



Investing in youth for tomorrow's Europe: policies for youth autonomy and perspectives for the European Social Fund

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"Towards combined actions for youth policies in the new programming period 2014-20: the proposal of the regions"

- I would like to thank Toscana Region, and in particular President Rossi and Assessore Simoncini, for organising today's event.
- As stressed by previous speakers, **the situation of young people has been deteriorating** over the last few years.

More and more young people cannot find a job and youth unemployment is now a dramatic phenomenon [it affected 5.8 million youngsters in November 2012, representing 23.7% of the youth labour force], which reached worrying extremes at the EU's periphery [57.6% in EL (Sept. '12) and 56.5% in ES (Nov. '12); >30% also in PT, IT, SK and LV; <15% only in DE, AT, NL, DK].

More and more young people are not in employment, education and training – the so-called NEETs [7.1 million young people (12.7% of those aged 15-24) affected in 2012q2, up 1.1 mln compared with 2008q2 (then: 10.3%); again concentration at EU's periphery].

Young people who do manage to enter the labour market tend to suffer from more precarious conditions than their older peers.

- In this context, **EU Structural Funds, and notably the European Social Fund**, have recently been further mobilised to increase support for youth, in particular in the eight MS more affected by youth unemployment. Many MS have thus taken action to boost youth employment, developed youth employment plans, and stepped up education and training programmes, also in response to Action Team visits and bilateral meetings organised after the launch of the Youth Opportunity Initiative [already mentioned by Commissioner Andor].

By way of example, as a follow-up to the work of the action team in Italy, action is being stepped up, amongst others, to

- support actions in the field of education for Convergence regions by transferring management of regional resources to the national "Education" operational programme (worth some EUR 300 million);
- reprogram the Sicily regional operational programme (worth EUR 452 million) in order to launch a Youth Action Plan;

- extend a tax credit scheme to encourage companies to hire young people and promoting youth entrepreneurship (currently worth EUR 100 million).

- The **2014-20 programming period** represents a key opportunity to further help more young people have easier access to jobs, education & training and therefore a better quality of life.
- To tackle the youth situation under the new programming period, we should work even more on several fronts [as Commissioner Andor said in his opening speech]: dealing simultaneously with the exceptional, and with the structural. Working on the side of labour demand and on that of labour supply. Stimulating demand, by improving competitiveness and creating the conditions for growth, and improving supply, by working on education and skills, on incentives to take up jobs.
- Comprehensive approaches and integrated interventions, including through different funds, should then be promoted.
- As regards the ESF, let me recall that the proposed **ESF regulation** for the period 2014-2020 includes a dedicated investment priority targeting the sustainable labour market integration of young NEETs, and that young people can also be supported through other priorities.
- MS, in particular those facing high youth unemployment rates like Italy, are thus expected to identify young unemployed persons as a specific target group for ESF support. Member States' programming documents (Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes) should then focus on fundamental measures which provide young people with the relevant skills and work experience, such as school-to-work transitions (e.g. traineeships and apprenticeships), active measures for labour market integration of young people and comprehensive approaches like youth guarantee schemes.

As it was already mentioned, as requested by the European Council and European Parliament, the Commission's Youth Employment Package of last December includes a proposed Recommendation to Member States on introducing the Youth Guarantee to ensure that all young people up to age 25 receive a quality offer of a job, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed.

The proposed recommendation urges Member States to establish strong partnerships with stakeholders, ensure early intervention by employment services and other partners supporting young people, take supportive measures to enable labour integration, make full use of the European Social Fund and other structural funds to that end, assess and continuously improve the Youth Guarantee schemes and implement the schemes rapidly.

- In the framework of the negotiations, we will discuss with MS their plans to incorporate this kind of measures in their ESF operational programmes for the new programming period.
- In this context, regions will be key actors to foster initiatives in favour of young people, also by developing current good practices like the Toscana initiative "Giovanisi" and the other ones which have been presented earlier this morning.