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**Topic:** Youth Unemployment

## **I. Introduction**

As the European Union continues to battle consistently high youth unemployment rates, Italy calls attention to the need to design effective employment policies not only aimed at those under 25, but also their counterparts aged 25 to 29, a group which could prove to be a long-term liability if continually ignored. In statistical terms, “youth unemployment” has traditionally referred to the age bracket 15-24 years. However, this definition has proved overly simplistic, particularly in the European region post-economic crisis. Those in their late 20s, and even their early 30s, have been disproportionately affected, and this demographic may become even more susceptible to longer periods of unemployment, as they have fewer options to return to training or education, especially because doing so they are not registered as unemployed and therefore can lose unemployment benefit entitlements. In this area, expansion of the Youth Guarantee to this age group is essential.

In general, the most likely predictor of someone’s employment future is his employment past. Youth unemployment also leads to a dangerous “scarring” effect, including lower pay, higher unemployment, lower mental health, and even reduced life chances. Research suggests that those who are unemployed from ages 25-29 are more susceptible to this “scarring,” and as such, maximizing opportunities and protection for this group is essential not just to care for their present, but to protect Europe’s future.

Further, as the European Union seeks to maximize opportunities for youth in its goal to minimize youth unemployment, cross-border mobility in job placement is vital. This means that it is imperative that the EU recognize the current disparity between the theory and practice of cross-border employment within the EU. In theory, there are no barriers stopping an individual from one member state working in another state. The Treaty of Rome provides for freedom of movement of workers and affords individuals the opportunity to set up and manage companies in all member states. However, obtaining educational and professional recognition outside one’s home state is much more complicated. There is currently no international mandatory EU regulation of academic degrees, making it difficult for some to be selected for jobs for which they are academically qualified, and even more challenging for students who wish to undertake part of their studies or training in another member state, which could limit their employment opportunities later on. Universal recognition of degrees will also make it more attractive for those who hail from outside the European Union to study in the EU, providing further economic benefits.

## **II. The situation in Italy**

Since the onset of the financial crisis, the rise in unemployment in Italy has almost exclusively affected those under 35, and of particular concern are those aged 25-29. For this age group, employment has decreased 12% and unemployment has increased 10% since 2008, while those over 55 have increased employment by 12%. Measures published in February 2014 reported in Italy a 25-29 unemployment rate of over 20%, compared to about 14% for age 30-34 and 11%

general unemployment. Trends suggest that these numbers are bound to be even higher at present. Italy, in fact, has the highest incidence of unemployment among 25-29-year-olds as compared to the unemployment rate of 20-64-year-olds, being nearly twice as likely to be unemployed.

Furthermore, in Italy, scarring has a pronounced effect, with 50% of those unemployed between ages 25 and 29 having been unemployed for longer than 12 months. This number continues to rise. These statistics illustrate the clear disparity between those aged 25-29 and the general population, and the need to expand the Youth Guarantee to provide for their needs.

Italy itself has already extended the benefits of the Youth Guarantee to all those aged 25-29 and is currently beginning to see the benefits of this decision. In almost all EU member states, though the unemployment rate for those aged 25-29 is lower than that of those aged 15-24, it is significantly higher than those aged 30-34 and higher still than total workers aged 20-64. The situation is direst in countries with already low employment rates (Greece, Spain, Italy, Portugal) but significant differences can also be seen in more stable countries like France and Denmark.

Concerning cross-border mobility and degree recognition, Italy is a proud signatory of the Bologna accords and ratifier of the Lisbon Convention, and is committed to maximizing opportunities for cross-border recognition of academic degrees. Italy's educational framework has been compatible with that of the Bologna Process since the Process's inception, offering the 3+2 program Bachelor's and Master's degree equivalents eligible to be recognized across the EHEA. This is of vital importance as currently about 60,000 Italians move abroad every year, seven out of 10 taking a college degree with them. The largest number of immigrants goes to the United States, which does not further the EU goals of better job placement and decreased unemployment within the EU. If a degree recognition program were adopted, these educated Italians would be encouraged to migrate within the EU to seek out jobs, internships, or educational opportunities for which they are already fully qualified. It is vitally important that youth from other member states are afforded the same opportunity in Italy.

### **III. Policy Recommendations**

Recognizing that this group is underrepresented across the EU, Italy supports a universal expansion of the Youth Guarantee for those aged 25-29 in all member states, to be implemented by the end of 2015. Thus the unemployment of those aged 25-29 will factor into the allocation of the Youth Unemployment Initiative budget. Though national sovereignty is important, the risks involved with allowing 25-29-year-olds to be unaided by economic policy are simply too great. The vulnerable state of the EU economy cannot support a 'lost generation' of chronically unemployed who depend for extended periods of time on unemployment benefits, and the time to act is now.

Italy also calls attention to the dependence upon inconsistent and at times outdated statistics for this group. It is essential that more research be done to provide insight into specific demographic qualities of those aged 25-29 and conditions that may contribute to their disproportionate unemployment level. Therefore, Italy recommends that Eurostat be directed to begin gathering

research that has already been conducted by Eurostat and private groups, beginning new research, and creating a base of statistics (similar to those created for ages 15-24) reporting on economic status and other conditions, so that the EU may better understand this group and formulate more effective policy initiatives. Because this is a small group and an issue somewhat limited in scope, funding for this initiative will be taken from the existing Eurostat budget. The process will begin in 2015.

An important step in continuing to reduce unemployment rates for those aged 25-29 will be the sharing of best practices. Due to a much higher difference between 25-29-year-olds and the general population in EU periphery states than central/core members, a dialogue must be undertaken in the proximate EU meeting on the Youth Guarantee for an open sharing of ideas between low-stress and high-stress countries. Research on best-practices, case studies, and the statistics to be gathered by Eurostat will be documented in an EU report on economic policy for this group, to be published no later than 2016.

To foster cross-border mobility, an agreement of recognition within all EU member states of comparable higher education degrees is clearly needed. It is the responsibility of the EU to further standardize the system of values for various higher degrees, so that they may be universally recognized throughout the EU. Italy believes that the existing Bologna Accords are the most efficient framework for increasing cross-border recognition of academic degrees. Therefore, Italy recommends mandatory assignation of the Bologna accords by all EU member states.

However, Italy is also aware of the necessity of a review of those policies already enumerated in the Bologna accords. It has been argued that certain policies or riders that were introduced in the original Accords interfere unnecessarily with universities' educational systems without increasing productivity or standards. Italy recommends an investigation into the existing Bologna Accords under the existing framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its sub-bodies the Committee of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, and the European Network of Information Centres on Academic Mobility and Recognition (the ENIC Network). This review shall be conducted during 2015 and discussed in the Bologna's 2015 meetings and forums, and in 2016 a summit shall be held including all signatories of the Bologna Accords (that is, all member states) to finalize and ratify suggested changes in the Accords.

It is also essential for maximum coordination that the Bologna Accords define categories and evaluations of competency for not just Bachelor's and Master's equivalents, but doctorate degrees as well. This shall be discussed at the next Bologna Policy Forum to be held in May 2015. A defined set of qualifications for a doctorate degree will be recommended and voted upon no later than 2016.

As the Bologna Accords become universally enforced throughout the European Union and are continually reviewed to maximize effectiveness, clarity and productivity, more of the European Union's young people will be afforded the employment opportunities they deserve, in whatever county they may be found. More students will be likely to study abroad, which increases employment opportunity later in life. Furthermore, the EU's educational system will increase in

competitiveness and draw students not just from the EU, but from around the globe. Increasing cross-border recognition of academic degrees through the aforementioned policies will aid EU youth and provide a much-needed economic boost.