



CASE STUDY 3

SOCIAL SOLIDARITY AND EU INCENTIVES FOR YOUTH



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BACKGROUND

The concept of social solidarity for youth in the EU includes policies that aim to reduce youth unemployment, provide quality education and training, foster youth participation in democratic life, and combat social exclusion. However, despite these efforts, youth in the EU face significant challenges, including high unemployment rates, social exclusion, the growing digital divide, and mental health struggles. These challenges were further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately impacted young people in terms of job losses, disruptions to education, and a general sense of uncertainty about their future.

Social solidarity for youth has been a focal point of several EU initiatives, including the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), Erasmus+, and the European Youth Guarantee. These programs were designed to support youth employment, improve skills, and foster social inclusion across EU member states. However, the degree to which these initiatives have succeeded has varied significantly across countries, dependent on local economic conditions, political will, and the level of commitment to youth solidarity.

One of the most pressing issues faced by youth in the EU has been youth unemployment. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, youth unemployment rates in Europe were high, particularly in southern European countries like Spain, Greece, and Italy, where the economic impact of the 2008 financial crisis had a long-lasting effect. For many young people, securing stable employment has been a constant challenge, with precarious, temporary, or part-time jobs becoming the norm rather than the exception.



OUTCOME

Youth Employment Initiative aimed to provide young people with skills, job opportunities, and pathways to education or apprenticeships. Its overall goal was to reduce youth unemployment by offering better access to training and employment, especially for those in regions with the highest unemployment rates.

The Erasmus+ program, which has been running since 1987, is one of the EU's most well-known initiatives, promoting education, training, and youth mobility across Europe.

The program provides opportunities for young people to study, work, and volunteer in other EU countries, fostering cultural exchange, personal development, and skills acquisition.

Erasmus+ has had a substantial positive impact on youth mobility and development. It has helped millions of young Europeans to gain international experience, improve their employability, and build networks. However, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted many mobility programs, limiting opportunities for young people to engage in study or work abroad.

Despite this, the EU adapted by offering virtual learning opportunities and encouraging digital mobility, which allowed some of the program's objectives to continue during the crisis.

The European Youth Guarantee, launched in 2013, is designed to ensure that all young people under the age of 30 receive a good-quality offer for employment, continued education, apprenticeship, or traineeship within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed.



LESSONS LEARNED

Some countries have successfully integrated it into their national policies, offering real opportunities for young people, while others have struggled to create sufficient high-quality offers. The crisis caused by the pandemic made the need for such guarantees even more urgent, but also harder to implement due to job losses and the strained capacity of labour markets.

The pandemic resulted in the disruption of education systems, causing learning losses and increasing the digital divide. Youth unemployment rates spiked, and young people faced challenges in accessing opportunities for internships, apprenticeships, and training programs.

The EU's response to the pandemic highlighted the importance of investing in youth solidarity. The NextGenerationEU recovery plan, which included a €6 billion allocation to support youth employment and education, provided a much-needed lifeline. While the recovery efforts have shown promise, it is clear that addressing the long-term effects of the pandemic on youth requires sustained investment in skills development, mental health support, and social inclusion.

