

ERASMUS PRO: FOR A MILLION “YOUNG EUROPEAN APPRENTICES” BY 2020

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65 years ago, Robert Schuman observed that “Europe will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity”. In this tribune, the Jacques Delors Institute working group on youth employment* calls upon European leaders to rapidly implement a new mobility programme – Erasmus Pro – which would allow a million young Europeans to obtain a professional qualification in another European country by 2020. A shorter version of this Tribune is published by [Le Monde](#), [The Guardian](#) and the [Frankfurter Rundschau](#).

1. Youth unemployment: an unacceptable situation, an insufficient response

The plight of numerous young people in Europe is a serious source of concern, with some 5 million of them – in other words fully one active young person in four – currently looking for a job. And in some countries that figure skyrockets to one in two. We are looking at the tragic prospect of a lost, doomed generation.

The European Union is facing a real challenge because its very cohesion and future depend on this, and indeed the magnitude of the challenge has caused the European institutions to mobilise. Meetings have been held, speeches delivered on the “priority action” required, promises made and initiatives adopted, yet we have no choice but to recognise that the measures adopted to date have had only a limited impact.

The “Youth Guarantee” scheme, whereby every young European must receive a quality offer for a job, an apprenticeship or an internship within four months of leaving education or losing his or her job, is not bringing in the results hoped for. It is encountering major difficulties in its implementation. The credit earmarked for it is quite simply not being used: only a few million euro were mobilised in 2014, out of the €6.4 billion that has been available since the end of 2013.

Other action has been taken by mobilising the European Social Fund or European Investment Bank credit. The Commission has also launched a scheme called “Your First EURES Job” which has been offering financial assistance since 2012 to young people seeking a job, an

internship or an apprenticeship in a different EU member state. But that initiative involves fewer than 1,500 young people per year (see attachment).

Thus the overall result of these actions is disappointing. Most of them support what continue to be national initiatives – with their benefits, but also with their shortcomings. Some of them are designed to encourage mobility. That is a move in the right direction, but it is too weak and it certainly is not the kind of approach, either in its modesty or in its mechanisms, that is going to have any significant impact on youth unemployment levels.

2. Trans-European mobility for young people to qualify and to access the job market

Mobility lies at the heart of the European Union’s calling. From the very outset its mission has been to facilitate the free circulation of people in general and (though this may be less well-known) also of young workers (see Article 50 in the Treaty of Rome). Major texts have been approved and mobility schemes have been adopted, the most emblematic of which is unquestionably the Erasmus programme, which has allowed over 3 million students to pursue a part of their studies in a university in a different member state.

What Europe has proven capable of doing in the past for its future university graduates with the Erasmus programme, it can and must do again today for its less qualified young people, who are inevitably the ones worst hit by unemployment.

Mobility can be a lever for action in favour of qualification and of access to jobs for young people. The success which has greeted Germany’s “MobiPro EU” – offering

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support to young Europeans wishing to commit to vocational training in Germany – is proof (on a small and excessively bilateral scale) that mobility works.

A scheme encouraging trans-European mobility for unqualified young people should allow:

- Unemployed young people to benefit from the prospect of a job in those regions where apprenticeship offers go unanswered – these unanswered offers, incidentally, are currently estimated to run into several tens of thousands;
- Unemployed young people to achieve qualifying training, a factor for their employability, their enhancement and their own personal enrichment – this would contribute to the development of Europe’s human capital; and
- To improve apprenticeship’s image in Europe, thereby helping to ensure the success of the national reforms currently in hand aiming to develop this kind of training.

3. A new European mobility programme: Erasmus Pro

We propose that Europe’s leaders urgently put together a new professional mobility programme – Erasmus Pro – to allow one million young Europeans to gain a professional qualification in a different European country by 2020. The young people involved will be taken in by a training centre and a business in the host country for a period stretching from two to three years, with ongoing support from their regions of origin.

The Erasmus Pro programme must be extremely ambitious in its aims if it is to trigger a mobilising effect in young people and businesses and if it is to have an impact on youth unemployment in Europe. Having 200,000 new “young European apprentices” a year is indeed an ambitious goal, yet it lies within the member states’ grasp if we consider both the vacant apprenticeships available today and the potential for creating new posts. Over and above the scheme’s potential for boosting the offer in countries facing a labour shortage, hundreds of thousands of new posts will be created every year between now and 2020 in countries currently developing their apprenticeship systems.

Of course, thanks to a sub-section of its Erasmus + programme, the EU already offers young European apprentices the chance to complete part of their training

abroad. This initiative will undoubtedly prove useful once all of the countries have a quality apprenticeship system in place, but unfortunately that is not the case today. The countries most badly hit by unemployment are also those that are lagging behind the most in precisely this sphere, which accounts for the very limited impact that this sub-section of the programme has had to date.

4. How the programme works: mobilising young people and businesses

Given the urgency of the challenge facing us, this scheme must be implemented rapidly, simply and directly. Young people must be encouraged to join the “one million” young apprentices benefiting from the mobility involved, and it is crucial for businesses to feel involved in the dynamic too. In order to achieve this, the EU must devise a communication campaign making full use, in particular, of the media, the Internet and the social media.

The Erasmus Pro programme must offer those young people interested in pursuing the prospect of apprenticeship training in a different country:

- Access to all offers available throughout the EU; these offers would be relayed via the EURES network, national employment agencies and every possible public or private professional and/or youth training institution. The young person involved must be able to benefit from the assistance of a national employment counsellor in preparing and submitting his or her candidature. The agency that sends a young person to another European country would be responsible for keeping in touch with that young person, in particular via an interview conducted at least once a year.
- Coverage of mobility costs (two trips home per year and an accommodation grant) and the cost of language training. This European assistance would be in addition to whatever remuneration the young workers would receive from their host company.
- Support in the host country, starting with preparation for the training stint and continuing throughout the young person’s stay in the country.

The Erasmus Pro programme must rely on a network of “project leader entities” in the host countries. These entities must offer young Europeans a series of

apprenticeship posts and they would be responsible for offering support to the young person whom they select (helping with red tape, language courses, social and cultural integration, disbursing the European assistance). Each young person would thus end up being integrated into a group of young European apprentices on mobility.

These project leader entities can be the businesses themselves, when they are in a position to take in a group of at least 10 apprentices and to provide them with the required level of support, or alternatively the training centres. The latter would play a particularly important role for small and medium businesses unable

to directly organise mobility for the young people that they wish to take on board.

And lastly, in order to encourage businesses to commit to this cross-border qualification scheme, the Erasmus Pro programme must contribute to the wages paid to European apprentices. But above and beyond this financial incentive, businesses must be encouraged to shoulder their share of responsibility in training young European workers. It is in their own interest to have a European labour force whose skills and knowledge meet their requirements.

BOX 1 ► How Would Erasmus Pro Work in Practice?

A Swedish telecommunications company offers to train 50 European apprentices in jobs in the telecom field. In that capacity it becomes a «project leader entity». Its offer is disseminated through Europe, in particular via national employment agencies and the social media. One of the young people contacted in Barcelona is interested in the proposal; another has learnt about the Erasmus Pro programme on Facebook, one of the scheme's partners. They both end up being taken on board by the Swedish company, as part of a group of young people from several different European countries. Training begins with a practical grounding in the Swedish language and in the country's culture in a twelve-week course designed to be as much fun as possible. The European young people then begin their professional apprenticeship alongside their Swedish colleagues. All of their training costs are borne by the company, which also pays the young people an equivalent monthly wage to that which a Swedish apprentice would earn, and it covers part of their mobility costs (travel and accommodation). The company is responsible for the training's success and receives approximately €10,000 per year per apprentice from the Erasmus Pro budget to offset its expenses. In administrative terms, these funds reach the company via the Swedish employment agency.

At the end of their apprenticeship, several young people choose to take up a job offer in the company that has hosted them, while one of the two young people from Barcelona chooses to return at once to his native region where, thanks to the local public employment agency, he is recruited by a Spanish telecommunications company on the strength of his qualification. The other young person, who has elected to remain in Sweden, makes regular trips home and keeps in touch with his national employment agency. He plans to take up a well-paid job in Spain after another few years developing his professional experience in Sweden.

5. A budget of approximately €5 billion a year for young European apprentices

The implementation of this scheme would cost the EU approximately €800 a month per young people (varying in accordance with the cost of living and the wage level for apprentices in the various regions of Europe), including both the assistance offered to young people and the financial incentive for businesses.

Thus in order to allow 200,000 young people per year to benefit from the opportunity to qualify in a different member state, the EU would have to mobilise a budget of some €4 billion to €6 billion a year (with an average cost of €20,000 to €30,000 per young person per year, varying according to the length of the apprenticeship).

This effort, worth around €5 billion a year, is a figure to which the EU and its member states can easily stretch. And in any event, in order to launch the scheme, the EU

would only need in the first year to mobilise €2 billion, which is what the 200,000 young European apprentices' mobility would cost in their first year.

The resources are there. We need to start by looking closely at the EU's budget in order to find out whether there are any unused funds that can be mobilised in favour of this new scheme. The new scheme could be linked to the "Youth Guarantee" scheme: an apprenticeship abroad should be one of the options offered to unemployed and unskilled young people. Thus we might envisage mobilising part of the €6.4 billion in the "Youth Employment Initiative" (of which only €1 billion is scheduled to be released between now and the end of the year) in order to launch this new mobility scheme.

If the political will is there, funding is not going to stand in the way of this initiative's adoption. And in any case, the cost of acting must be offset against the cost of failing to act: a recent study has revealed that the annual

cost of young people in the EU who are not in education, employment or training topped the €150 billion mark in 2011. And in addition to that, there is the medium- to long-term cost of unemployment both to the economy - unemployment fuels a deterioration in human capital, which in turn has a negative impact on productivity and on the potential for growth - and to society.

6. Guaranteeing circular mobility for young apprentices within the EU and facilitating their return to their native countries

Erasmus Pro brings benefits that dovetail with one another: youth unemployment drops, Europe's human capital is enhanced and European integration moves forward.

Every European region should be both a region of origin and a host region for young European apprentices, as is the case with student mobility in the higher education sphere. Yet given the current differences in youth unemployment levels in the various regions of the EU, we may witness a cyclical imbalance in the mobility flow across the EU caused by temporary economic circumstances. In fact, it would not be surprising for young people in countries where unemployment is especially high to be more receptive to this initiative, while the countries in which youth unemployment is lowest are also those that can make the best apprenticeship training offers in the short term in terms of both quality and quantity.

In view of the risk of cyclically "asymmetrical" mobility, it is important to offer three responses, all of which are designed to facilitate young people's return to their native countries:

- The first response naturally concerns the young European apprentice's freedom. At the end of his or her two- or three-year training period, the apprentice would be under no obligation to remain in the host country, or indeed to return home.
- The apprentice's region of origin must put in place the conditions required for it to stay in touch with its young mobile apprentices. In addition to the role played by national employment agencies, each member state should create an online network to bring together all its young people serving apprenticeships abroad, permitting them to interact with each other and with other national players, especially businesses. This dynamic will increase the likelihood of the young people returning to

their regions of origin once their training has been completed. Each country will thus benefit from the return home of its "Erasmus pro" young people with a professional qualification, fluency in a foreign language and a European cultural outlook.

- The EU also has an important role to play in guaranteeing this circular mobility on the young people's part. The funding of two annual trips home must be guaranteed in the context of the Erasmus Pro programme, but the EU's primary contribution in this field will be the action it takes to cut through the administrative and legal obstacles standing in the way of worker mobility.

This, because the success of European mobility - for apprentices as much as for workers in general - rests on progress being made in two (long-term) European projects:

- the portability of social rights, including health insurance, unemployment benefits and supplementary pension benefits; and
- the mutual recognition of diplomas and qualifications, whether *de jure* or *de facto*.

While the mutual recognition of diplomas and qualifications is now possible in most spheres from a legal point of view, there are still too many constraints in the implementation of the texts, in particular in terms of excessively weighty administrative procedures. But an Erasmus Pro young person must be certain that his or her qualification will be recognised throughout the EU. The EU today needs to offer its people exactly what the single market has brought in terms of the free circulation of goods, namely the mutual recognition of approved standards.

Conclusion

The seriousness of the situation demands rapid action and a consensus at the highest level in the European institutions (the European Council, Parliament and Commission). In such unique historical circumstances as the reunification of Germany, the EU proved capable of rapid action and of setting up the required tools at the end of exceptional procedures. We are in just such a situation today. The lost generation is not going to wait for ever.

APPENDIX 1 ► The EU's main initiatives in favour of youth employment

1. The "Youth Guarantee" and the €6.4 billion package for the "Youth Employment Initiative"

The flagship initiative adopted by the EU in the struggle against youth unemployment is known as the "Youth Guarantee". This initiative endeavours to respond to the urgency of the current situation by calling on the member states to ensure that all young people under the age of 25 have access to a quality offer in terms of a job, training, an apprenticeship or an internship within four months of leaving education or of losing their job. To achieve this, member states need in particular to promote the structural reforms required to facilitate young people's transition from education to employment.

In order to help implement the "Youth Guarantee" in those EU regions where youth unemployment is higher than 25%, the EU approved a package worth €6.4 billion (the "Youth Employment Initiative") in 2013, which is supposed to be used up between 2013 and 2015. Yet the Youth Guarantee scheme has encountered major difficulties in its implementation at the member-state level, and only €1 billion of the package is likely to be used between now and the end of 2015. In addition to this budget package, there are the funds earmarked for the European Social Fund (which has an endowment of €10 billion a year), a major part of which is set to be mobilised in favour of youth employment.

2. The European Alliance for Apprenticeships and the Quality Framework on Traineeships

The EU's action has also focused on improving the quality of internships and apprenticeships. In this connection the European Commission has launched two initiatives: the "European Alliance for Apprenticeships", which aims to facilitate national partnerships for developing apprenticeships, to promote the value-added aspect of the apprenticeship training system, to help in the development of common curricula for training in different professional fields, and to facilitate the recognition of an apprenticeship performed abroad; and the "Quality Framework on Traineeships", which aims to guarantee the quality of traineeships offered to young people so that those traineeships can play a fully-fledged bridging role between the worlds of education and of work.

3. European Investment Bank loans in favour of youth skills and jobs

The European Investment Bank (EIB) rolled out a scheme in 2013 entitled "Skills and Jobs – Investing for Youth", which offers loans to fund projects in the fields of education and professional training, in an effort both to bolster young people's employability (the "Skills" part) and to create jobs for young people by facilitating access to funding for small and medium businesses that hire young people (the "Jobs" part). In 2014 the EIB granted loans worth fully €13 billion under this scheme, €10 billion of which related to "Jobs" and €3 billion to "Skills."

4. Support for young people's mobility – a reform of the EURES Network and the pilot scheme known as "Your First EURES Job"

In order to facilitate labour mobility within the EU, the Commission has embarked on a reform of the pan-European job mobility portal known as EURES, in an effort to increase transparency in the way job offers are handled, to improve the skill matching process and to strengthen cooperation between public- and private-sector service providers. The Commission has also launched a pilot scheme entitled "Your First EURES Job", which is a job mobility scheme designed to help young Europeans to find a job, an internship or an apprenticeship in a different EU member state. The mechanism combines personalised recruitment and placement services with EU financial incentives (help with travel expenses for job interviews or with settling in a different EU member state, and funding for pre-job training, particularly in terms of language courses). Yet this initiative's impact is far too weak: only 5,000 young people are expected to have taken advantage of the initiative over four years (2012–15).

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