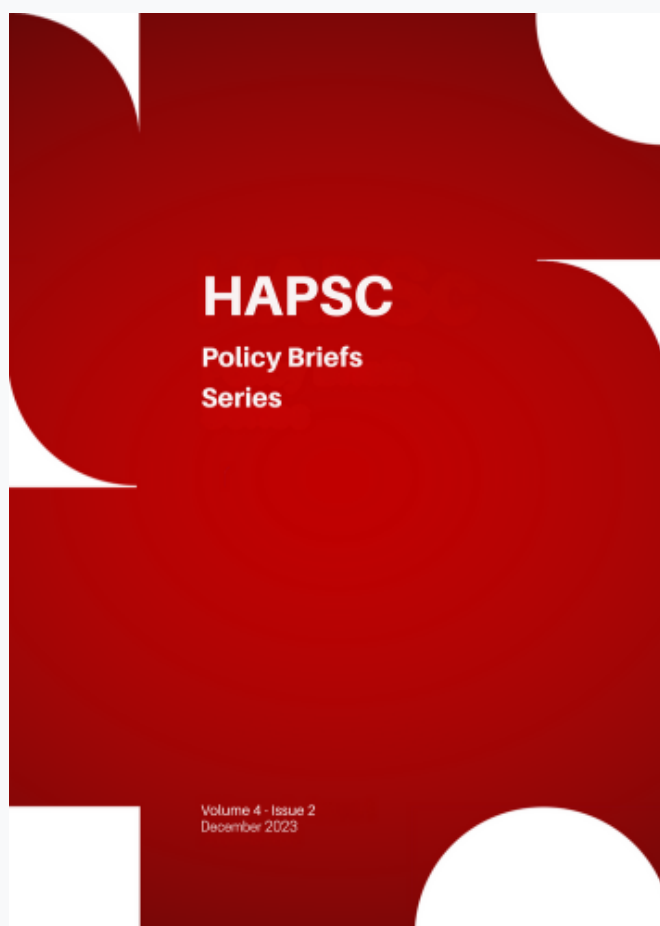


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**Advancing Sustainable Development, Responsibility and Civic Engagement in Greece: Analyzing the Interplay of Education, Employment, and Political Involvement within the European Policy Framework for Youth**

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# Advancing Sustainable Development, Responsibility and Civic Engagement in Greece: Analyzing the Interplay of Education, Employment, and Political Involvement within the European Policy Framework for Youth<sup>1</sup>

Evangelos Taliouris<sup>2</sup>, Marinos Chourdakis<sup>3</sup> & Nikolaos Moraitakis<sup>4</sup>

## Abstract

Democracy, social welfare and environmental modernization are issues in EU political agenda that deal with the future generations, therefore this paper will elaborate the political will for European Youth in EU and Greece by 2030. More specifically, this paper will analyze the social challenges that youth faced in EU since 2020 from Covid-19 to the war period and the future via Sustainable Development Agenda. The social challenges will be analyzed first towards the Sustainable Development Goals (4, 8) in EU and Greece, whilst it is necessary these challenges to be associated with the sense of political belonging in EU for youth. EU has launched a strategy for youth that is mainly based on 11 Goals under public discussion and consultation “The Euro-pean Youth Goals 2019-2027”. During crisis periods (financial, Covid-19, war), the negative socioeconomic outcomes were an uncertain risk for youth regarding their SD potentials, while political engagement and the sence of political belonging in EU pub-lic affairs seems to be associated with goals 9 and 11 in Youth Strategy. Although EU and its member states (including Greece) have a significant institutional tradition in social welfare and considered as one of the best place to live, political steps need to be taken in order to ensure youth capability to meet their own needs. These values are strongly associated with SD and its definition 36 years after Brundtland report and the significant institutional tradition in social welfare, which is considered very im-portant in order future generation to ensure youth capability to meet their own needs in Europe and Greece towards democracy, social welfare, environmental moderniza-tion and economic competitiveness.

**Keywords:** European Policy, Greece, Sustainable Development, Youth, Crisis.

## Introduction

European Union in 2022 dealt with significant issues related to post Covid-19 period, the war and the sustainability issues (e.g. climate change). Moreover, EU have faced significant socioeconomic challenges (e.g. financial crisis) and uncertain risks (e.g. Covid-19, war) that had to deal with since 2010. These issues have affected EU citizens regarding the role of EU in high policy issues. At the same time Euroscepticism has increased not only because of facts such as Brexit but also regarding political discourse for democratic deficit in EU institutions. In Covid-19 period and war crisis, Next

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Generation EU<sup>5</sup> programme have been launched as the largest financial and development package in EU structural funds and policy cohesion process (2021-2027 period) (Commission, 2020; Taliouris and Manasakis, 2022). Such policy tools (e.g. financial and economic) are significant and influence political changes not only institutionally but indicate the political dimension of EU in participatory process and democratic framework as fundamentals for success. Democracy, social welfare, environmental modernization are issues in EU political agenda that deal with the future generations, therefore the title of this programme pictures the political will for European Youth.

This paper will analyze the social challenges that youth faced in EU since 2020 from Covid-19 to the war period. The social challenges will be analyzed first towards the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>6</sup> 4 and 8 in EU and Greece, whilst it is necessary these challenges to be associated with the sense of political belonging in EU for youth. This is important because youth is the social backbone of labor market as well as the overall sustainability of European Social Model and welfare in EU. These reasons have indicated youth as an interesting policy topic for EU that it is associated with other traditional policy realms such as education and employment. This paper will focus on education policy realm in EU and Greece and youth capability to meet their own needs in terms of sustainability.

Therefore, this paper will analyze the Youth Strategy by 2027 (Youth Year 2022) in EU in parallel with the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 and the Next Generation programme, whose title and targets are directly associated with youth as social group. According to Eurostat<sup>7</sup>, Youth is consisted of the population in EU between 15 and 29 years old and more specifically it is mainly consisted by the group of Millennial (people born between 1981 and 1995) and Gen Z (people born between 1995 and 2012) (EURES, 2023). For the purposes of this study, in order to examine the risks and challenges faced by the new generation as well as the prospects and opportunities for employment, they are analyzed using statistical data (Eurostat, OECD) as well as the other forms of archive research from EU Institutions and International Organizations.

The qualitative research method of this paper will be based on theoretical investigation and literature review, the archive research and the analysis of statistical data. Moreover, through Eurobarometer polls will be analyzed the Youth views regarding the issues above and the impact on their political perspectives for EU, welfare and education regarding their social competences' literacy and engagement in EU and Greece. Education is a development factor in EU and in particular for youth

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<sup>5</sup> Next Generation EU: [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/eu-borrower-investor-relations/nextgenerationeu\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/eu-borrower-investor-relations/nextgenerationeu_en)

<sup>6</sup> Europe Sustainable Development Report 2022: <https://eu-dashboards.sdindex.org/map/goals/SDG4>

<sup>7</sup> Eurostat: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/youth>

in order to achieve SD (EESC, 2022); the policy analysis is based on the perspective which is associated with European institutional traditions (e.g. social welfare, environmental modernization) and neo-institutional perspectives for social responsibility and democratic participation.

### **Youth, education and social welfare**

After Lisbon treaty in 2009, the common steps of member states in EU had a policy framework with significant potentials compared to the past; financial crisis, EU institutional setting and democratic deficit discussions has generated a political discourse among parties and stakeholders. Moreover, Brexit (Commission, 2018) as a fact in combination with Euroscepticism increase and the EU weaknesses to respond effectively that time in financial crisis have set up a political discourse for the Europeanization process and the EU responsiveness in risks and crisis (health issues and war). Consequently, the main outcome that crisis has derived for EU is the development of a common attitude in dealing with crisis such as Covid-19 and Peace. In practice, these risks influenced negatively youth capability (Millennial and Z generation) to meet their own needs in EU and states such as Greece. The relatively high unemployment rates, the increase of NEETs (Young people – Not in Education Employment or Training) and the social vulnerability of youth set education process as a policy mean for responsible citizenship and social engagement. Education is a policy realm that reflects the European institutional tradition of social welfare in terms of social inclusion and participation (e.g. self-esteem), employment and social engagement (e.g. social competences, democratic values, science skills), as reflected in all European education policy planning efforts.

At the beginning of 21st century, the common policy process among EU institutions and member states was to achieve the objectives were set in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy. Another important aspect that time was the education and lifelong learning policy framework regarding youth's position in society and labor market (Chourdakis, 2020: 67). This perspective was also pictured in Bologna Declaration (1999) and follow-up process, emphasizing the political need to create the European Higher Education Area in order to increase the potentials of employability in general and in particular for youth (Bologna Declaration, 1999). This program set out objectives for education and training by 2020 and it was based on Bologna Declaration and Lisbon Strategy. In 2010, Commission develops "Europe 2020" Strategy as a response to crisis and as a common path after the institutional changes in EU (e.g. Lisbon Treaty) (Commission, 2010, EP, 2023). In general, education seems to tackle unemployment and its negative consequences in labor market and soft skills increase. During crisis, unemployment across EU was the main factor for social exclusion and poverty deprivation rate for people and vulnerable social groups such as youth. It is estimated that in 2013 the unemployment rate reached 11%, in Greece 30% and 15 million unemployed population (Eurostat,

2019). That time 1 out of 2 young people were unemployed in Greece, while age in combination with sex and education level to be factors that are strongly associated with employment and social welfare as well. In 2022, 95.3 million people in the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion; this was equivalent to 21.6 % of the EU population (Eurostat, 2023a; 2023b).

Despite the fact that education at secondary level is obligatory in EU, its postmodern societies had still to deal with issues such as early school leavers, unemployment, specialized and up-skilling work force increase and better synergies among education (e.g. Universities) and development sectors. Unemployment as a risk for youth is strongly associated with the absence of an appropriate "mechanism" that links education with labor market in member states like Greece. Moreover, early school leavers are more vulnerable in long term unemployment, which seems to affect NEETs. This indicator in the majority of EU member states, indicates that NEETs are of low or medium educational level (Eurofound, 2012: 31; 2016a: 2; Papadakis et al., 2020). Consequently, this confirms the difficulty of early school leavers face and NEETs to join vocational training, highest education or employment. Summing up, the socioeconomic barriers that early school leavers face while they are trying to have access in labor market is a fact (EU, 2015).

Thus, the sum of education, training and lifelong learning set the necessary conditions for human development and success in labor market (Cedefop, 2015, p.4). Another interesting fact is the positive impact in employability of those have at least bachelor degree, compare to young people, who have not completed higher education. The correlation between educational level and employability confirms the importance of education as policy realm in society and social engagement, which might influence the challenges that young people faced. This linkage has been underlined before financial crisis in the OECD report "Education at a Glance 2008"(OECD, 2008: 151-152). This report underlines the importance of education again towards employability through statistical evidence-based analysis which underlines both the positive impact in job seeking and better opportunities as well. Bologna Process in EU incorporates this adjustment and the vulnerability as well towards unemployment of well-educated people during crisis (Chourdakis, 2020). In conclusion, the latest OECD report "Education at a Glance 2022" indicate the employment rates for people who have not completed secondary education (56%), those completed secondary education (76%) and tertiary education (87%) in EU, confirming the correlation between educational level and employment potentials for those who have completed higher education (OECD, 2022).

The Covid-19 restrictions to people in EU and Greece have affected negatively their social activities and skills, especially when schools and academic institutions closed (Eurofound, 2021). Consequently, the overall living conditions as well as the mental well-being has been affected in a

triple way from financial crisis outcomes, the Covid-19 restrictions and post-covid period because of the war in East Europe (Ukraine, Russia). The latter has a significance consequence at a global level and influenced global trade and investments as well as power balance and the national economies outside EU (Ruta, 2022). However, European youth must “survive” in this complex and challenging socioeconomic environment. In 2020, Rome ministerial communique commit to build an inclusive, innovative and interconnected EHEA by 2030, able to underpin a sustainable, cohesive and peaceful Europe (Rome Communique, 2020).

Since 2000 and the beginning of financial crisis at the first decade of 21st century (Commission, 2000), the social goal of education policy does not solely based on knowledge but also on social skills and competences (Commission, 2010). According to Chourdakis (2020), employability and higher education are strongly interrelated before crisis in London Ministerial Conference (2007), during Bologna process and postcovid-19 period. This employment-education dependency (in terms of accessibility, level, longevity) is also pictured in OECD statistics (Education at a glance 2018; 2022). As described in the Eurydice report, graduates' employment prospects are greatly influenced by economy's performance and demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, nationality or social class (European Commission/EACEA/ Eurydice, 2014). Therefore, higher education and lifelong learning can significantly contribute to employment prospects and the quality of working life (Chourdakis, 2020); a fact that underlines the need for analysis and depth understanding of another integrated youth indicator the NEETs.

At the same time, NEETs pictures the underdog characteristics that this social group develops in employment market and its very low potentials. But who the NEETs really are; the Young People - Not in Education, Employment or Training)<sup>8</sup> at at the age of 15-29 (e.g. millenials, GZ), who do not participate in any category of social welfare network (e.g. education, employment and training). At EU level, NEETs are considered one of the main parts of youth long term unemployment (Eurofound, 2012). This form of social vulnerability reveals the weaknesses of modern social and economic systems (Lavdas, 2016) and EU institutional tradition as well, called Social Europe model (Sapir, 2004; Taliouris and Tzagarakis, 2020). Statistics and evidence-based policy analysis indicates that NEETs rates are quite similar with unemployment, whilst financial crisis was a milenstone in social vulnerability of NEETs and youth. Up till 2019 the NEETs rate has been gradually declined; however, Covid-19 social externalities had negative socioeconomic outcomes and increased rates. This

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<sup>8</sup> For more information on the profile of NEETs, see Papadakis N. (2013). *Absentee Barometer: NEETs (Young People Not in Education Employment or Training)*. Athens: I. Sideris Publications (in Greek).

situation in combination with the negative outcomes of the war in political (e.g. sense of belongingness in EU) and economic (e.g. inflation) issues has influenced the sustainability perspective for EU and its youth (e.g. Next Generation EU). Despite financial crisis, covid-19 and energy crisis NEETs rate is lower in 2021 than in 2011. Additionally, current data shows that EU and Greece are not close to 2030 target (9% (EC, 2021). Despite financial crisis, Covid-19 and energy crisis NEETs rate is lower in 2021 than in 2011. Additionally, current data shows that EU and Greece are not close to 2030 target for 9% (EC, 2021). Thus, EU and Greece, must pay extra attention in such target because indicates another fact which does not based on discrimination between ages (e.g. millennials, GZ) but sex as well. In 2022, 13.1% of young women aged 15–29 in the EU were NEETs, while the corresponding share among young men was 2.6 percentage points lower, at 10.5%. (Eurostat, 2022a).

The unemployment rate varies between member states, for example between Germany and Greece, which in November 2019 recorded unemployment rates of 3.1% and 17.1 % respectively (OECD, 2023). The difference between EU member states becomes more pronounced if we compare the unemployment index in 2022. According to Eurostat, the lowest youth unemployment rates were recorded in the Czech regions of Central Bohemia (1.7%), South-West (3.1%) and Prague (3.2%), the German region of Upper Bavaria (3.3%) and the Polish region of West Transdanubia (3.6%), while the highest youth unemployment rate was recorded in the Spanish region of Ceuta (42.4%), and in the two Greek regions Thessaly (39.8%) and Central Greece (36.5%) (Eurostat, 2022a). These figures confirm the serious effects of successive crises and the difficulties that European citizens have to face (Eurostat, 2022a). Unfortunately, Youth is a social group that in the last decade and crisis period is vulnerable compare to population over 29 years old (Choudhry, et. al. 2012). An important role in the reduction of unemployment rates was played by the efforts and actions carried out both at European and national level in Greece such as the Youth Guarantee (Matthes, 2016).

The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly affected unemployment rate. This has increased in 2020 to 19.1% (Eurostat, 2022a), confirming that the crises are multidimensional and have social and economic consequences in vulnerable social groups such as youth. Although youth is generally more optimistic, have ideas and digital competences, it still faces high rates of unemployment or work in lower quality or for low wages (Eurofound, 2021). In post-Covid-19 period the social threat for youth exists but it seems to be gradually decreased reaching 13.9% (2.6 million) for EU countries in April 2022 (Eurostat, 2023a); April 2021, youth unemployment decreased by 685 thousand in the EU and by 555 thousand in the euro area (Eurostat, 2023b). However, in some countries, the social risk of unemployment is still a threat for youth in terms of age and sex. According to OECD data in July

2023, Greece has one of the highest unemployment rates for young people aged 15-24 and the second unemployment rate gap between men and women (OECD, 2023b). In 2020, Rome ministerial communique commit to build an inclusive, innovative and interconnected EHEA by 2030, able to underpin a sustainable, cohesive and peaceful Europe (Rome Communiqué, 2020)

### **EU policy framework for youth and its policy implications in Greece**

EU has launched a strategy<sup>9</sup> for youth that is mainly based on prioritization regarding policy orientation and 11 Goals under public discussion and consultation (Commission 2018a; 2018b; EU, 2018). The European Youth Goals 2019-2027<sup>10</sup> are: 1. Connecting EU with Youth, 2 Equality of All Genders, 3. Inclusive Societies, 4. Information & Constructive Dialogue, 5. Mental Health & Wellbeing, 6. Moving Rural Youth Forward, 7. Quality Employment for All, 8. Quality Learning, 9. Space and Participation for All, 10. Sustainable Green Europe, 11. Youth Organisations & European Programmes (Commission 2018a; 2018b; EU, 2018). In 2021, European Parliament and Council have also concluded to set European Year of Youth in 2022 (Commission, 2021), based on the fact that EU needs the vision, engagement and participation of all young people to build a better future, that is greener, more inclusive and digital. The following year 2023 is the European Year for Skills that focuses in youth, as well among other social groups (e.g. vocational training), common citizenship issues and Erasmus+. Summing up, it is interesting to underline at that point that Greek youth and EU is familiar with Erasmus as an exchanging programme in EU (Greece: 72, EU: 50) (Eurobarometer, 2022). This is reasonable because Erasmus heightened the sense of cultural sensitivity and understanding (92% of participants), make a stronger connection to Europe (75%), attained at least intermediate proficiency in a second language etc (EC, 2018).

During crisis periods (financial, Covid-19, war), the negative socioeconomic outcomes were an uncertain risk for youth regarding their SD potentials, while political engagement and the sense of political belonging in EU public affairs seems to be associated with goals 9 and 11 in Youth Strategy. In particular, goal 9 sets political engagement as an issue in elections and day by day participation. According to EP (2021) Youth Survey “Voting in European elections” (p. 36, chapter 2.5), the eligible young population voted to a higher extent compared to the overall turn out<sup>11</sup> in 2019. Moreover, the impact that younger voters had was important, while the civic duty is associated with socioeconomic and environmental issues (e.g. growth, climate change and environment). “These elections saw a younger, more pro-European and engaged group voting in increased numbers. This translates into

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<sup>9</sup> Engaging, Connecting and Empowering young people: a new EU Youth Strategy

<sup>10</sup> Youth Goals: <https://youth-goals.eu/youthgoals>

<sup>11</sup> EP. 2019 European election results: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en/turnout/>

greater legitimacy for the European Parliament and empowers its members when approving the new European Commission and holding it to account over the next five years” David Sassoli President of EU Parliament (EP, 2019).

According to the Eurobarometer 502 (2022), important things for European youth in EU are related with people well being and mental health, free movement-employment, climate change and socioeconomic justice. The first issue is strongly associated with the negative outcomes of financial crisis (since 2009), Covid-19 and the need for peace. Therefore 34% of youth in EU and 33% in Greece have indicated the “Improvement of mental-physical health and wellbeing” as important. Another important topic for policy discourse and responsibility is environment and climate change, which is pictured in youth responses both in EU (34%) and Greece (33%). However, financial crisis that broke out in 2008 and recession brought a large number of European young citizens face to face with unemployment, poverty, social exclusion and inequalities. Europe faced unprecedented challenges and its citizens experienced economic uncertainty. Hence, most popular issues for youth in Greece are employment (Increasing job opportunities for young people, Greece: 45%, EU: 33%), social welfare (Fighting poverty and economic and social inequalities, Greece: 46%, EU: 32%) and international cooperation for peace (Preserving peace, reinforcing international security etc, Greece: 42%, EU: 37%). The latter is a significant issue in post- Covid-19 period and it is pictured at another Eurobarometer 97 (2022) for European Parliament for the overall population, which highlighted the importance of a common defense-security policy (Greece: 78, EU: 77), energy policy (Greece: 79, EU: 75), foreign policy (Greece: 74, EU: 70). Despite, these pro-Europeanism perspectives the youth in Greece (rather in EU) were not satisfied both from EU (Greece: 59, EU: 37) and their national Government (Greece: 64, EU: 40) with the response to the war crisis in East Europe. Moreover, they were very disappointed from this war's negative consequences in economy at large (Greece: 92, EU: 62) and for themselves as well (Greece: 99, EU: 88).

The socioeconomic perspectives are further pictured in the Eurobarometer 97 (2022), in which the issue of employment and economy are crucial for young people: expectations for “the employment situation” as worse (Greece: 46, EU: 35) and as static (Greece: 37, EU: 40), and “the economic situation” as worse (Greece: 49, EU: 53). In details, this uncertainty is pictured in the living cost increase (Greece: 55, EU: 54), unemployment (Greece: 20, EU: 9) and health (Greece: 21, EU: 14), which conclude to different perspectives for EU as a whole: “positive” (Greece: 31, EU: 47), “neutral” (Greece: 38, EU: 36), “negative” (Greece: 31, EU: 16). Moreover, this is also pictured in Eurobarometer 547 (2021) for youth priorities at EU policy level, which were mainly based on social issues related to wellbeing, tackling poverty and social welfare. This significant tradition of European

Social Model in EU and its implications in domestic and member states institutional setting it is still a topic that is associated with trust and prosperity from youth in EU and Greece. Despite the deregulation of ESM the last two decades, its negative externalities and its weak alternatives by Corporate Social Responsibilities policy substitutes at high level policies (EC, 2007; 2011; 2014). A brief presentation for European Social Model is necessary at this point and its regional characteristics which are called social models in EU (Commission, 1994; Eurofound, 2011; European Economy News 2006; Kotroyannos, et al., 2013; Sapir, 2004). The social models had also a significant impact to CSR perceptions, public policy models and EU citizens approach in welfare issues, due to this institutional tradition (Taliouris, 2019; 2018) but also traditional policy topics education, employment and social security.

Business sector is a significant non state actors that has a role to play in EU and internationally for SD (Taliouris, 2019b). At the same time youth consider it as social stakeholder (e.g. employer, growth contributor etc). For instance, companies are organizations that need to be close to youth perspectives about environment, social inclusion, work life balance and community improvement (Deloitte, 2023). According to EURES (2023) European Youth (e.g. Millennial and Generation Z) political and economic issues are not isolated but interrelated. Moreover, the link with Sustainable Development, its definition and SDGs requires social engagement of stakeholders such as business sector via political Corporate Social Responsibility (Commission, 2011; Taliouris, 2021; Manasakis and Taliouris, 2022; Taliouris and Manasakis, 2021). Despite the fact that youth in EU and Greece pay attention on business sector responsible activities and entrepreneurship (EURES, 2023), policy experience indicates this strategy very useful but optimistic not only for EU (Commission, 2016) but also Greece (2017; 2018). Business sector is an important stakeholder for social equity and European Social Model (Sapir, 2004; Taliouris, 2019; 2018) because contribute in employment increase and social inclusion. Although EU and its member states have a significant institutional tradition in social welfare and considered as one of the best places to live, political steps need to be taken in order to ensure youth capability to meet their own needs. These values are strongly associated with SD and its definition 36 years after Brundtland report (WCED, 1987).

## Conclusion

According to the C456 Official Journal of EU (2018: 3), “socioeconomic exclusion and democratic exclusion go hand in hand. Youth struggling with disadvantages are generally less active citizens and have less trust in institutions. Europe cannot afford wasted talent, social exclusion or disengagement among its youth. Young people should not only be architects of their own lives, but also contribute to positive change in society”. Due to this statement, Youth prosperity EU and its member state is a

crucial policy topic that challenges not only their economic and political future, but the overall institutional setting and its core elements such as democracy, social welfare, environmental modernization and economic competitiveness. These core elements are very prosperous from the one hand and optimistic as well in order to be met, due to the different interests and perspectives of EU member states and stakeholders.

Education is linked with the social welfare institutional tradition in EU, whilst an aim is to increase human capital capability to be more qualified though soft skills that will contribute to their employability's improvement in national and EU labor market. These are related with SDG 4<sup>12</sup> for Education and SDG 8<sup>13</sup> for employment, while both have a significant progress and they have been performed relatively well despite the fact of financial and health crisis in EU<sup>14</sup> and Greece<sup>15</sup>. In SDG 4, EU have marked significant progress towards the final goal by 2030 except in low achieving 15 years old in reading mathematics or science 2006-2018 that is characterized with insufficient progress towards EU target. Greece reaches significant low rates (4.1%) compare to EU (9.6%) in early school leavers from education and training (18-24) in 2022, while the overall progress and its score is stagnating or increasing at less than 50% of required rate, with a weak performance such as in Pisa score and Underachievers in science (% of 15-year-olds), employment rate of recent graduates and adult participation in learning (Hellenic Statistics SDG4, 2023). In SDG 8, EU have marked significant progress in all of the targets except a moderate progress in real GDP, material footprint and NEETs in benchmark period 2007-2022. Furthermore, it is also indicated an insufficient progress towards EU targets in investment share and in work at risk in poverty rate 2010-2021. Greece has non dynamic progress and significant changes remain to be done, while it is insufficient to meet the overall goal Despite the progress and the minimization of the gap in indicators related with NEETs, long unemployment rate etc the "total employment rate" in combination with "inactive population due to caring responsibilities" and "Involuntary temporary employment" has weak performance (Hellenic Statistics, 2023).

Moreover, the Eurobarometer (502) for European Year of Youth, young people's most common expectation is decision-makers to be aware more to their demands and act on them (EU: 33%; Greece: 36%), climate change (EU: 34%; Greece: 33%), education (EU: 33%; Greece: 41%), employment

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<sup>12</sup> Quality education in the EU: overview and key trends, Low achieving 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics or science, Participation in early childhood education, Early leavers from education and training, Tertiary educational attainment, Adult participation in learning in the past four weeks.

<sup>13</sup> Decent work and economic growth in the EU: overview and key trends    Real GDP    Investment share of GDP    Employment rate    Long-term unemployment rate    Young people neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET)    Fatal accidents at work

<sup>14</sup> SDG Index Eurostat: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/infographs/sdg/index.html>

<sup>15</sup> Sustainable Development Report INDEX: <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/profiles/greece>

(EU: 28%; Greece: 40%) and social inclusion (EU: 32%; Greece: 45%). The optimism regarding the goals for EU youth strategy are very important and indicate youth political participation and engagement as a prerequisite for a democratic society. At that point, it is necessary to underline the overall need for civic education in youth and public sphere in general by EU institutions (EU: 23%; Greece: 21%), Media (EU: 25%; Greece: 18%) Teaching staff (EU: 18%; Greece: 18%) and family-friends-colleagues (EU: 23%; Greece: 21%) (Eurobarometer 547, 2021). Especially, in Greece, it is important in order to increase the youth familiarity with EU institutions and political affairs in general both domestically and internationally (Chourdakis et al. 2022). Hence, social literacy introduces the concept of responsible citizenship in education, which is based on the rights and obligations towards society. Unfortunately, in Greece, the development of such courses in secondary educational level needs to be empowered and increased in curriculum in High School, especially those related with the entrance to social sciences Departments and Universities in Greece (e.g. administration, economics, law, political science etc).

Hence, civic education can play an important role in promoting values into an open and democratic society; elements that EU and Greek citizenship is based on politically (EU, 2015: 2). The development of civic education is therefore imperative for the acquisition of comprehensive knowledge of European affairs that will contribute to the development of an active and democratic European and Greek youth (Chourdakis et al, 2022). In conclusion, civic education offers the opportunity to Greek and European citizens to get to know the rights and privileges offered by the EU, while at the same time it helps them grasp the importance of their active participation “together” in EU (EU:80%; Greece: 70%). In essence, it gives them the opportunity to develop their European citizenship and sense of belonging, which is very important for youth and its positive feeling for EU in the ages 15-24 (EU: 58%; Greece: 42%) and 25-39 (EU: 55%; Greece: 32%), before Covid-19 and war in Europe (EP Eurobarometer 4021, 2019). In conclusion, Lisbon strategy perspectives is still up to date because underlines the fact that EU is an ongoing social, political and economic process that through crisis and successes shape at the end the characteristics of the “young citizen”, who is required to be more democratic, more responsible and fully active, ready to act and take initiatives (EC, 2000) in order to achieve sustainability and democracy in daily life.

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