

Youth Partnership

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The entrepreneurial mindset as a key factor for youth employability and youth entrepreneurship and the role of Youth Work in Europe

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Employment challenges for young people in Europe

Over the last 15 years, a series of crises including the 2008 financial crisis, Covid-19 pandemic, and most recently, the war in Ukraine, have had severe consequences on young people in Europe, particularly in the area of youth employment and financial autonomy. The financial and employment crisis of 2008, entitled by some specialists as “The Great Recession” has hit hardest young people affecting their short and long-term perspectives, according to the latest ILO Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022 report (International Labour Organization, 2022).

In 2019, as the European economy was still recovering from the consequences of the financial crisis, Covid-19 pandemic posed further challenges to young people’s economic independence and their transition to autonomy, due to schools and university closures, restricted access to indoor and outdoor activities, employment, income and health and social services. The OECD’s (2021) report confirms that the economic crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic mostly affected young people, with about half of young people’s households having suffered some form of job-related disruption. As a result, many young people have been facing financial challenges and lack of necessary resources and are in precarious working and living situations (EU-Council of Europe youth partnership, 2021). The pandemic tended to magnify pre-existing social inequalities in resources (such as good quality education, income, access to health care, access to other supporting services) resulting in an unequal impact on youth from different social strata (EU-Council of Europe youth partnership, 2020).

Nowadays, young people are also facing another employment challenge related to the growing mismatch between youths’ skills and employer needs. As per data on the European Union year of [skills website](#), 77% of EU companies report difficulties in finding workers with the necessary skills. Businesses, large and small, need skilled

people to innovate and grow, but yet, mismatches and shortages in skills are increasing, while a large number of people are at risk of unemployment. If unaddressed, the youth unemployment will likely increase as the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) transforms society, economies, jobs, and people's personal lives.

The existing mismatch between youth skills and employer needs threatens to become even wider as Industry 4.0 transforms business and jobs faster than workers can adapt. Two-thirds of today's five-year-olds will, in about 15 years, find themselves in jobs that don't exist today, and the jobs that do exist won't necessarily be located where the job seekers live (Deloitte Global, The Global Business Coalition for Education, 2018).

The entrepreneurial mindset as a response to youth unemployment

Promoting youth entrepreneurship and sustainable development is one of the possible responses to the challenges portrayed above. The economic crisis and Covid-19 pandemic, together with the climate crisis, have also highlighted the need to focus on sustainable development, as opposed to economic growth. Sustainable development is generally defined as the development that aims to meet the needs of the current generation without compromising the needs of future generations, in order to create a sustainable environment for young people. The policy rationale for attaching high hopes to such efforts is that if young people can be empowered to take charge of their own lives and careers, and learn how to seize opportunities, this will contribute greatly towards improving the overall situation in the European labour markets (Curth, 2015).

This requires a development of the context where all young people have access to quality education and training, which helps them in gaining a wide range of skills and competences needed to adapt to the rapidly changing and highly interconnected world. The aim of such education and training would be to provide a path for active development of human capital, practical encouragement of social entrepreneurial activities and establishment of effective pathways to youth employment.

Focus on entrepreneurship and knowledge-based activities supports the development of innovative culture in Europe and the world, as it also facilitates competitiveness and economic growth (Wilson, 2018). Consequently, the European Union and national governments have launched considerable efforts to pursue the objective of promoting entrepreneurship among young people, and initiatives to boost youth entrepreneurship are given a significant role in supporting the main goals of the Europe 2020 strategy for growths and jobs (European Commission, 2010).

In recent years, most European countries intensified their focus in this area (Tsakiridou & Stergiou, 2014). Furthermore, the important role of education in promoting more entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviours, starting even at primary school, is now widely recognized (Mitra, 2008). However, entrepreneurial learning may take place in many different settings, i.e. in the formal education system, in non-formal learning outside the education system, for example in the work place, or, in youth work settings (European Commission, Directorate-General Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2017).

Most of the literature advocating entrepreneurship in education is based on the premise, not that everyone needs to become an entrepreneur, but that all members of our society need to become more entrepreneurial. This is echoed in what entrepreneurs write and say about their own understanding of entrepreneurship (British Council, 2017). In a broad sense, entrepreneurship should be considered as a general attitude that can be usefully applied in all working activities and in everyday life, such as creativity and innovation (Sarri, Bakouros, & Petridou, 2010). Promoting the inclusion of entrepreneurial skills and attitudes in education settings provides wider benefits to society, that go beyond new business ventures.

In this sense, Social Entrepreneurship has a vital role to play, since it is considered an important tool for supporting sustainable development, as it focuses on addressing the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in society (Seelos & Mair, 2005)

and therefore contributes to the achievement of the internationally recognized goals of sustainable development (Břanda & Urbančíková, 2020).

In general, entrepreneurship should be viewed as a new basic competence, not just as a tool to create more businesses - thus contributing to economic growth and to job creation - but also as a way to stimulate the development of personal qualities that will help fulfil the potential of the individual (Tsakiridou & Stergiou, 2012). Thus, over the past decade, the European Commission has comprehensively considered different aspects of entrepreneurial learning, which has, among other things, resulted in the development of EntreComp and the related publication *EntreComp: The Entrepreneurship Competence Framework (2016b)*.

The EntreComp framework proposes a shared definition of entrepreneurship as a competence and aims at reaching a consensus among stakeholders and establishing a bridge between the worlds of education and work. It is set to become the reference point for fostering the entrepreneurial capacities of European citizens, consisting of three interrelated and interconnected competence areas, 'Ideas and opportunities', 'Resources' and 'Into action'. Each area includes 5 competences, which, together, are the building blocks of entrepreneurship as a competence. The framework develops the 15 competences along an 8-level progression model. Also, it provides a comprehensive list of 442 learning outcomes, which offers inspiration and insight for those designing interventions from different educational contexts and domains of application (Bacigalupo, Kampylis, Punie, & Van den Brande, 2016).

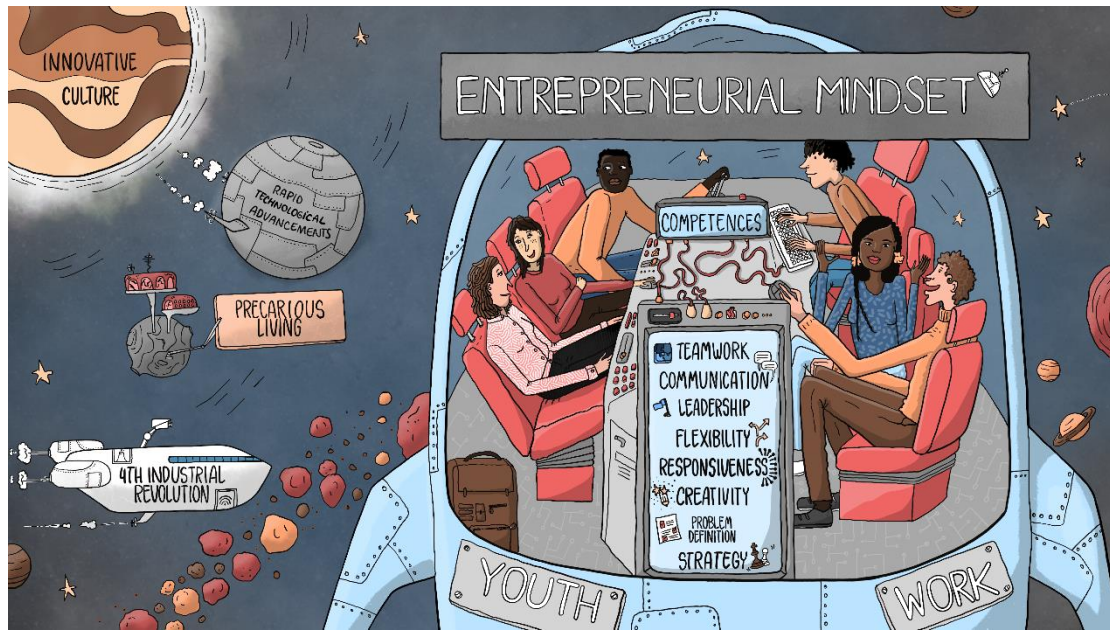
In general, EntreComp is considered as a tool for lifelong learning, aiming to place a focus on the transversal skills needed to be entrepreneurial citizens creating social, cultural, and economic value for others through their actions. EntreComp community consists of practitioners and organisations exploring how to inspire and be inspired to implement EntreComp through strategies and activities in their work and across their communities. These communities are working in a variety of domains: lifelong learning, youthwork, schools, universities, employment support organizations, employers, businesses and with entrepreneurs to build skills for life (EntreComp

Europe, 2020) developing more resilient young people with the capacity to foster entrepreneurial initiatives under the 4IR which creates new opportunities for entrepreneurship. Due to the rapid technological advancement in the 21st century and to innovations in work, entrepreneurship will likely provide a unique opportunity for youth across the globe to bypass barriers to entry into traditional employment. It will also provide an opportunity to leverage local knowledge and resources. Some young people will move between formal and informal work; entrepreneurial skills could help them better navigate these changes and could better position them for future job opportunities (Deloitte Global, The Global Business Coalition for Education, 2018).

Youth work and entrepreneurial learning

Without a doubt, the financial crisis, followed by the significant increase in youth unemployment and the share of NEETs in the European Union, has been one of the main drivers for changing the position of youth work in the entrepreneurship education spectrum. With a significant share of the young people in the European Union left outside the labour market and the education and training systems, youth work became a platform where young people could participate in meaningful activities and, at the same time, gain competences relevant to the labour market or becoming active citizens (European Commission, Directorate-General Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2017).

There is a growing realisation that entrepreneurial attitudes and values are often achieved outside the formal education system through youth work (including self-organised projects by young people). In this sense, youth work presents itself as a promising opportunity for combining traditional approaches to the promotion of innovation and entrepreneurship, targeting disadvantaged groups of young people, and aiming at social activation and inclusion. In other words, youth work appears to offer untapped potentials for developing the resources of NEETs through activities conducted by youth workers in a supportive setting (Arnkil, 2015).



The economic crisis of 2008 and Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the important role of youth work in providing young people with spaces and opportunities to develop competencies relevant to the labour market or becoming active citizens. Furthermore, it also has a significant potential for contributing to the development of entrepreneurial competences (Kiilakoski, 2014). This is because it supports personal development by helping to transform young people’s potential, creativity, talents, initiative, and social responsibility through the acquisition of related knowledge, skills, attitudes and values (Bamber & Crowther, 2012)

Due to this important causality between entrepreneurship and youth work, entrepreneurial learning has been included as one of the selection criteria for the grants and funding that are available to youth work organizations. For example, in the Erasmus+ programme and the European Solidarity Corps (ESC), fostering innovation and entrepreneurship and volunteering are some of the objectives supported by the Key Actions of the programme (European Commission, Erasmus+ Guide, 2016 and Erasmus+ [Programme Guide](#) 2023). The EU Youth Strategy also supports Member States in providing young people with opportunities to develop their skills and entrepreneurship competences, and ensure better transition to independence, through traineeships, apprenticeships, and employment opportunities. Youth Wiki

Chapter 3 on [Employment and Entrepreneurship](#) maps out the policy frameworks supporting development of entrepreneurship, competences, opportunities and funding structures at the national level, as well as the promotion of entrepreneurship culture (European Commission 2023a).

Similarly, the European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe, besides for activities focused on Council of Europe youth sector priorities, also gives grants for pilot activities which are proposing interventions based on innovation (Council of Europe, 2023).

While the purpose of youth work is not to provide jobs for young people, non-formal learning has an important role to play in contributing to the development of skills and competences of young people. Successful youth work practice can also result in a range of positive outcomes for young people which enable them to, strengthen their network and social capital and cultivate, creativity, innovation and risk-taking skills and empower the sense of initiative and entrepreneurship (European Commission 2023; 2016) . Youth work engages young people in the wide variety of personal and social development activities, helping them to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are needed in the labour market. These include teamwork, communication, leadership, flexibility, and responsiveness. They also include creativity and innovation, which involve defining problems, coming up with ways of dealing with them, and sticking to a chosen course of action. In this way youth work contributes to closing the gap between the competences acquired by young people and the needs of the labour market.

One of the most effective ways to promote youth entrepreneurship over a medium to long term period is to reform or upgrade the formal and non-formal education learning approaches (European Union, Committee of the Regions, 2017). In order to have an effective entrepreneurship education, non-formal learning approaches, like youth work, should include capacity building activities (e.g. local research, partnership building activities) and learning mobility activities (e.g. seminars, training courses, study visits and job shadowing). Through implementation of local or international

activities youth work aims to tackle various aspects of youth entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship and develop competencies of all involved actors. These youth work activities are based on a variety of methods and techniques of non-formal education, and they support the active role of the participants. The activities often target various groups including young people and youth leaders, youth workers, program managers and project coordinators, representatives of institutions and local authorities. Besides developing capacities of the participants, this procedure, also aims to especially support the development of cross-sectorial cooperation, which is one of the key elements for development of supportive entrepreneurship environment in participants living areas. The value of non-formal learning in entrepreneurship is not widely understood outside the youth sector, and should be better promoted to other stakeholders (Bamber J. , 2012).

Given the complex environments in which young entrepreneurs have to work, youth organisations need to be aware of the need for more consolidated expertise when providing entrepreneurial learning. EntreComp can help youth organizations to understand entrepreneurship competences and form a basis for entrepreneurial learning (Youth@Work Strategic Partnership on Youth Employability and Entrepreneurship preneurship, 2019).

Conclusion

Many young people today are facing challenges with their economic independence, their social life and their transition to autonomy. Evidence based research and practices from all around Europe prove that non-formal learning and youth work have an important role to play in responding to youth unemployment, to social exclusion and to closing the gap between the competences acquired by young people and the needs of the labour market.

In the context of continuous economic and social crises, youth work can facilitate young people's participation in the economy and in the society by creating a safe and inclusive learning environment for them. In this non-formal learning environment

young people are able to develop their knowledge, skills, attitudes and talents, to enhance their social responsibility, to develop further their entrepreneurial skills, and to learn and experiment with new ideas, methods and tools bringing them closer to innovative initiatives that could potentially turn to innovative youth entrepreneurial actions.

As mentioned, most of the literature advocating entrepreneurship in education is based on the premise, not that everyone needs to become an entrepreneur, but that all members of our society need to become more entrepreneurial. Youth work has an important role to play in the development of this entrepreneurial mindset so that young people can be more resilient, resourceful, and solutions oriented, even when the conditions say otherwise. Young people with this entrepreneurial mindset are becoming more active lifelong knowledge seekers who are curious, creative, critical thinkers.

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