

The new political EU landscape after the 2024 European Parliament Elections: Predictions in the field of employment and education.

YouthProAktiv (YPA) is dedicated to fostering proactive engagement and entrepreneurship among young people, with a strong emphasis on social entrepreneurship as a driver for sustainable development, social inclusion, and youth empowerment. Recognising the strong link between education, employment, and entrepreneurial capacity, YPA promotes education systems that nurture initiative and creativity, and advocates for policies that equip young people with the skills needed for an evolving labour market.

This policy briefing has been developed in the context of the new institutional and policy cycle of the European Union following the 2024 European Parliament elections, which are expected to influence priorities related to youth employment, education, and inclusion in the next legislative term.

The briefing underlines the importance of strengthening the EU's single market by investing in fair, inclusive, and future-oriented education, training, and employment policies. It presents research findings and recommendations to ensure that inclusive and sustainable initiatives remain central to the EU's post-2024 agenda. The document begins with an overview of the 2024 election results and the current parliamentary configuration, followed by an analysis of key legal and policy frameworks, recent initiatives, and forward-looking recommendations.

Summary of key messages and policy recommendations:

The 2024–2029 legislative term begins in a context of economic transformation, technological innovation, and the need for climate action. Employment and education policies will need to respond to a rapidly evolving labour market shaped by the green and digital transitions, demographic changes, and new forms of work. While these shifts present opportunities for growth and competitiveness, they also require targeted measures to ensure that progress benefits all segments of society, particularly young people and those in vulnerable situations.

This policy briefing highlights the importance of safeguarding and expanding youth mobility opportunities, investing in skills for the green and digital economy, and strengthening fair employment standards to protect workers in emerging labour models. It also emphasises the need to embed meaningful youth and civil society participation into policy-making processes, ensuring that initiatives reflect lived realities and address diverse needs.

Our recommendations call for reinforcing programmes such as Erasmus+, ALMA, and the Youth Guarantee; expanding the Union of Skills initiative with a strong youth dimension; and developing inclusive education and training strategies that close persistent digital and skills gaps. By adopting a forward-looking and inclusive approach, the EU can build a resilient workforce, foster innovation, and ensure that no one is left behind in the transition towards a sustainable and competitive future.

1. EU Political context and implications for youth, employment, and education

The European Union plays a central role in shaping policies that directly impact citizens' daily lives, particularly in areas such as employment and education. Through legislative coordination, funding instruments, and strategic initiatives such as the European Pillar of Social Rights, the Youth Guarantee, and the Digital Education Action Plan, the EU provides a common framework for Member States to advance social and economic development.

The European Parliament (EP), as the only directly elected EU institution, co-legislates and helps define long-term policy priorities. Every five years, its composition reflects citizens' broader political preferences and often signals adjustments in EU policy direction. The current 2024–2029 term began following the June 2024 EP elections, held in an environment shaped by the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the twin green and digital transitions, and youth concerns about inequality and job precarity.

According to recent youth surveys, young people have been clear about their top priorities: tackling poverty and inequality (43%), combating climate change and protecting the environment (40%), and addressing unemployment (37%).¹ Respondents also placed more emphasis on climate action than the general population, reflecting a strong demand for meaningful progress on sustainability and social inclusion. In response to such concerns, the European Parliament and the European Commission have updated key policy frameworks - including the European Pillar of Social Rights, the EU Youth Strategy, and the Digital Decade strategy- integrating stronger social and environmental dimensions to better align with citizens' expectations.

1.1 The 2024 European Parliament elections: results, turnout, and policy implications

Voter turnout in the 2024 European Parliament elections reached 54.8%, an increase from 50.6% in 2019. Some Member States, such as Denmark, recorded participation above 60%, while in others, such as Slovakia, turnout remained below 30%.² Higher turnout levels - particularly among young people- have been linked to heightened awareness of the EU's role in addressing global and regional challenges, including the war in Ukraine, climate impacts, and economic uncertainty.

The 2024 Youth Eurobarometer provides further insights into voting patterns: 38% of respondents with a post-secondary education degree or higher reported voting for a party or candidate because their ideas aligned with their own, compared to 29% among those with secondary education or lower. These figures suggest that political priorities expressed during the campaign resonated strongly with voter concerns, influencing the redistribution of seats in the new Parliament.³

The current European Parliament, serving the 2024–2029 term, is more politically diverse than in the previous legislature, with adjustments in the relative strength of various political groups. The European People's Party (EPP) remains the largest group with 188 seats, followed by the Socialists & Democrats (S&D) with 136 seats. Renew Europe (RE) holds the third-largest share, positioning it as an important player in coalition-building. The Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA) have 53 seats.

Other groups -including those advocating for stronger national decision-making or changes to the pace and scope of EU integration- also increased their representation, notably the Patriots for Europe (Pfe) with 84 seats. This more varied composition requires broader negotiation across political groups to form majorities and advance legislation.⁴

Legislative priorities in areas such as youth employment, skills, and education will be influenced by the current distribution of committee leadership positions, particularly within the Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) and Culture and Education (CULT) committees. In the current legislative term, funding priorities, the balance between social and economic measures, and the implementation of existing strategies will be shaped by this broader range of parliamentary perspectives.

2. Legal and strategic frameworks in employment and education

To understand how the current political configuration of the European Parliament (2024–2029 term) may influence the EU’s approach to employment and education, it is essential to examine the legal and strategic frameworks that underpin policy in these areas.

These instruments not only define the EU’s competences but also guide Member States in promoting quality education, lifelong learning, fair employment, and inclusion; priorities of particular importance for Europe’s young people as they navigate the school-to-work transition and the demands of a changing labour market.

2.1 EU Charter of Fundamental Rights

The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (CFREU) enshrines the rights of EU citizens, with Articles 14 and 15 being particularly relevant to education, training, and employment.⁵

Article 14 affirms that “Everyone has the right to education and to have access to vocational and continuing training” (paragraph 1). This establishes the EU’s commitment to ensuring that all citizens -including young people- can access high-quality education, lifelong learning opportunities, and vocational training aligned with the evolving needs of the labour market.

Article 15 further reinforces these rights by stating that everyone has the right to engage in work and to pursue a freely chosen or accepted occupation. It also guarantees every EU citizen the freedom to seek employment, establish themselves professionally, and provide services in any Member State. These provisions are particularly significant for young Europeans seeking mobility through internships, apprenticeships, or job opportunities across borders, ensuring that their qualifications and skills are recognised and valued EU-wide.

2.2 Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) is another cornerstone in shaping EU policy in employment and education. Articles 45 to 48 guarantee the free movement of workers, a principle that allows young people to pursue work experience,

training, or career opportunities in other Member States without discrimination based on nationality.⁶

In addition, Article 153 grants the EU competence to adopt legislation that improves working conditions, protects workers' rights, and promotes social protection. This legal foundation underpins major EU social legislation -from workplace safety rules to social security coordination- with direct relevance for young people entering the labour market.

2.3 European Pillar of Social Rights

The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) sets out 20 principles grouped into three main categories: equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions, and social protection and inclusion.⁷ For young people, these principles reinforce commitments to equitable access to education and training, fair treatment in early career employment, and adequate social protection during transitions between education and work.

The EPSR has become increasingly integrated into legislative initiatives and EU funding programmes targeting youth employment, skills development, and mobility, helping to translate its broad principles into practical measures that improve young people's prospects.⁸

2.4 EU Directives and Legislation

Several key directives operationalise these legal commitments and provide concrete protections for workers and learners across the Union. The Employment Equality Directive (2000/78/EC) prohibits discrimination in employment based on religion, belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation, safeguarding equal opportunities for young workers.⁹ The Equal Treatment Directive (2006/54/EC) requires equal pay for equal work and promotes gender equality in access to jobs, career progression, and leadership positions; essential for achieving balanced representation in the labour market.¹⁰

The Directive on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions (2019/1152) strengthens worker protection by ensuring clear and predictable employment terms, particularly relevant for young people in internships, apprenticeships, and temporary contracts.¹¹ Finally, the Directive on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications (2005/36/EC) facilitates the free movement of skilled workers by ensuring that qualifications obtained in one Member State are recognised across the EU, enhancing mobility for young professionals.¹²

Collectively, these instruments advance fairness, inclusion, and transparency across EU labour markets and education systems, providing a legal foundation for policies that support youth employment, skills development, and cross-border mobility.

2.5 Relevance for the 2024–2029 legislative term

In the current legislative term, these frameworks remain the backbone of EU action on employment and education, directly shaping policies that affect young people's prospects. They provide the legal foundation for tackling persistent challenges such as youth unemployment, skills mismatches, and barriers to mobility. As the EU addresses the impacts

of the digital and green transitions, demographic change, and post-pandemic recovery, these frameworks will continue to guide the development of initiatives aimed at ensuring that all young people -regardless of background- have access to quality education, the opportunity to gain relevant skills, and the ability to participate fully in a fair and competitive labour market.

3. Current developments and emerging trends

3.1 Challenges ahead

Despite notable progress in legal and strategic frameworks, the EU continues to face multiple, interlinked challenges that could hinder further progress in employment and education policies.

Some of the most pressing issues include: the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence and automation; the ongoing need for adequately funded upskilling and reskilling programmes; the persistence of precarious work and labour market disparities; and difficulties in retaining young talent within Europe's diverse regions, in an increasingly competitive global economy. The acceleration of AI and automation is reshaping the future of work.

While these technologies bring efficiency and productivity gains, they also pose a tangible risk of job displacement, particularly in manufacturing, transportation, and retail. Bruegel's Chart of the Week estimates that 54% of EU jobs could be significantly impacted by automation in the coming decades.¹³ Public concern over automation's impact was already evident in a 2020 survey¹⁴, and Cedefop's first European Skills and Jobs Survey more recently found that around 14% of EU jobs are at high risk of being replaced by algorithms.¹⁵

This technological transformation underscores the urgent need to strengthen Europe's digital skills base. In response, the EU launched the Union of Skills on 5 March 2025, a comprehensive initiative designed to equip individuals with the competencies required in a dynamic labour market.¹⁶ Over the next three years, it will focus on four pillars: building foundational skills; upskilling and reskilling the workforce; facilitating cross-sector and cross-border skills mobility; and attracting, retaining, and developing talent.

The Union of Skills builds on existing strategies such as the Skills Agenda for Europe and the Digital Education Action Plan, both aligned with the Europe's Digital Decade 2030 targets. These aim to ensure that 80% of adults have basic digital skills by 2030, bridging gaps in everything from foundational online literacy to advanced technological competencies.¹⁷

The EU also explicitly recognises "disadvantaged groups" in Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 (Annex I – Common Indicators) under the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+).¹⁸ This includes people experiencing or at risk of poverty, social exclusion, or multiple discrimination -such as ethnic minorities, rural inhabitants, NEETs, and persons with disabilities. These groups continue to face structural barriers to full participation in the labour market, making targeted, inclusive policies essential to meet the 2030 goals.

A further challenge is retaining young talent. Although Europe produces a highly skilled workforce, many young people continue to migrate for better opportunities abroad, exacerbating regional imbalances, labour shortages, and demographic decline. According to

the EU Demographic Scenarios Report, this “brain drain” can have long-term consequences for economic resilience and social cohesion.¹⁹

Balancing economic growth with equity will be a central tension in the coming years. The EU must build a competitive, future-ready workforce while ensuring opportunities are accessible to all – particularly long-term unemployed individuals, ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities. This balance demands sustained funding and robust monitoring to ensure that no one is left behind.

3.2 Promoting fair employment opportunities for all

Over time, the EU has strengthened social protections for workers. The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) is the main financial instrument for promoting employment, social inclusion, and skills development, with a €99.3 billion budget for 2021–2027. It consolidates four instruments: the European Social Fund (ESF), the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD), and the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI).²⁰

ESF+ funding supports skills acquisition, youth employment, poverty reduction, and adaptation to the green and digital transitions. It works alongside the Just Transition Fund and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), turning the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights into practical measures.

The European Employment Strategy (EES) complements these efforts, particularly in youth employment, gender equality, and integration of disadvantaged groups. Through the Youth Employment Initiative (allocated 12.5% of ESF+ funding) and backed by the Youth Guarantee, the EU has provided targeted support to regions with high youth unemployment. Interventions include apprenticeships, training, and job placement schemes, with follow-up data showing 61% of YEI participants employed, in education, or in training after six months.²¹

In July 2020, the Youth Employment Support Package – A Bridge to Jobs reinforced the Youth Guarantee and encouraged Member States to invest €22 billion in youth employment via NextGenerationEU and the EU budget. Since the Youth Guarantee’s inception, more than 24 million young people have accessed education, training, or work. The European Alliance for Apprenticeships alone has generated over 900,000 apprenticeships since 2013, many in green and digital sectors.²²

The EU’s Union of Equality agenda also prioritises gender equality through the Gender Equality Strategy (2020–2025), addressing equal pay, work-life balance, and gender-based violence.²³ Progress here has helped narrow gender employment gaps and boost women’s participation in the workforce.

Labour mobility remains another cornerstone. The European Labour Authority, working with the European Employment Services (EURES), has improved enforcement of labour laws, facilitated mobility, and coordinated national employment services.²⁴ Over 1,000 EURES advisers in 31 countries assist jobseekers, with access to 1 million CVs and 3.9 million job vacancies, strengthening cross-border matching and reducing skills mismatches.

3.3 Transversal strategies for modernising education

The EU recognises that the digital and green transitions present opportunities, but without inclusive education policies, these shifts could deepen inequalities. The ESF+ therefore also funds measures to ensure equitable access to skills, connectivity, and mobility.

Digital skills are central to EU education policy. The Digital Education Action Plan (2021–2027) aims to improve digital literacy and modernise learning environments. Eurostat 2023 data show that 44% of Europeans still lack basic digital skills, with major disparities: Finland (82%) and the Netherlands (83%) lead, while Romania lags at 23%.²⁵

The ALMA (Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve) initiative targets NEETs aged 18–30, aiming to help 50,000 young people into work by 2027.²⁶ Alongside Erasmus+, these programmes expand mobility and foster cross-border cooperation in education. Concretely, Erasmus+ (2021–2027) operates through three key actions:

- KA1 – Learning Mobility: Over 1.4 million participants in 2024, supported by 59% of the programme’s €26.51 billion budget.²⁷
- KA2 – Cooperation & Partnerships: Over 273,000 projects between 2014–2025, involving nearly 940,000 organisations.²⁸
- KA3 – Policy Support & Cooperation: Supports education reform, digital and green transitions, and active youth participation.

Since 1987, 15 million participants have gained international experience through Erasmus+, with the current budget nearly doubling from the previous cycle and aiming to triple mobility numbers.²⁹

4. Opportunities and risks for youth policy

The 2024–2029 legislative term presents a complex policy landscape for youth, employment, and education in the EU. Several overarching trends will shape the opportunities and risks in the coming years, particularly in three interconnected areas: the green transition, budgetary priorities, and digital transformation. The way these are addressed will have long-term implications for young people’s access to skills, decent work, and social mobility.

4.1 Green transition and labour protection

The EU’s climate neutrality objectives³⁰, anchored in the European Green Deal and the Fit for 55 package, are driving substantial investment in renewable energy, energy efficiency, and sustainable transport.³¹ These initiatives hold significant potential for creating new employment pathways for young people, particularly in green technologies, sustainable construction, and environmental services.

However, the green transition also raises challenges in ensuring that job creation is inclusive and that workers in high-carbon sectors are supported through reskilling and upskilling measures. The Just Transition Mechanism and programmes under the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) are key to supporting workers and regions most affected by industrial change.

The success of these initiatives will depend on sustained funding, coordinated implementation between Member States, and active involvement of youth organisations in shaping transition strategies.³²

For youth, the opportunity lies in positioning themselves within the growing demand for skills in green sectors, while the risk is that without adequate training and targeted outreach, the benefits may bypass disadvantaged groups, exacerbating labour market inequalities.

4.2 Funding priorities and budgetary constraints

Post-pandemic recovery measures, coupled with inflationary pressures, have placed significant strain on the EU budget. As the 2021–2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) enters its final years, debates are intensifying over how to allocate remaining resources and whether mid-term budgetary revisions will prioritise youth-focused initiatives.³³

Flagship programmes such as Erasmus+, the Youth Guarantee, and the ALMA Initiative depend on stable funding to reach vulnerable young people and deliver long-term impact. According to the European Commission’s 2024 progress report on the EU Youth Strategy, regions with higher youth unemployment rates rely disproportionately on EU funding for employability schemes. Any reduction in allocations could risk widening disparities between Member States and limit access to opportunities for those most in need.³⁴

Ensuring that budgetary decisions continue to safeguard youth-oriented investments -even in a context of competing priorities- will be essential for maintaining progress in social inclusion, skills development, and labour market integration.

4.3 Digital transformation: inclusion and innovation

The Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030 sets ambitious targets for ensuring that 80% of EU adults have at least basic digital skills by the end of the decade.³⁵ This transformation is expected to create opportunities in sectors ranging from artificial intelligence and cybersecurity to digital health and online services.

Yet, the digital transition also carries the risk of deepening existing inequalities if access to training, infrastructure, and resources is uneven.³⁶ Data from Eurostat (2024) shows that while over 90% of EU citizens use the internet weekly, only 56% possess basic digital skills - with particularly wide gaps between Member States.³⁷ This skills’ divide is even more pronounced among disadvantaged youth, rural populations, and older workers.

The EU’s response includes initiatives such as the above mentioned Union of Skills, which focuses on building foundational competencies, facilitating mobility across sectors and borders, and attracting and retaining talent.³⁸ Concretely, the Union of Skills introduces several youth-centric measures:

- Foundational skills support: literacy, numeracy, digital literacy.
- STEM education and career pipelines: promoting gender-inclusive access to STEM.
- Vocational education and training (VET) improvements: making VET more attractive and future-ready.

- Micro-credentials and skills mobility tools: enabling quick upskilling and cross-border portability.

Ensuring that all these policies and measures address the needs of marginalised young people -including those not in education, employment, or training (NEETs)- will be critical to achieving both economic competitiveness and social equity.

5. Policy recommendations: advancing inclusive employment and education in the current EU context

As the EU enters the mid-point of its 2024–2029 legislative term, policymakers face a crucial moment to reinforce commitments to inclusive employment and education. Global economic uncertainty, the rapid pace of technological change, and the urgency of the green transition have created both opportunities and risks for Europe’s future workforce. Against this backdrop, it is essential to ensure that young people and disadvantaged groups can access the skills, mobility, and protections needed to participate fully in Europe’s economic and social life.

Building on the European Pillar of Social Rights, the EU Youth Strategy (2019–2027), the Digital Decade targets, and the Union of Skills initiative, the following integrated policy actions can guide EU policymakers, Member States, and stakeholders in creating an enabling environment for inclusive employment and education, strengthening the European Union’s capacity to deliver on its 2030 ambitions for equity, resilience, and competitiveness.

A. Protect and expand mobility opportunities for youth and disadvantaged groups

We call on the European Commission and Member States to safeguard and strengthen flagship mobility initiatives such as Erasmus+, ALMA, and the Youth Guarantee, ensuring they remain foundational pillars of EU youth empowerment. These programmes have proven to be instrumental in opening access to education, training, and employment opportunities across borders, particularly for young people in vulnerable situations. We recommend reinforcing their budgets within the upcoming 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework to match the scale of the challenges ahead.

We further urge the introduction of equity-based access mechanisms, including simplified application procedures and the expansion of existing social inclusion top-ups. These measures should specifically target marginalised groups such as NEETs, rural youth, and ethnic minorities, who continue to face systemic barriers to participation. In addition, facilitating the mutual recognition of vocational qualifications -particularly in green and digital skills- will boost cross-border employability, enabling young people to move fluidly between regions and sectors while retaining career flexibility.

B. Invest in skills for the green and digital transitions

We recommend a substantial expansion of the Union of Skills initiative, with targeted resources channelled towards local upskilling centres, vocational training institutions, and NGOs. By fostering cross-sectoral training partnerships between public authorities, SMEs,

and civil society, the EU can ensure that all communities -urban and rural- benefit from the green and digital transformations.

Achieving the Digital Decade goal of 80% digital literacy among adults by 2030 will require targeted programmes for older workers and digitally excluded youth. We advocate for embedding green and digital skill modules within both formal education systems and non-formal learning programmes. These should be co-designed with employers, education providers, and youth organisations to ensure training remains relevant to evolving labour market needs, while anticipating future skills demands.

C. Strengthen employment standards in emerging labour models

We urge the EU to adopt a binding directive on platform work that ensures fair wages, algorithmic transparency, and full access to social protection across all Member States. The rapid expansion of platform-based employment, combined with the increasing use of AI in workplaces, risks deepening precarity if safeguards are not put in place.

We further call for a worker-centred regulatory framework governing AI in the workplace. This framework should promote transparency, respect human dignity, and include mechanisms to prevent discrimination in recruitment, performance monitoring, and career progression. As part of this approach, we recommend establishing a Youth Labour Rights Observatory in collaboration with Eurofound to monitor emerging labour trends, assess risks to young workers, and provide evidence-based input for responsive policymaking.

D. Institutionalise youth and civil society participation

We advocate for a stronger EU Youth Dialogue Mechanism that ensures continuous, structured engagement between policymakers, youth-led organisations, and grassroots actors on employment and education issues. This should include dedicated outreach campaigns to engage underrepresented young people and make EU-level consultations more accessible and representative.

We also recommend the creation of a Youth Civic Innovation Fund within the Erasmus+ framework to support projects co-designed with disadvantaged groups. These projects should focus on advancing digital inclusion, promoting awareness of green job opportunities, and strengthening social entrepreneurship. In addition, introducing a Social Impact Label for EU-funded education and employment initiatives would help identify and reward projects that prioritise inclusion, local relevance, and sustainable, long-term outcomes.

Conclusions

As the European Union moves further into the 2024–2029 legislative term, it faces the dual challenge of sustaining competitiveness while ensuring that progress in employment, education, and skills development is inclusive and equitable. The evolving policy landscape, shaped by economic, technological, and environmental transformations, calls for an approach that places people -particularly young and vulnerable citizens- at the centre of decision-making.

The coming years offer significant opportunities to strengthen the EU's social and economic fabric. By reinforcing mobility opportunities, investing in the skills required for the green and digital transitions, and upholding fair labour standards, the EU can ensure that its workforce is not only competitive but also resilient and adaptable. Central to this effort will be the meaningful participation of young people and civil society in shaping policies that reflect lived realities and long-term societal needs.

Europe's social model remains a powerful framework for balancing innovation with solidarity. By embedding fairness, accessibility, and sustainability into future policy design, the EU can create pathways that enable all citizens to benefit from economic transformation. This vision is not only aligned with the Union's foundational principles but is also essential to meeting the ambitions of the Digital Decade, the Green Deal, and the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Looking ahead, the EU's ability to deliver on its 2030 objectives will depend on its commitment to inclusive growth, ensuring that no one is left behind as Europe navigates the challenges and opportunities of a rapidly changing world.

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