILO: *Youth employment in Eastern Europe: Crisis within the crisis*, Background paper for the informal Meeting of Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs during the 100<sup>th</sup> Session of the International Labour Conference (Geneva 2011).

people rose from 25.6 to 29 per cent over the period 2007-2010. More importantly perhaps, in 2010 almost 1 in 3 young people (28.4 per cent) working part-time did so involuntarily. Similarly, youth is disproportionately represented among temporary workers. Within the EU-27 countries in 2010, 42.1 per cent of workers under the age of 25 were working in temporary jobs. This figure has remained quite constant during the crisis (in 2008, it stood at 40.2 per cent). Crucially, 37.1 per cent of them were doing so simply because they could not find a permanent job<sup>4</sup>. Finally, there is a higher incidence of informality among young workers compared to their adult counterparts. In Europe, the share of youth in the informal economy is about 17 per cent, compared to 7 per cent for prime-age workers (25-54 years old)<sup>5</sup>. In South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, informality among young people is even more pronounced as it is estimated that one third of total youth employment is in the informal economy. For instance, the estimated share of young workers in the informal economy is 33.2 per cent in the Ukraine and 45 per cent in FYROM in 2010<sup>6</sup>.

In view of this rather bleak portrayal of youth employment the region, it is clear that young people face a number of substantial barriers in gaining access to decent jobs. First, labour markets in the region are characterized by a low level of labour demand and a lack of decent jobs. Second, as mentioned above, the region is characterized by a segmented labour market in which young people are disproportionately represented among temporary workers<sup>7</sup>. From the 1980s onwards, reforms of employment protection legislation (EPL) in many European countries introduced flexibility “at the margin”. These two-tier reforms have served to significantly deregulate the use of temporary contracts, while preserving stringent firing rules for permanent ones. Since young people are disproportionately represented in temporary work, they are thus at a disadvantage in relation to permanent workers in terms of wages, career prospects, training provision and job stability. Moreover, they face the risk of being trapped in a vicious circle of temporary jobs and unemployment with little chance of transition to permanent jobs, even into their thirties. Third, young people face a mismatch between education outcomes and the skills demanded by the labour market. This mismatch is particularly pronounced within the South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia where on the one hand, aspiring young graduates possess competencies that are not sought after by employers in their country and on the other, the quality of education and training is lagging behind the requirements of the labour market. Fourth, young people face a difficult school-to-work transition since a lack of work experience can make them less marketable to employers. Finally, youth people lack the knowledge concerning where and

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<sup>4</sup> Source: Eurostat Labour Force Survey, data extracted 13<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

<sup>5</sup> ILO: *The Youth Employment Crisis: Time for action*, Report V, background report prepared for the 101st Session of the International Labour Conference (Geneva 2012), page 16.

<sup>6</sup> Sources: “Section 5 Annexes”, summary notes of national events on youth employment and ILO: *Youth employment in Eastern Europe: Crisis within the crisis*, Background paper for the informal Meeting of Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs during the 100<sup>th</sup> Session of the International Labour Conference (Geneva 2011).

<sup>7</sup> European Commission 2010: “Employment in Europe” Report, chapter 3 on “Youth and segmentation of EU labour markets”.

how to look for work. Public Employment Services have an important role to play in this respect, providing career guidance and personalized counselling services to young people.

## 2.2 What are Countries Doing on Youth Employment?

### *Policies, programmes and partnerships implemented within the European Union*

Youth employment is an area of priority action for the European Union. As part of the *Europe 2020 strategy*, several flagship initiatives and headline targets are directly or indirectly linked to the youth employment challenge<sup>8</sup>. More recently, within the context of this strategic framework, in December 2011, the European Commission launched the *Youth Opportunities Initiative*, calling on Member States and their social partners to prevent early school leaving and the inflow into unemployment; helping youngsters develop skills relevant to the labour market; ensuring opportunities for young people to gain work experience and on-the-job training and helping young people find a first job<sup>9</sup>. Similarly, youth employment is an important component of the recent *EU Employment Package* presented by the European Commission on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2012. In its policy communication, the Commission stressed the need to deliver on opportunities for youth by supporting young people's transition to work ("e.g. through youth guarantees, activation measures targeting young people, the quality of traineeships, and youth mobility").

A number of European partnerships on youth employment are also forming at the EU level, most notably on the issue of *Youth Employment Guarantees*<sup>10</sup>, a *European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships*<sup>11</sup>, and the EU social partners' joint work programme for 2012-14<sup>12</sup>.

At the national level, Member States have adopted a range of policies aimed at addressing the youth employment crisis<sup>13</sup>. First, EU countries have taken a series of measures in order to ensure that young people gain the skills and competences they need to access the labour market, including special training schemes for young unemployed (Austria, Ireland and Greece) and second-chance schools (France, Greece, Luxembourg and Austria). Broader reforms seek to improve the school or vocational training systems and

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<sup>8</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:EN:PDF>. Specifically, three headline targets are relevant: the goal that by 2020, 75% of the population aged 20-64 should be employed; the share of early school leavers should be under 10% and at least 40% of the younger generation should have a tertiary degree; and 20 million less people should be at risk of poverty. Similarly, three of the flagship initiatives proposed in the strategy are equally pertinent: "Youth on the Move", an "Agenda for New Skills and Jobs" and a "European Platform against Poverty".

<sup>9</sup> [ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=7276&langId=en](http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=7276&langId=en).

<sup>10</sup> In the *EU Employment Package*, the Commission pledged to present a proposal for a Council Recommendation on Youth Guarantees by the end of 2012 and support activation measures targeting young people in the context of Youth Guarantee schemes.

<sup>11</sup> <http://qualityinternships.eu/>.

<sup>12</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=329&newsId=1211&furtherNews=yes>.

<sup>13</sup> European Employment Observatory Review 2010, "Youth Employment Measures 2010". [ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=6711&langId=en](http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=6711&langId=en).

increase the number of places available. Second, several member states have introduced special measures to support apprenticeships (Denmark, Ireland, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Sweden, and the United Kingdom). This builds on the success of the dual system apprenticeships – that combines school-based education with in-company training, usually for a period of three to four years after the completion of compulsory education – which is typical in Austria, Denmark, and Germany. Third, a growing number of countries have recently instituted youth guarantees to ensure that all young people are in a job, education or training (Finland, Austria, the United Kingdom and Sweden). Finally, active labour market policies (ALMPs) constitute an important tool for alleviating the current youth employment crisis. A broad range of policies fall within this category, most notably, the provision of job-search assistance, career guidance and personalised counselling programmes, incentives to employers to hire young workers (through hiring subsidies and reductions in non-wage costs of labour), programmes to promote self-employment, and establishing a job guarantee schemes for young people. Moreover, a growing number of countries have adopted a “mutual obligations” approach whereby income support provided to young persons is conditional upon their participation in the programmes offered to them (whether it be training, job-search or job-placement activities). It is also noteworthy that certain countries have designed measures targeted at at-risk groups, such as young migrants or the Roma (Germany, Austria, France and Slovakia).

Specifically, in France - where a national event on youth employment was held on 21<sup>st</sup> March - three plans structure government action on youth employment. First, the 2009 *Emergency Plan for Youth Employment* comprises a series of measures to support young people in their school-to-work transitions through funded apprenticeships, training contracts and subsidised contracts. Second, the 2009 *Acting for Youth* plan is aimed at addressing the problem of early school leavers. It comprises a “right to prepare for working life”, increases compulsory education from 16 to 18 years of age, and establishes the right to training or a job upon leaving school. Finally, the “Hope for suburbs” plan targets young people from disadvantaged areas.

In Spain, a number of ALMPs have been established in favour of young people. A series of measures have been taken to link education with work experience through internship schemes for VET and university graduates, as well as unemployed youth. Emphasis has also been placed on facilitating the entry of early school leavers into the labour market; indeed, initial vocational qualification programmes (PCPI) offer early school leavers a chance to enrol in training courses to gain professional skills for one or two years, allowing them to obtain a degree equivalent to secondary education. Similarly, a series of measures have been launched that aim to promote the transnational mobility of young people. For instance, funded by the Spanish Ministry of Education, ARGO GLOBAL is a programme that offers grants to young university graduates from Spanish universities to take part in an internship in international companies abroad. On the demand side, hiring subsidies have been established in order to incite companies to recruit and/or create additional jobs for young people.



### *Policies, programmes and partnership implemented in South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia*

Within South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, while governments have implemented policies aimed at combatting unemployment and promoting decent work for young people they have traditionally lacked a comprehensive framework establishing a clear set of policy priorities, targets and outcomes for youth employment. That said, three out of the six countries in which national events were held (Georgia, FYROM and Turkey) are in the process of developing such national overarching strategies. Below, consideration is given to particular national policies and programmes implemented by these six governments in the area of youth employment.

In Azerbaijan, government policies on youth employment have focused on paid unemployment benefits for three months, the provision of skills training/retraining, the creation of regional training centers, and training on how to look for a job. Three government programmes have been particularly successful in recent years. First, a Career Development Centre has been successfully established at the State Economics University. Second, in an effort to promote the insertion of young unemployed in the labour market, three monthly VET training courses for young job seekers are offered by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection. Third, with ILO technical assistance, regional training centres have recently been launched in Baku and Geokchay.

In Armenia, ALMPs currently being implemented focus on vocational education for unemployed (especially disadvantaged youth), wage subsidy programme, public works and apprenticeships. In 2011, the Armenian State Employment Service Agency implemented for the first time an internship program for young people that have a specialization in a certain technical area but lack work experience. The Government is also working to strengthen its education system, especially in the higher education and vocational education areas. The Republican Union of Employers of Armenia (RUEA) and the European Regional Educational Academy (EREA - a youth organization) of Armenia are actively contributing to such programmes. Broader institutional reforms are also underway. In 2007, the Youth Professional Orientation Centre (YPOC) - functioning under the Ministry of Labour and Social Issues – was established.

In Georgia, there is no special youth employment strategy. The Public Employment Agency was dissolved in 2006 and the Law on Employment was repealed that same year. Therefore, different projects aimed at addressing youth employment have typically lacked a systematic approach. However, the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs, is currently working on the elaboration of a *National Strategy on Youth Affairs*, with a chapter on Youth Employment. Social partners are also active in the field of youth employment. On the pressing issue of skills mismatch between young people and labour market needs, the Georgia Employer's Association is cooperating with universities and vocational educational institutions to ensure they educate qualified specialists who can be employed in future.

Local authorities (most notably Tbilisi city hall) and youth organizations (Georgian Young Medics' Union, Youth Alternative, and the European Law Students' Association) have also implemented a number of projects aimed at tackling the youth employment crisis.

In Ukraine, ALMPs provided by the PES for youth include training and retraining, career guidance and professional advice, public works and self-employment scheme. A new initiative that is currently elaborated by the PES is a lump-sum payment of unemployment benefits to the registered unemployed to finance his/her education in a new field with subsequent employment in the same field (voucher system). More broadly, the new revision of the Law on Employment, the Labour Code and the General Agreement between the Government, Employers and Trade Unions, will aim to smooth the transition of youth from education to work, reduce youth unemployment and retain young Ukrainians from emigration. Alongside government policies and programmes, social partners have also taken measures aimed at addressing the youth employment crisis. For instance, in an attempt to address the skills mismatch prevalent in the country, the Federation of Employers is actively involved in the elaboration of the system of professional (occupational) standards and the National Qualifications Framework.

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia recently saw the coining of a *National Employment Strategy 2011-2015* and the *National Action Plan on Employment (2011-2013)*. The strategy highlights four policy areas that are instrumental to the creation of decent work opportunities for youth. The first revolves around the promotion of investment as a tool to increase economic growth, export capacity and the competitiveness of the country. The second policy area is the promotion of private sector enterprises, based on the simplification of the regulatory regime and the continuation of the reform of the labour taxation system. The third policy is the reform of all levels of the national education system. Finally, the range and scope of ALMPs will be improved, especially with regard to employment services; labour market training; and employment creation. The assignment of priority to youth employment at national level is evidenced by the inclusion in the *National Employment Strategy* of two measurable targets, namely the increase in the youth (15 to 29) employment rate (from 26.5 per cent to 29 per cent in 2015) and the decrease of early school leaving (from 16.2 per cent to 14 per cent).

In Turkey, a *National Youth Employment Action Plan* (NYEAP) has recently been adopted. Current action plans and employment strategies proposed by the government mainly target the improvement of labour supply. Specifically, improving the low labour force participation rate of young women is a major objective in Turkey (in 2011, the labour force participation rate of women was recorded as 28.8 %, compared with 71.7% for men), and one key issue for facilitating this is the provision of sufficient care services. İSKUR has implemented a project entitled "The Operation on Promoting Women's Employment" that offers a series of trainings, micro-finance and job counselling offered to women. Social partners (for instance, the Women Entrepreneurs Association of Turkey (KAGIDER)) are also working to address this gender gap. Another major focus of government (and the private sector) policies has been on improving the weak linkages between education and the labour market.

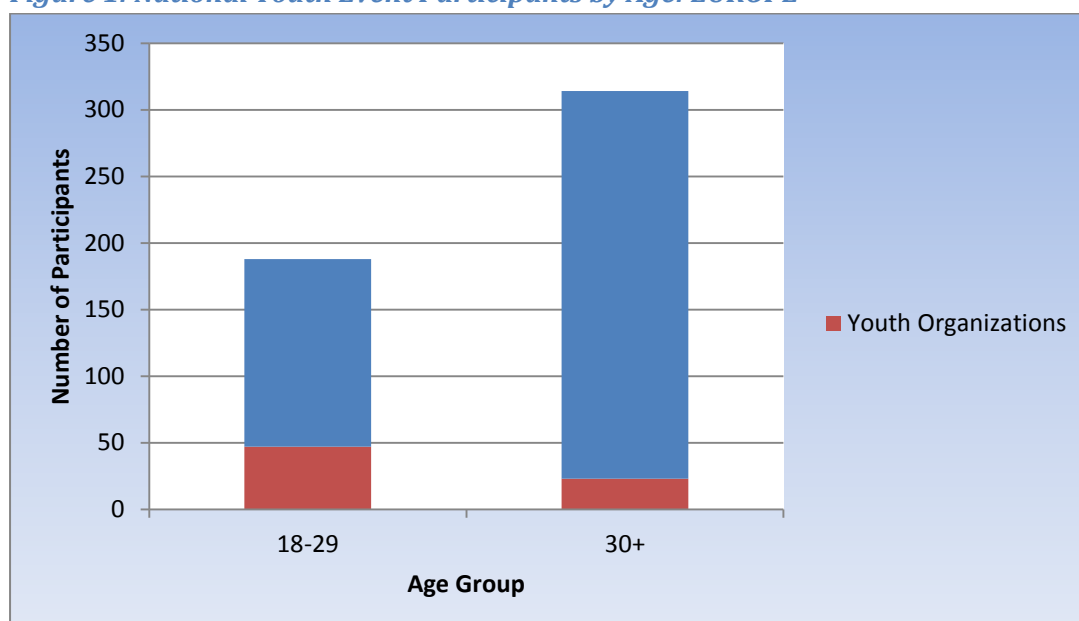
### 3 Young People as Agents of Change

#### 3.1 Key Issues Discussed During the National Events

The following section summarizes key issues discussed during the nine national events in Europe and Central Asia, indicates how issues were brought to the table and provides statistics on participants (cf. Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3 and Figure 4; these figures cover data for all countries except Spain).

A regional youth event for the European Union on 16<sup>th</sup> March organised by the ILO Brussels office provided a platform for the representatives of the European Commission, the EU Danish Council Presidency, the European Economic and Social Committee, the social partners, youth organizations and the main political groups of the European Parliament to share their thoughts and initiatives on the current youth employment crisis. During the half-day consultation which integrated both high-level presentations and moderated roundtables, participants stressed that transitions from school to work as well as the policy outreach to youth through effective public employment services and youth networks required improvements in the EU. Participants noted that countries with a strong dual apprenticeship programme, combining in-classroom and workplace training such as in Germany, Austria or the Netherlands, have experienced a higher chance of positive labour market outcomes for young people. Concerns were raised that the disproportionate representation of youth in precarious work and risks of long-term exclusion might cause negative societal and political consequences such as delayed family planning, instable relationships and distrust in political institutions.

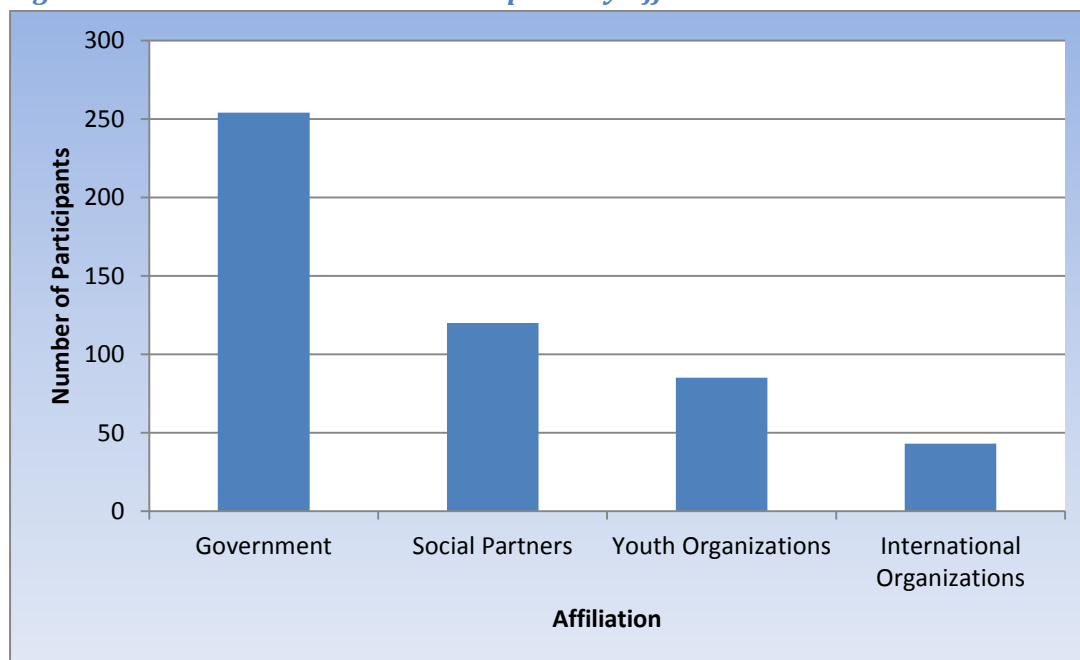
*Figure 1: National Youth Event Participants by Age: EUROPE*



In France, a youth workshop was held on 21<sup>st</sup> March. The half-day workshop consisted of a high-level presentation by Raymond Torres, Director of the International Institute for Labour Studies of the ILO, a presentation by a representative of an umbrella organization of the French youth organizations and a discussion round with participants from the workers, employers and the main French youth organizations. In his opening speech, Raymond Torres called for a reinforced global effort in the framework of the G20 in order to help the young and recalled the necessity to effectively implement the *ILO Global Jobs Pact* for the creation of decent employment adopted in 2009. In the following roundtable, participants expressed their concerns that young people have not been properly taken into account by policy-makers in the devising of the stimulus policy packages that followed the onset of the economic and financial crisis in Europe.

In Spain, a national conference on youth employment and decent work was held at the headquarters of the Economic and Social Council in Madrid on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2012. It was organised by the ILO Office in Spain with the active partnership of employers (Spanish Confederation of Employers Organizations (CEOE) and Spanish Confederation of Associations of Young Entrepreneurs (CEAJE)) and trade union representatives (Trade Union Confederation of Workers' Commissions (CCOO) and the General Union of Workers (UGT)) as well as the Spanish Youth Council (CJE). The conference presented ten good practices in the field of job creation and/or the promotion of decent work for youth, addressing issues such as advancing union involvement in recruitment processes, promoting employment of people with disabilities, ensuring gender parity in hiring practices, supporting youth entrepreneurship, and providing training to young workers so that they may benefit from new employment opportunities in the green economy.

**Figure 2: National Youth Event Participants by Affiliation: EUROPE**

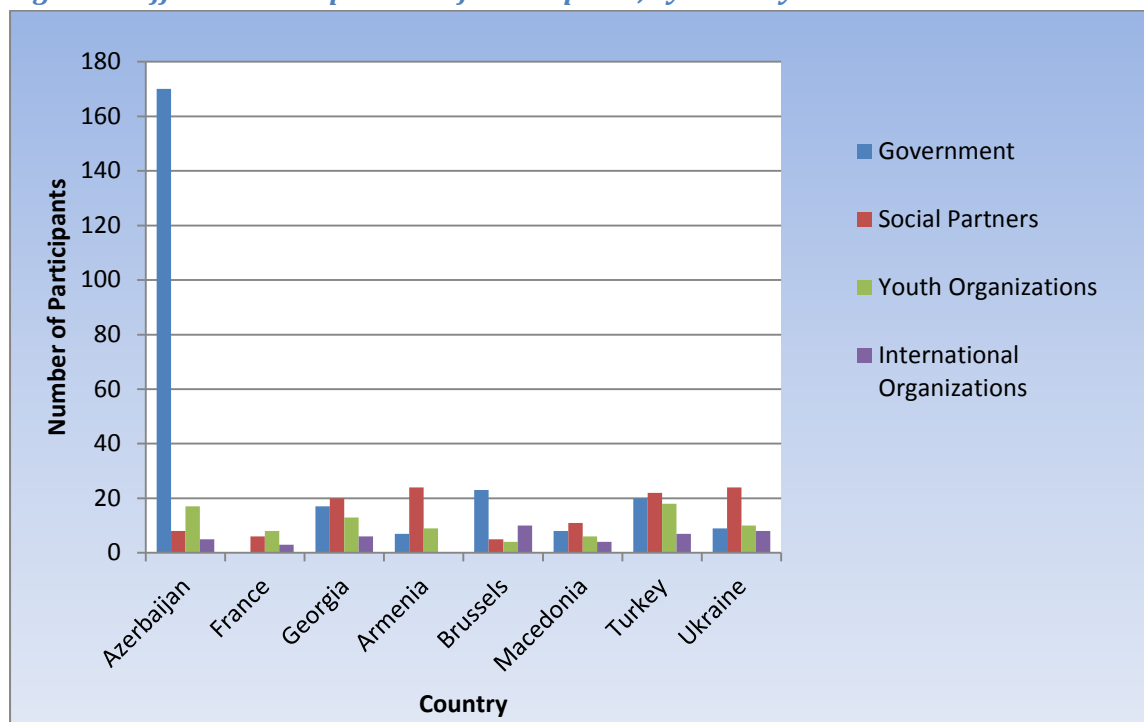


At a national ILO youth event held on 15<sup>th</sup> March in Azerbaijan, participants agreed that youth employment is a national priority but so far has not been sufficiently translated into action. To make progress, participants of the half-day workshop emphasized that the existing technical and vocational education and training system (TVET) in the country needs to be strengthened. Government representatives, public employment services' (PES) civil servants, employers and workers, international experts, as well as representatives of Azerbaijani youth organizations stressed in their contributions to the event that action must be taken to enhance the quality of training, provide sufficient financial and managerial support for training institutions and ensure coordination across various institutions and stakeholders. For effective youth employment policies, both employers and workers highlighted the need for social dialogue. A representative from the Azerbaijani Confederation of Trade Unions pointed out that their activities are increasingly dedicated to protect the rights of young employees at the enterprise level, particularly in multinational companies, by promoting freedom of association and creating trade unions.

In Armenia representatives from the government, the workers, the employers and youth organizations took part in a youth employment event on 14<sup>th</sup> March. The one-day workshop which was organized around single speeches and panel discussions focussed on the school-to-work transition of the young. Both representatives of the government and other organizations highlighted the importance of establishing vocational orientation systems and viable strategies for rural youth employment. The participants suggested the systematic organization of job clubs and job fairs, as well as short-term training for young job seekers. It was also stressed that rural youth employment required targeted vocational training and the creation of non-agricultural employment in rural areas. During the meeting, speakers emphasized that cooperation between the educational system, enterprises and ministries dealing with youth employment issues needs to be urgently improved. The participants of the workshop were interested in learning about good practices being implemented in other countries in the region, in view of introducing and adapting such practices in Armenia.

In Georgia, a high level half-day national conference including ministers, civil servants, workers, employers and student organizations was organized by the ILO on 19<sup>th</sup> March. At the workshop, which comprised panel discussions and single speeches, the participants agreed that there was an urgent need to increase the capacity of public employment services in order to effectively address the issue of youth employment, work migration and reintegration. The systematic organization of job fairs, the promotion of quality apprenticeship and on the job-training programmes were recognized as key measures to be addressed in order to close the skill and experience gap of the youth on the labour market. The president of the Georgian Trade Union Confederation (GTUC) added that vocational education is not popular among youth for various reasons such as legal restrictions for continuing education in universities. Furthermore, the social partners voiced the urgent need for reliable labour market statistics based on regular surveys.

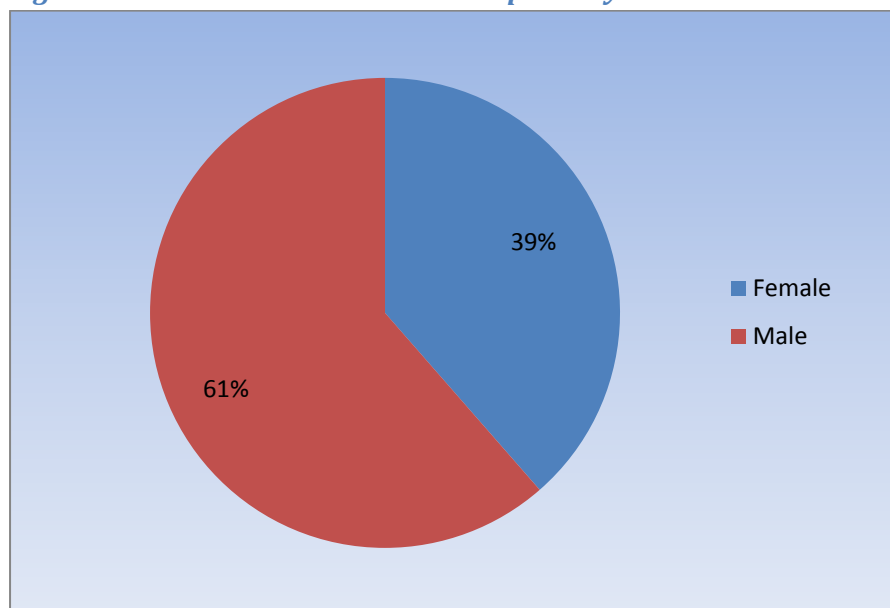
Figure 3: Affiliation Composition of Participants, by Country



In Ukraine, a one-day round table held on 23<sup>rd</sup> March brought together government representatives, workers and employers, youth organizations, private employment agencies, researchers and international experts for a discussion on youth employment. The discussants agreed that major reasons for youth unemployment in Ukraine comprise an ineffective system of career guidance, a disregard of the young for vocational training, the low quality of education and training, a mismatch between labour supply and the labour market's demands and the lack of incentives for employers to hire inexperienced young workers. Reacting to these challenges, the participants agreed on the need for effective youth employment policies, improvements of the education and training system, the creation of decent work for youth and increased policy coherence and coordination between educational and training institutions, the social partners and relevant ministries.

A one-day workshop on *Youth employment in crisis: Time for action* held on 22<sup>nd</sup> March in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia gave a platform to high-level representatives from the government, the social partners, academia and the ILO to discuss the youth employment challenge in the country, review the policies currently being implemented to ease the transition to work and plan the way forward. A recent study presented at the event showed that only 4 per cent of young people had transited to a career job in the FYROM. The speaker of the employers pointed out deficits in the education system, a skills mismatch and the lack of practical knowledge as being the main barriers for young people to find a job. Trade unions' activists expressed their concerns regarding declining interest of young workers for trade union activities. Centring on suitable employment promotion policies, the workshop participants discussed the scope of the *National Employment Strategy 2011-2015* and the *National Action Plan on Employment (2011-2013)* for FYROM.

**Figure 4: National Youth Event Participants by Gender: EUROPE**



At the youth employment event held in Turkey on 29<sup>th</sup> March, the participants emphasized the importance of education for the young and the need to strengthen its relationship with employment and the labour market. In high-level panel presentations given by government representatives, employers, workers, and researchers as well as during integrated workshops with Turkish youth organizations, the discussants called for the promotion of care services to enable labour market participation of young women, better linkages between education and youth employment, notably through academy-industry partnerships, and youth employment awareness campaigns among employers. The participants also agreed on the necessity to improve the image and value of vocational education for the young. To achieve these goals, the discussants called on the social partners as well as the public and private sector to take action for effective internships and scholarships, personal development workshops, mentoring and coaching modules.

### **3.2 Youth Voices**

The following section highlights young people's contribution to the events, summarizes follow-up activities identified and recapitulates on partnerships and networks which were proposed during the nine national events in Europe and Central Asia.

While the forthcoming European Commission's initiatives for youth employment were welcomed by youth organizations at the European Union event in Brussels, participants noted that the concrete delivery of EU programmes in the area of youth employment is not yet felt on the ground in many member states. The young voiced their needs for decent jobs, quality standard for internships, and effective training and apprenticeship programmes as well as inclusive social security systems. The upcoming *Youth Opportunities Initiative* by the EC takes up many proposals to tackle youth unemployment such as supporting labour

market mobility of youth, mobilising the European Social Fund to support skills development and school-to-work transitions, supporting the transition from education to work and improved policy delivery as part of the European Semester. The young Europeans at the event particularly appreciated plans for a *Youth Guarantee*, introduced by the European Parliament and endorsed by the Council and Commission in 2012, which plans to make sure that no young person would remain unemployed for more than four months, but would obtain employment, education or training leading to skills upgrading and higher employability. All the participants of the meeting noted with satisfaction the attention given by Denmark's presidency to youth employment (e.g. conference on youth employment in Denmark on 26-27 April), praised the hearings of the European Parliament on youth employment and welcomed that youth employment is part of the new EU social partners joint work programme 2012-2014.

At the national event in France, the youth organizations remarked that strategies aiming at the young need to first make an inquiry into their life situations as these are very diverse. Youth representatives insisted on the fact that the difficulties encountered by young people are due to bad experiences and a challenging labour market situation rather than a fault of character as it is sometimes implied. Summarizing their experiences, the young participants pointed out that their whole generation has lowered their ambitions and substituted career aspirations for the search of stability. Follow-up activities called for by the participants comprised improvements of social security coverage of the young, guarantees for decent salaries for young workers, steps to decrease precariousness particularly for young migrants and women, targeted youth services of the PES, improved training opportunities, quality standards for internships and apprenticeship programmes, greater policy coherence as well as a better representation of the young in trade unions as well as business, economic, social and environmental councils.

The national conference on youth employment and decent work in Spain was attended by one hundred and fifty young people. Ricardo Ibarra, the President of the Spanish Youth Council (CJE), a platform comprising seventy-six youth organizations, underscored the need to find common agreement through social dialogue since the youth crisis requires deep structural changes that demand the mobilisation of all relevant actors. As follow-up actions to the event, conference participants adopted a set of shared conclusions intended to feed into the ILO Youth Employment Forum of 23-25 May 2012 and the International Labour Conference 2012. At the heart of these conclusions was an overarching concern for optimizing young people's school-to-work transition by – among other things - increasing the quality and number of VET opportunities and aligning such programmes to the needs of the labour market, promoting dual training systems and encouraging company involvement in such schemes, ensuring access to continuing education, and carrying out awareness campaigns in order to change the current perception of vocational training. Similarly, emphasis was also placed on the importance of facilitating the assimilation of young people into the labour market by improving incentives to companies to recruit young people, promoting self-employment among youth through information services, guidance and



counseling opportunities, encouraging the development of community initiatives on employment, investing in new sources of employment in the green economy, and passing a new law on employment for youth with disabilities to ensure equal opportunities. Finally, a key follow-up activity proposed by participants was the coining of a *Comprehensive Plan for Youth Employability* that will be the product of collaborative effort between workers' unions, business organisations, and youth representatives.

In Azerbaijan, contributions from the National Association of Youth Organizations and young representative of Trade Unions made clear that a major concern of the Azerbaijani youth is education. Youth NGOs underlined their desire for better education, apprenticeship programmes and on-the-job training as well as opportunities for seasonal work. The young also added that social networks are an important tool used during job search activities. Activities identified by the participants that would need follow-up action comprised the improvement of the national labour code, capacity building for PES, and an increased coordination of labour market and education policies with particular focus on vocational education and training. In order to ensure a better match between labour supply and demand, a greater involvement of the social partners was recognised as necessary follow-up activity. It was also agreed to widen the frame of cooperation to allow young people to raise their voice.

At the national event in Armenia, Mr. Petrosyan, the first Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Issues elaborated on the fact that in 2012 the Government will develop a *National Employment Strategy*, a *Concept Note* and a new *Law on Employment*. The youth employment issue will be the cornerstone of these three documents.

In Georgia, youth organizations described the challenge of finding a first job. A young union representative brought up the issue of mismatch between skills and available jobs in the labour market, a problem that was also pointed out by youth through social media networks. Migration was also highlighted as an important channel for finding a job. To promote youth employment, youth organizations demanded effective and decent internships, apprenticeships and career guidance. Pointing out the effectiveness of youth organizations for job brokerage and coordination of internship and apprenticeship programmes, a representative from the Georgian Young Medics' Union stressed that her organization succeeded to help many young medics to find employment. In a call for action made at the event, Mr. Giorgi Avaliani, the Senior Deputy Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs invited social partners to take part in drafting the *National Strategy on Youth Affairs*, with a chapter on youth employment. To respond to the youth employment challenge, the ILO offers technical support in elaborating the youth employment chapter and developing municipal employment services.

In Ukraine, the president of the Ukrainian Association of Students' Self-Government voiced the urgent need for paid internship programs being fitted into university curricula. A young representative of the Federation of employers' of Ukraine asked for effective national employment creation programs as the youth employment crisis would make young people lose their trust in government institutions. Highlighting problems of low wages for female

employees, single motherhood and gender stereotypes, two young participants involved in initiatives for women asked for strategies for the promotion of female employment. As follow-up action to the event, the tripartite actors present at the meeting pledged to pay particular attention to measures for youth in the revision of the *Law on Employment*, the *General Tripartite Agreement* and new social initiatives of the President of Ukraine. All roundtable participants, including representatives of youth and women's organizations, highlighted the need to conduct more regular youth consultations in the future.

In the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, a youth NGO which deals on a daily basis with young unemployed emphasized that in many cases young people in the country are continuing their education simply because the Macedonian economy is not creating sufficient jobs. Bearing in mind the extremely difficult situation facing young people, participants expressed their wish to keep youth employment as a focus of all labour market interventions of the government. To further strengthen its commitment to youth employment, the government announced its plan to formulate a fully-fledged *National Action Plan on Youth Employment*. Trade Unions and Employers Organizations will participate in the drafting of the action plan, which is expected to be finalised and adopted by the Government by the end of 2012. The ILO aims to provide assistance in the preparation of the national action plan and will help to implement a school-to-work transition survey, attached to the Labour Force Survey of the third quarter of 2012.

At the national event in Turkey, the representatives of Turkish youth organizations made suggestions to improve the outreach of youth employment initiatives. Young people asked to be involved in the design of policies affecting them and proposed to help communicating these policies via social media tools. As follow-up actions to the event, youth organizations suggested concrete steps to improve their representation, for instance the establishment of an inter-agency body for youth employment issues and their involvement in Provincial Employment and Vocational Training Boards. Presenting the first youth employment strategy in the history of Turkey, all participants endorsed the recently adopted *National Youth Employment Action Plan (NYEAP)* as a major step forward. The strategy had been prepared within the scope of the *UN Joint Programme on Youth Employment and Migration (UNJP-YEM)* implemented by ILO and other UN agencies in cooperation with the Turkish Employment Organization (ISKUR).

### 3.3 Learning from the Events

The following section spotlights participant's evaluation and eventual comments or suggestions made by the young at the events throughout Europe and Central Asia.

The young Turkish participants proposed to repeat the highly valued ILO youth event in the future, at a larger scale, to include more civil society organizations and organise the input of the young even more effectively. In the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia the majority of the participants believed that the creation of a youth platform was achieved by the event and good practices were shared. Most of the participants in the event in Armenia

rated information, networking opportunities, sharing of views and presentations as either good or satisfactory. In Ukraine, all young participants greatly appreciated the national youth event and other activities of the ILO in promoting youth employment and strengthening social dialogue as well as the involvement of youth and women's organizations. The participants of the European consultation in Brussels agreed that that the event gave a chance to inform each other about their initiatives and to exchange views on what are perceived to be the most pressing issues. In Georgia and Azerbaijan, most of the participants rated information, networking opportunities, sharing of views and presentations as either excellent or good.

## **4 Conclusions**

Participants of the national youth events throughout Europe and Central Asia highly appreciated the opportunity to raise their voice and share their views, concerns and expectations at a high-level tripartite event. This was broadly perceived as a significant stepping-stone to involve youth in a more interactive and participatory political process, with the ILO serving as a facilitator. Concerns were raised that the youth employment crisis increasingly presents a cause for young people to migrate, delay family planning and lose faith in politics, governments, social partners and democratic institutions.

While tripartite actors in Europe and Central Asia are increasingly recognising the importance of addressing the youth employment crisis, in certain instances youth organizations expressed reservations with regard to the effective implementation of policies, programmes and services aimed at bringing about real change. Young people also reported being insufficiently informed of government initiatives. Disillusionment exists among young people who feel that public employment services do not always provide them with effective tools and support in their search for a decent job. Moreover, youth organizations and social partners agreed that more efforts were needed to increase the interest among young people in joining trade unions and employers' organizations.

In this challenging situation, the nine youth events organized by the ILO and its country offices in Europe and Central Asia gave a voice to the young, civil society organizations and social partners, produced innovative ideas and deepened approaches for decent employment of the young, increased momentum for policy action and youth employment initiatives and strengthened partnerships and networks committed to implementing effective policies to tackle the youth employment crisis. Among the obstacles to be urgently addressed throughout the region, the youth organizations, social partners, civil society associations and government representatives identified skills mismatch, protracted and difficult school-to-work transitions, precarious situations of young people in unpaid, undeclared, low-paid or temporary work as well as limited outreach of existing active labour market, training and employment initiatives to the young. The national events created momentum for numerous follow-up activities, most significantly the development of national overarching strategies on youth employment in Georgia, FYROM, and Turkey. At

the events, new and on-going initiatives and policies were announced and strong messages for policy action were sent asking for:

- Improvements of career guidance, targeted training, skills needs projections and labour market analysis systems to reduce the skills mismatch between young jobseekers qualifications and labour market demands;
- More effective education, work-related apprenticeships and vocational training as well as quality internships to facilitate school-to-work transitions of young people;
- The promotion of collective bargaining as well as the introduction of quality standards, minimum income guarantees and inclusive social protection systems to strengthen decent work for young employees;
- Targeted services of Public Employment Agencies, increased offers by the social partners and the use of social media to effectively reach out to the young;
- The use of social dialogue, increased representation of youth organizations and greater inter-ministerial coordination to ensure policy coherence of youth employment initiatives.