
THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION OF YOUTH IN EUROPE UNDER THE EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

The situation of young people in Europe and in every Member State of the European Union is a particularly important one. The younger generation, aged between 15 and 25 and even between 25 and 29, is today's support for tomorrow in terms of the workforce.

This younger generation, during the COVID 19 pandemic, has suffered across Europe. The lack of jobs and the student period of most of this age group have not been carried out in the best conditions despite all the efforts made by each individual state, due to this pandemic.

Due to this pandemic, a significant number of people of the younger generation have found themselves in the situation of suffering and not being in the employed population, this is because the investments for jobs have been increasingly low, and the economic activity in the years 2019-2022, the first semester, has suffered through the reduction of, closure of activities such as HoReCa, tourism and others. The younger generation found themselves to be the most affected.

The objective of this article is to demonstrate that the effects of COVID 19 have had a particular impact on the economic and social situation of young people in Europe and in each individual member country. In presenting this situation, we used a series of data resulting from the analyses carried out at national level in each country, as well as more generally, in the European Union.

Of course, the situation of the young population is viewed with attention, concern, but also with the hope that this situation will be balanced, that we will return to macro-stability and that, within the European Union, we will initiate major projects, with the participation of as many states as possible, so that the issue of the absorption of young people from unemployment becomes a priority.

From the data published by Eurostat and the European Parliament it is very clear that the European Union's attention is focused on the young generation, the first age group within the workforce, at national and European level. To present these aspects, we used concrete data, some of which we have

adjusted, processed and re-arranged, so as to highlight the degree to which the active employed population, labor force, of the young group of 15-29 years was affected.

We used the graphic representations, the tables to highlight as clearly as possible the situation of the young population affected by the COVID 19 pandemic. At the same time, through some statistical-econometric methods and models, we managed to highlight some aspects, such as the young population between 25 – 29 years old occupied, the employment rate, then the employment rate of the young population between 2019 and 2021, the annual employment rate between 2005 and 2020, but also the young employment between the fourth quarter of 2019 and the first quarter of 2021. I have also dealt with highlighting, by statistical means, indicators, graphs and other representative figures, the economic policy that needs to be directed, both in the European Union strategy and in the strategy of the Member States, in order to improve the situation of this young category of labour force.

Keywords: labour force, employed population, unemployment, crises, investments, developments.

JEL classification: I20, J20

Introduction

In this article we started from studying and interpreting the situation of the young population of Europe, which was and still is affected by the COVID 19 pandemic. In this regard, we have presented at length the situation regarding the impact of the pandemic on the young workforce. Of course, it is obvious that the young workforce is affected, either due to the fact that they are in training on various stages of education before becoming specialists, or because they did not have a job or lost their job due to measures taken by the governments of the Member States of the European Union in the desire to stop this spread of COVID 19. The conclusion from the beginning is that the younger generation of the workforce has suffered the most.

Investment has been lower and, therefore, the development of the young workforce is not at the level of the potential available to the Member States of the European Union and which we could use in order to improve the industry and economic development of the Member States of the European Union.

We have presented a series of figures in relation to the young population among the workforce before but, especially, during the pandemic crisis that started in 2019 and continues, although the data is until the fourth quarter of 2021. Those figures also refer to the annual rate of evolution of the number of employees in the 19-29 age group in the 27 Member States of the European Union in the period between 2005 and 2020.

We then analyzed the situation and the changes that occurred in the young workforce between the fourth quarter of 2019 and the fourth quarter of 2021, which coincides with the COVID 19 pandemic. It is found that among female and male individuals the influence was different. Mainly, the male population suffered more.

The effects of the COVID 19 pandemic can also be analyzed in the light of the evolution of unemployment among the young population. Thus, through monthly graphic representations between December 2019 and June 2021, it is found that a decline is also following the number of unemployed, male, female and total. It has a worrying development especially in 2021. The year 2022, although it is not included in the schedule, has the same trend and the same sense of negative evolution, the number of unemployed in the population of the younger generation, the first age group 15-25 years.

The unemployment rate among youth also has a seasonal character, in the sense that in certain activities, such as tourism, HoReCa, even agriculture, the reduction in the number of employees was quite pronounced.

In this article, we have made extensive use of the graphic representations which, based on the data provided by the Economic Commission – Economic Department of the European Union, highlight the level of impairment, as a result of Covid 19, of the employees in the first age group, in general terms between 15 and 29 years. It is found that long-term unemployment within this age group continued in 2020, also in 2021, and is likely to continue in 2022. In 2022 we can even discuss the possibility of increasing youth unemployment, following the anticipated *relaunch* of the 6th wave of the Covid 19 pandemic. In this respect, the analysis by state and by sex in 2 years reveals that the countries have suffered in a differentiated way and that, consequently, the problem was raised that through the Recovery and Resilience Program, the countries, depending also on the degree of impairment, could use community funds in order to redress the situation of the employees in the group 15-29 years.

At the same time, at the level of education and conditions of retraining, immediate measures must be taken so that the labour market re-enters in accordance with the requirements of the national economy, in its different branches and fields of activity.

Literature review

The issue of unemployment among timers aged 15 to 29 is particularly important for any nation and consequently a significant number of researchers have turned their attention in this direction. I'll keep mentioning some of the works that address this topic. Thus, Adda, J. Others (2017) are also doing a

study on skills mismatches and skills mismatches with what the Italian labour market offers. Bettinger, P. and others (2017) were concerned about how online courses affect student success. Carcillo, S. and others (2015) were concerned about the situation of their population not employed, educated or prepared after the crisis. Dietrich, H., Möller, J., (2016) presented a paper in which they had as their main objective the unemployment of young people in Europe. A similar theme was addressed by Dietrich, H., (2018). Dorsett, R., Luccino, P., (2018) were concerned about the role of early experiences in young people's betrayals in the labor market. Iacob Ş.V., Măhărea E., (2020) were concerned about the evolution of the population's employment, unemployment and their effects on economic growth. Möller, J., (2017) addressed the issue of youth unemployment in Europe from a regional perspective. Moxon, D., Bacalso, C., Şerban, A., (2021) were concerned about the importance that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on young people in Europe. Schmillen, A., Umkehrer, M., (2018) highlighted the effects of early career unemployment on future experience for the younger generation workforce.

Methodology, resources, results and discussions

Covid 19 appeared at the end of 2019 and developed, growing, in the year 2020, then developed in 2021 and now, in 2022, it seems that it is again the danger of a 6th wave with another Covid 19.

Throughout Europe, the situation of economic growth has been affected by the pandemic crisis correlated with the economic and financial crisis and it is anticipated that in 2022 the hope of economic growth will return. In the same context, a Recovery and Resilience Program was adopted by the European Union, in the hope that in the most affected areas these funds will be used, which must have an important effect on the workforce in general, on the economic recovery, which can be brought to macro stability.

A number of projects in 2021 and early 2022 show that there is concern for coordinating the efforts of all countries, especially the least developed ones, to ensure economic recovery.

The young population is among the groups most disproportionately affected by the current pandemic crisis. For the young population, the prospect of preparing and filling jobs in a context where the economy of all countries does not have the necessary resources for job-creating investments, nor to be able to absorb a larger part of the population.

On this young generation there is significant financial pressure. Mentally, from a health point of view, we can talk about some effects of the COVID 19 crisis that can have an effect in relation to the perspective of the young generation.

Humanity has also passed between 2008 and 2010 over a strong economic, financial, European and global crisis in which, once again, the young generation was again the one affected, in the sense that by reducing financial resources and investments, fewer jobs were created, capable of absorbing the young generation.

Of course, in the European Union, there is a particular concern to find solutions so that the younger generation can benefit, in addition to professional training, at all the level, but especially at university level where the quotas of economic specialists are created, also in terms of the possibility of taking up jobs, of finding advantageous solutions for stabilizing the psychological state of these young people.

The long-term repercussions of the current crisis are deeply directed against the youth, in which there can be very special effects on their evolution and socio-economic situation.

In the Member States of the European Union, the COVID 19 crisis has had a particular impact on the workforce and, in particular, on the workforce in the 19-29 age group, in the sense that by reducing the activity in a number of areas, the possibility of their employment has also been reduced, especially of the young people who, instead of going after finishing higher education to the jobs that the economy offers, has also been reduced, they've basically gone straight into COVID 19.

Of course, a number of in-depth analyses are being carried out at Eurostat level in relation to people in the young group, revealing that unemployment, inactivity and social exclusion are well known among the young workforce.

The effects of the measures that have been taken are welcome, but they must be supplemented by collaboration between the Member States of the European Union, by making efficient use of financial resources, by initiating advantageous projects, projects of great value, which will ensure, in addition to jobs and incomes, both in the form of wages for the young workforce, but also in terms of the results of the national economy.

The pandemic crisis is having a negative impact on the young workforce that often sees its aspirations doomed to fail.

For the study, I will try to analyze the population in the 15-29 age group, because this is in line with the desire to create a young, well-specialized workforce that has jobs and that can produce what each nation expects from the younger generation.

Of course, a first problem would be to summarize the specific effects of the pandemic combined with the effects that are happening in the labour market, especially with regard to the young age group.

Unemployment, labour force and inactivity in the young age group are elements worthy of consideration and from this point of view in the article you will try to highlight the impact that the COVID 19 pandemic is having on education and the socio-economic situation of the young-age population.

The most important data-driven issues will be set out at length, in the sense of understanding the need for investment program that create new jobs and are closely in line with the new specializations consistent with the need to improve industry, development through digitalization, other modern methods and possibilities of the economy, so as to ensure consistency between the young, trained workforce and the jobs that the national economy offers it in each country.

Only one question would be asked: *Why do we have to deal specifically with how young people are affected by this pandemic crisis?* In this regard, we can answer very clearly that the younger generation represents approximately 8.7% of the workforce, which must have jobs and must expose its results at a wide range of training carried out at a high level in the level of education in the Member States of the European Union.

On the other hand, it is important to consider that this pandemic crisis is quite deeply *responsible for* the situation in the labour market.

We will find, first of all, that some of the people in the young group who complete their studies and professional training are fighting a close fight in the context in which it has limited jobs due to the effects that the COVID 19 pandemic has had on the economy. Secondly, the proportion of the young population in the workforce, starting a new job, was about 12.7% at the end of 2020 – beginning of 2021. This percentage is reduced taking into account the potential that the younger generation has in terms of labour in the Member States of the European Union.

The young population would like to represent a sector that is less affected and has a hopeful position on the prospect of important employment. Thirdly, many young people have lost their jobs because, on the one hand, during the crises, there has been a need to reduce some activities and the most affected, who have moved from work to unemployment, have been young people. At the same time, the young population is in the process of improving their professional training and, in particular, to have a social dimension that does not isolate them but, on the contrary, puts them in the spotlight regarding the role they must play in the national economy.

Of course, these aspects are taken into account by most governments in the strategies they pursue, but the effects are not always the most convincing.

The impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on employees in the young group, 15-29 years old, is important. Firstly, this age group is affected by

job cuts, reduced employment. That is why it grows in number especially among this young generation. Young workers and the unemployed represent a high share in the total analysis of the active and employed population in the economy of all the Member States of the European Union.

There is a decline in the availability of indefinite contract-based employment of the population of the younger generation. Compared to 2019, there is an increase of about 725 people from the younger generation who are not included either in the workforce or in the education process in 2020 and beyond in 2021 and 2022.

For the next period, an increase in unemployment among the young population is anticipated, in the sense that economy becomes tight and cannot provide jobs on the specifics of the younger generations. In this context, the share of the inactive population increases in 2020, then in 2021, it stabilizes a little in 2022 but, in the second part of the year, now that it is planned to resume on a much higher scale the situation of investments and jobs, it is still the younger generation that will suffer.

Also, in the non-Member States of the European Union, there is concern about the population of the younger generation, but there are still limits in terms of ensuring the best conditions for improving education and, above all, in terms of creating jobs, which will ensure the assimilation and then professional development of the population of the younger generation.

There are two key future prospects for Member States in the context of the COVID 19 pandemic. Firstly, all active labour groups are somewhat reduced. The shift from labour to unemployment is around 1.5% in most Member States of the European Union. Secondly, there are delicate situations regarding the workforce, because the pandemic requires the development of jobs and the absorption from unemployment or the protection of the young population to enter the ranks of unemployment.

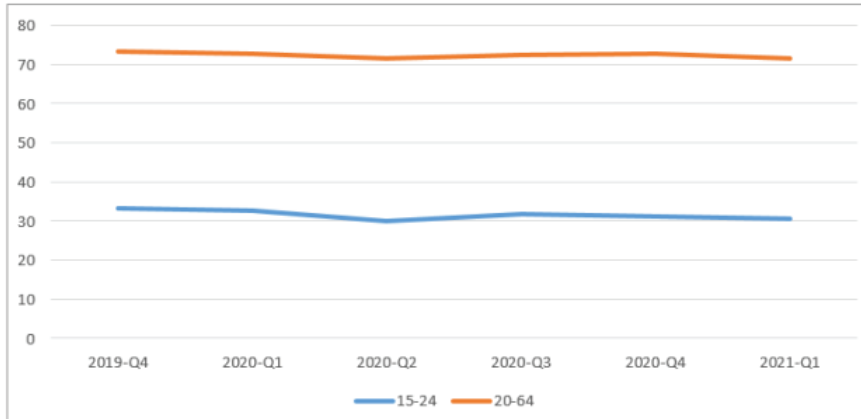
The development of workers in the young group is important. In the European Union, 27 countries, around 1.1 million people of the 15-24 generation and 1.02 million in the 25-29 age group lost their jobs from 2019 to the first quarter of 2022.

The number of young employees in these work groups decreased in terms of the 15-24 generation from 33.4% to 31.2% while, overall, the number of employees decreased by only 1.4%.

The younger generation, in particular, suffered especially in the second part of 2020 because business has shrunk, a number of companies and jobs have closed, uncertain premises have been created for the young population to evolve positively.

Youth employment rate, EU-27, 2019/Q1 – 2021/T4

Figure 1

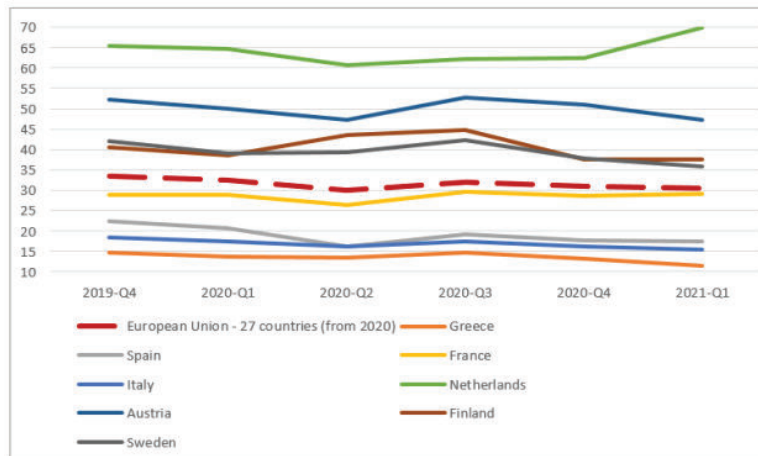


Source: Eurostat

Next, I will point out that the rate of young employees has become unstable in most Member States of the European Union. In the Netherlands, the rate of the young population, 15-24 years old, is higher even if it is a pandemic rate, but this has decreased in Greece, Italy, Spain where the average is below the European one.

Youth employment rates (15-24) in selected EU countries, 2019/Q4 – 2021/Q1

Figure 2



Source: Eurostat

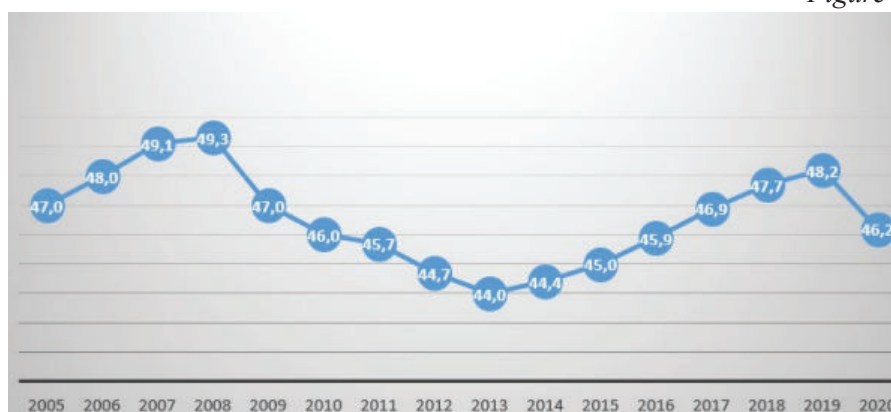
It is easy to see that in the group of countries we have selected, the data on the situation of the population in the age group 15-24 years and 25-29 years old are different from one country to another. An important situation is that between the groups of employees aged between 15-24 years and the one between 25-29 years old, there is a significant share of the female population. Thus, the employees in this group decreased more than the female population.

We can also talk about the young population about the situation of female employees aged 30 and 34, as well as about that of the female employed generation, which is outside the Member States of the European Union.

In order to have a better reflection on the situation that the overall deterioration of the situation of employees of the younger generation has, we present in Figure the number 3 annual number of young employees, 15-29 years old, in the period 2005 - 2020.

Annual rate of young employees, 15-29 years, in the period 2005 - 2020

Figure 3



Source: Eurostat

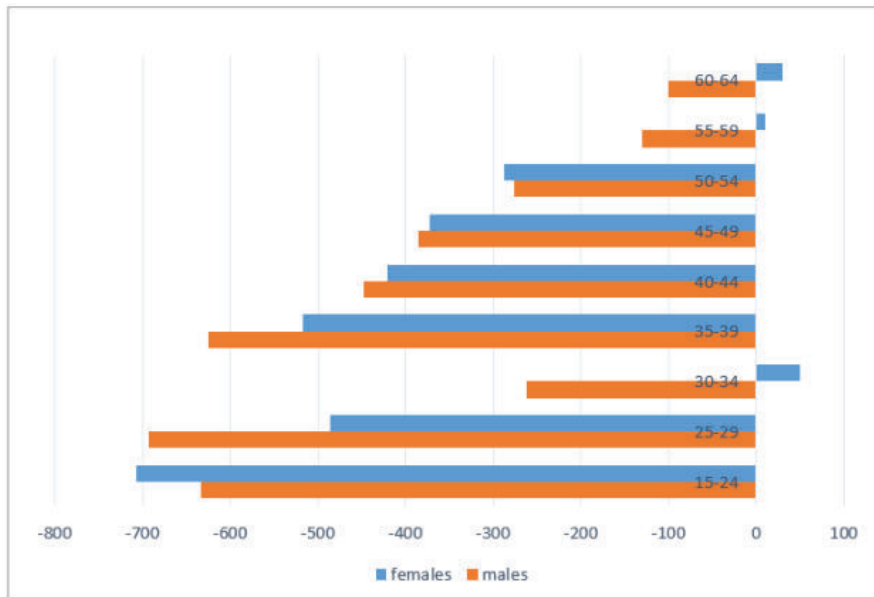
It is noted that in the period 2008 there was a downward curve of the share of the young population among the employees in the total, the peak being in 2013, as a result of the economic and financial crisis of 2008 -2010. Then begins a recovery of the situation, increasing until 2019, when the peak of employment of employees of the younger generation was the highest, followed as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic a decrease in 2020, deepened in 2021 and with sufficiently low chances for the period 2022.

In a similar way, we analyzed the changes that took place in the situation of the population of the younger generation (15 – 29 years old) in 2019, the fourth quarter, compared to 2021, the fourth quarter.

Figure number 4 shows the situation of the evolution of the share of the population of the young generation and of all generations, by the structure of feminine and masculine.

Changes in employment by age group and gender, 2019/T4 compared to 2021/T4

Figure 4



Source: Eurostat

It is established that for the generation 15-29 years the largest share of the employees was those of the female gender.

Next, it is necessary to have a discussion on the development of youth unemployment. Of course, studying the situation of the evolution of the unemployment rate, among the 27 countries and the European Union as a whole, we find that the population in this age group increased from 15% in March 2020 to 18.5% in August 2020.

So, so, unemployment has gone up as a rate and among it we find the young population very clearly. In Figure number 5 I present a comparative graphical representation in relation to the situation of the unemployed rate for people under the age of 25, between December 2019 and June 2021.

Monthly unemployment rates for people under the age of 25 in the EU-27, December 2019 - June 2021

Figure 5



Source: Eurostat

It is noted in this figure that, from December 2019, until March 2020, I have to deal with a stability in the number of unemployed within this young generation. Then, from 2020, the month of March, until August 2020, there is an explosion in the increase in the rate of the unemployed, on the total, as well as on the two sexes, male and female. It is found that the growth rate of unemployment among female employees has a much higher share than those in the male category. There follows a period of slight stability, between August 2020, until January 2021, after which we have growth and, again, a slight reduction between June 2021, until December.

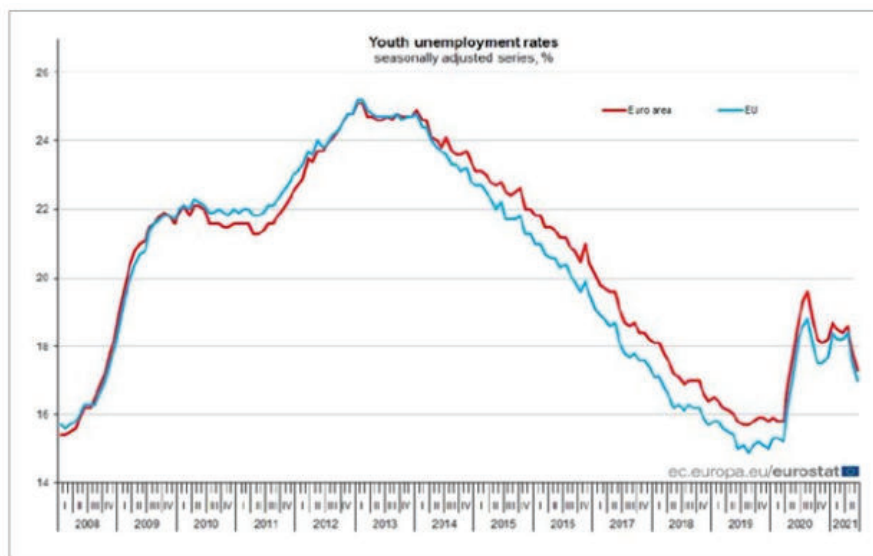
We find that from this analysis, the population of the employees of the younger generation is in a more serious percentage of affectation due to the unemployment caused, first of all by the effect of the COVID 19 pandemic, and then this one, correlated with the economic and financial crisis, had much more pronounced negative effects.

Then, in 2022, the energy crisis and then the food crisis started, determined in the required terms by the armed conflict, the war in Ukraine. The perspective of the employed population in the younger group will continue to suffer, both because there is a fairly high rate of unemployment growth, but also because there is a not sufficiently well-defined share in terms of increasing investment and increasing the number of jobs, and it is possible to ensure an improvement in the situation of the population.

We can also discuss at this point the situation in which the unemployment rate among young people up to the age of 25 is adjusted somewhat and seasonally. In this regard, Figure number 6 shows the figures of the unemployment rate in the period January 2008 – June 2021.

Youth unemployment rate (under the age of 25), EU-27, seasonally adjusted, January 2008-June 2021

Figure 6



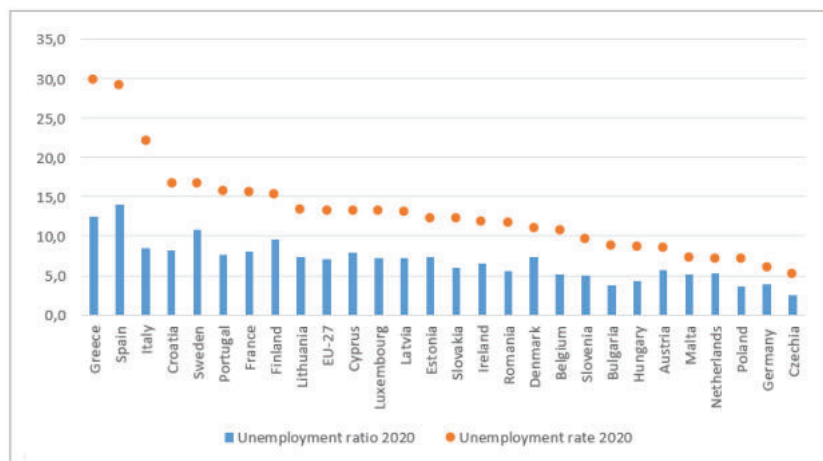
Source: Eurostat

It is found that between 2017 and 2018 there was a low rate of the number of unemployed among employees in the very young group. Then, from the second part of 2018, in 2019 and with a focus in 2020 – 2021, the unemployment rate among employees in the young group has increased again.

At the same time, it is important to establish the evolution of the rate of unemployed people in the 15-29 age group, because this is much higher and this is what we are doing by comparing the situation in the Member States of the European Union.

Youth unemployment rates and unemployment rates (15-29), 2020

Figure 7



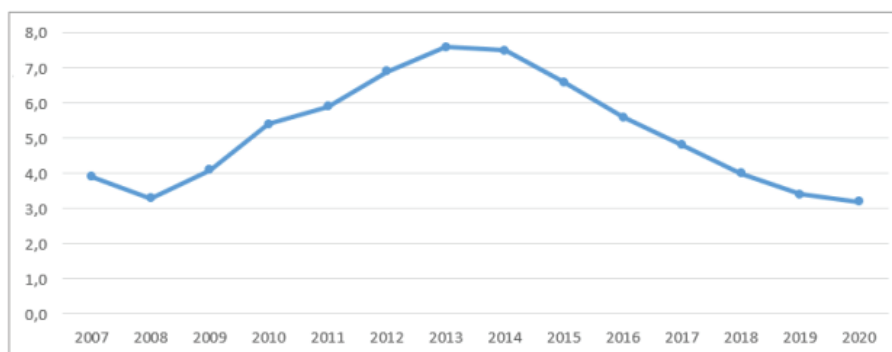
Source: Eurostat

It is found that this has a particular effect on unemployment, with a risk of unemployment that is quite high and creates problems even in terms of long-term unemployment. Of course, in the long run there should be a decrease, but due to the situation of this very special virus, we are facing a very delicate situation with regard to the young generation.

In Figure number 8 show long-term unemployment among young people 15-29 years, between 2007 and 2020.

Long-term youth unemployment (15-29) in the EU-27, 2007-2020

Figure 8



Source: Eurostat

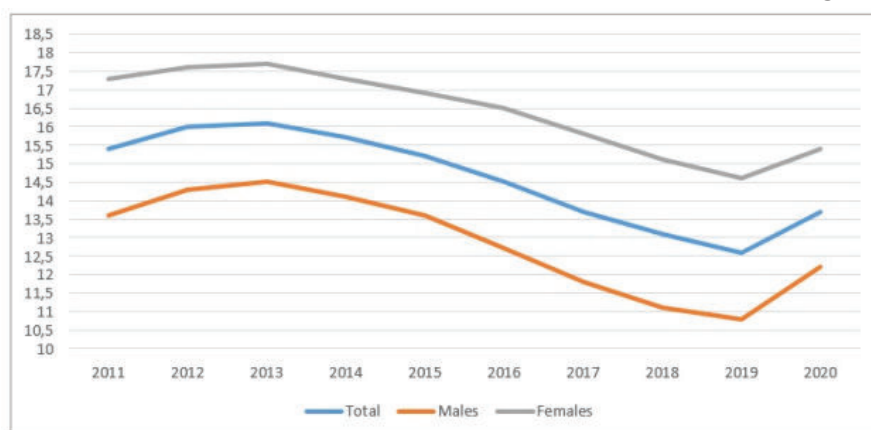
We find that this long-term unemployment increased from 2008 to 2013, then followed a reduction process that flattened somewhat in the fourth quarter of 2019 – 2020 and with an increase in the following period.

Another worrying aspect regarding the situation of the young population, aged between 15 and 29 years, is the impact that the pandemic crisis has in the sense that the share of the young population that is not in the category of employment has increased, neither in the continuation of the education process nor of professional training. This population will create great difficulties in the coming period in the sense that there will be a rather interesting rate.

In Figure number 9 we presented the population rate between 15 and 29 years, in the European Union, 27 states, according to the Annual Report on the unemployed population in work, education or training.

Annual rates for the unemployed, education or training population, in %, of the population aged 15-29, EU-27

Figure 9



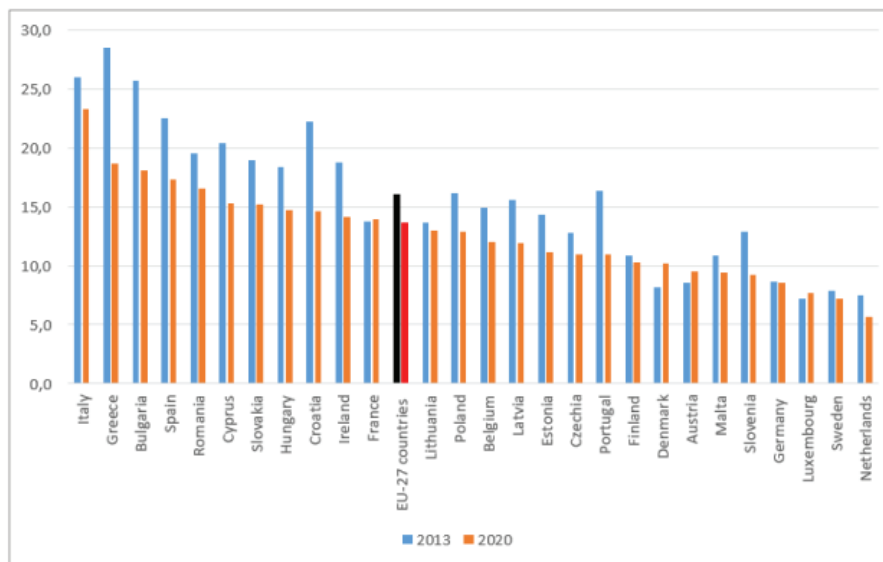
Source: Eurostat

It is found that from 2011, until 2019, this share decreased, reaching in the first part of 2019 to about 10.5%, after which, in 2020, the growth process was resumed, materialized by reaching a level of approximately 13.5% for men and 14.5% for women, in 2020, with an increase focus also in the period 2021-2022.

Despite the considerations that have led to some improvements, in Greece, Italy and other countries, Figure number 10 shows the situation of the young generation able to work, generation 15-29 years, between 2013 and 2020.

The situation of the young generation capable of working, generation 15 – 29 years, from 2013 to 2020

Figure 10



Source: Eurostat

The analysis is carried out for 2 years, 2013 and 2020, for the member countries of the European Union. We note that the highest share is held by the developed countries and Romania is among them in the sense that in 2013 the percentage was 15.4% reaching 23% in 2020.

Conclusions

From the study of this article it is found that the young workforce is the most affected by this pandemic, Covid 19. National strategies, as well as that of the European Union, must provide for measures that are as well coordinated as possible, so that the effects of Covid 19 are controlled and, as far as possible, diminished.

The time interval from March to July 2022 revealed that by removing the restrictions aimed at spreading the infection with Covid 19, it has already yielded results, especially in the areas that were the worst affected, such as tourism, HoReCa and other branches of the national economy, which also involved the concentration of labor force.

Another conclusion is that measures must be taken so that the professional retraining of the workforce, which in the period of Covid 19, which is approaching

3 years since it started, has stagnated, is brought to the requirements and skills that the modernization of the national economies imposes.

Another conclusion is that large-scale projects must be initiated, developed and carried out at European Union level through which the workforce and, above all, the specialists within the young workforce can expose their level of training, so as to achieve the transition to improving the national economies on the basis of the newest forms to which the population of the young generation would access. Of course, digitalization, robotization, the use of new forms of technological development, must take the toll on the major concern of the European Union and the Member States.

Research, innovation, development must gain a serious impulse, be oriented towards the top areas of industry and other branches of the national economy, so that the improvement of national economies is achieved by applying these conquests of research, innovation, development.

At the heart of these research, invention, innovation and development activities must be attracted and more actively involved the segment of the employed population, the workforce in the age group of 15-29 years.

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