

**CHIARA LODI RIZZINI**

**THE EUROPEAN YOUTH GUARANTEE:  
WHAT VIABILITY FOR SOUTHERN MEMBER STATES?  
EVIDENCE FROM ITALY**

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**Percorsi di secondo welfare** is a research project started in April 2011. It is structured as a partnership, led by Franca Maino as director and Maurizio Ferrera as scientific supervisor, both academics at the University of Milan, and hosted by Centro Einaudi in Turin. The venture has been funded and actively supported by our partners: ANIA, Compagnia di San Paolo, Fondazione Cariplo, Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Cuneo, Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Padova e Rovigo, Fondazione con il Sud, KME, Luxottica and Corriere della Sera.

**Percorsi di secondo welfare** is committed to enhancing the common understanding of what has recently come to be known as “second welfare”. The term refers to a mix of social protection and social investment programs which are not funded by the State, but provided instead by a wide range of economic and social actors, linked to territories and local communities. Through the collection and evaluation of new initiatives and best practices, the Observatory seeks to promote a “virtuous nesting” between first and second welfare, that will ultimately be able to tackle the challenges posed by the emergence of new social needs, and worsened by the present financial situation.

The website [www.secondowelfare.it](http://www.secondowelfare.it) collects the most significant “second welfare” experiences at mostly national but to some extent international levels, and attempts to spread them for purposes of evaluation and, hopefully, dissemination. Our research also seeks to build a strong conceptual framework for future reference. The final report (November 2013) elaborates on these experiences and best practices in order to offer a more extensive view on developments and perspectives for “second welfare” in Italy, and to ultimately help grow the capacity of the actors who take part in its advancement.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### THE EUROPEAN YOUTH GUARANTEE: WHAT VIABILITY FOR SOUTHERN MEMBER STATES? EVIDENCE FROM ITALY

Introduction: why the South?	5
1. The European context: a jobless generation?	6
2. The Youth Guarantee	10
3. The Italian Implementation Plan	11
4. What viability in Southern Europe? The Italian case	12
4.1. The impact of crisis and austerity	13
4.2. The age factor	15
4.3. The influence of previous labour policy model	16
4.4. Public employment services in Italy: a fragmented and inefficient system	18
4.5. Do traineeships really matter?	20
Concluding remarks	22
References	24

## KEYWORDS

Youth Guarantee, youth unemployment, labour market policy, Europe, Italy

## ABSTRACT

**THE EUROPEAN YOUTH GUARANTEE:  
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EVIDENCE FROM ITALY**

Affecting more than 5 million young people, youth unemployment in Europe has reached unprecedented levels. In order to tackle the problem, the European Union has recently introduced the Youth Guarantee, a program aimed at encouraging Member States to: establish strong partnerships with stakeholders; ensure early intervention by employment services and other partners supporting young people; adopt measures to enable labour integration; and make full use of the European Social Fund and other structural EU funds.

How incisive can the Youth Guarantee be for Southern European countries? The Italian example can contribute to offering answers through the discussion of three major arguments. First, Southern Member States are suffering from unemployment that is generally spread throughout the population, rather than being affecting only young people. How can they be offered new jobs if the whole economy is structurally weak? Secondly, the sub-national level lacks competencies and services to manage and implement Youth Guarantee schemes. Lastly, the financial constraints posed by austerity measures rule out the possibility to make all necessary adjustments at the national level through an increase in social expenditure.

In conclusion, the paper argues that, when implementing a European policy such as the Youth Guarantee, the differences between countries have to be taken into account, rather than producing a “one-size-fits-all” policy solution. Otherwise, the Youth Guarantee risks to fail and exacerbate the division between a “good” and a “bad” Europe, as well as to perpetuate the Mediterranean model of welfare that sees families as the main source of welfare provision.

## THE EUROPEAN YOUTH GUARANTEE: WHAT VIABILITY FOR SOUTHERN MEMBER STATES? EVIDENCE FROM ITALY<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION: WHY THE SOUTH?

The European Union has recently introduced a *Youth Guarantee* with the aim of tackling youth unemployment,<sup>2</sup> a problem that is affecting 5.556 million young Europeans (Eurostat Database). Southern Member States—Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece—present several shared economic and social characteristics that produced in turn quite similar challenges in the fields of unemployment and social exclusion. These patterns are typical of the so-called “Fourth Social Europe” (Ferrera 1996, 2012) originated from the evolution of the Bismarckian system and characterized by a “dualistic” social protection model (Emmenegger et al. 2012) that provides a wide range of services, rights and entitlements to some groups (i.e. standard workers) and low protection—or no protection at all—to others (i.e. non-standard workers, temporary workers and young workers who are often employed with non-standard temporary contracts). The reasons for such dualism can be found both in the traditional features of the labour market and in the socio-historical framework, that deeply differ from the other European Continental States. Southern European countries display job markets characterized by: severe territorial and sectorial divisions and a widespread “black” economy that is completely set outside the coverage of the welfare state; tight solidarity bonds between families’ components that operate as a “social security cushion”, providing assistance (from care to income support) and guaranteeing risks (from unemployment to sickness) where both public and private provision are absent (Ferrera 2012);<sup>3</sup> a cumbersome influence of the Catholic Church—particularly in Italy—which has prevented reforms in sectors like poverty and social exclusion.

<sup>1</sup> This working paper is an updated version of the work presented at the 21<sup>st</sup> International Conference of Europeanists (Council for European Studies), Washington (D.C.), March 14-16, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Eurostat, according to the guidelines of the International Labour Organization, defines an unemployed person as someone aged 15 to 74 without work during the reference week who is available to start work within the next two weeks and who has actively sought employment at some time during the last four weeks. The unemployment rate is the number of people unemployed as a percentage of the labour force.

<sup>3</sup> According to recent analyses the most efficient “guarantee” remains the family of origin. In 2012 the young Italians aged 18-34 who lived with at least one parent were 6.964 million (61.2% of non-married under 35), 2% more than in 2011: 3.864 million were aged 18-24, while 3.1 million were aged 25-34 (Istituto Giuseppe Toniolo 2013).

Differences between Southern and Northern and Central Europe are also due to its peculiar political background, namely: the recent authoritarian experiences that led to the development of a weak idea of *stateness*, where “State” can be easily manipulated by lobbies; strong corporatism and struggle between polarized interests (Ferrera 2012) that resulted in a polarized vision between social and political ideologies (i.e. State versus Church, Left versus Right, Social Democracy versus Capitalism) which has in turn obstructed for several years the reform for a strong and inclusive welfare system.

Against this background, in the last years exogenous and endogenous pressures have imposed changes such that the previous models are still recognisable but with some new features, enhancing a mutual crossbreeding. Calls for change from the European Union have certainly been one of the most relevant pressures, as EU actions and recommendations have favoured the implementation of reforms in several Member States (Maino 2014). Will the European Union accomplish similar results through the Youth Guarantee? Will the YG foster reforms in the South, or policy legacy effects (Rose and Davies 1994) will determine the failure of the policy?

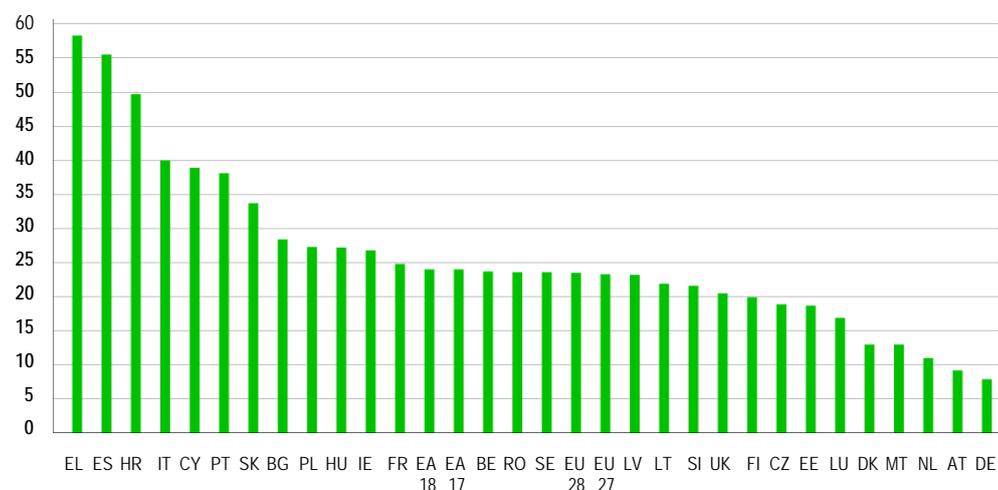
This working paper investigates the viability of the Youth Guarantee in Southern Member countries through the analysis of the Italian case. The first section introduces to the European context, clarifying why a strong policy for tackling the growth of unemployment is needed and why the policy has been encouraged by the European Union. Section 2 presents the proposal of the Youth Guarantee and its main characteristics, while section 3 describes the Guarantee implementation plan in Italy, which will be the centre of the analysis that follows. Section 4, in fact, discusses the viability of such a proposal in Southern Members States focusing on the case of Italy and identifying the following issues: the constraints brought by austerity measures, that would not allow to make the financial additions needed to modernize existing labour policies; the effects of the economic recession, which produced generalized unemployment, not only affecting the young but also young adults up to 30 years old; the path dependence (Pierson 2004) of the pre-existing “Southern Model” that results in a range of factors—weak active labour market policies (ALMPs), inefficiency of public employment services and ineffective traineeship programs—that could undermine the implementation of the Youth Guarantee.

## 1. THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT: A JOBLESS GENERATION?

Youth unemployment in Europe has reached unprecedented levels, with a rate of 23.4% for those under 25 in 2013 (Eurostat Database). Unemployment is almost a generational problem: this is particularly clear if we compare this rate (23.5%) to the 25-74 years old unemployment rate (9.5%), which is less than half (Eurostat

Database). Youth unemployment rate varies considerably among States, reaching the highest levels in Greece (58.3%), Spain (55.5%), Croatia (49.7%), Italy (40%) and Portugal (38.1%) (Figure 1), although even the best economical performers among European countries are facing worsening occupational trends (Eurostat Database).

Figure 1 • Unemployment rate (less than 25 years old) in the European Union, 2013



Source: Eurostat Database 2014

Youth unemployment has huge costs for the European Union: taking altogether unemployment and young people’s unemployment and inactivity,<sup>4</sup> the economic cost in 2008 has been estimated in €120 billion, that is about 1% of the aggregated GDP of the EU-26 countries (Mascherini 2012). In 2011, it increased to €153 billion, a staggering €34 billion higher than in 2008, thus representing a relative increase of almost 28% in 3 years. As a share of GDP, the cost was 1.21%. At the country level, the absolute costs are highest in Italy (€32.6 billion), followed by France, United Kingdom and Spain (€22 billion, €18 billion and €15.7 billion respectively). The costs with respect to GDP are highest in Bulgaria and Greece (3.3% and 3.28% respectively), while Cyprus, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia and Poland all report annual losses of more than 2% of GDP<sup>5</sup> (Mascherini 2012). Par-

<sup>4</sup> They are the so-called NEET. The European definition of a NEET is a young person (15-24 year old) who has remained outside employment, education or training for 6 months or more during the previous 12 months—the 6 months do not need to be consecutive (European Commission 2012a). NEETs are a very heterogeneous population. The largest subgroup tends to be those who are conventionally unemployed. Other vulnerable subgroups include the sick and disabled. Non-vulnerable subgroups include those simply taking time out and those constructively engaged in other activities such as art, music and self-directed learning. What they do have in common is the fact that they are not accumulating human capital through formal channels. Some 14 million young people are not in employment, education or training across the EU as a whole (while 5.7 are unemployed) (Mascherini 2012). However, rates vary widely from around 4.3% of 15-24-year olds in the Netherlands to 21.1% in Italy (Eurostat Database).

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that these findings do not consider the indirect costs of the deterioration of human capital and employability nor any increase in crime and health costs.

ticularly heavy financial burdens to be borne by countries already characterized by fragile economies.

Youth unemployment has a social cost, too. Young people not in employment, education or training are at higher risk of being socially and politically alienated. Compared to their non-NEET counterparts, for example, NEETs have dramatically lower levels of political interest, political and social engagement, and trust in institutions (Mascherini 2012).<sup>6</sup> Conditions that are particularly worrisome in Southern Europe: where “stateness” is still weak youngsters can be exposed to the manipulation of populism and criminal organizations. On the basis of the current trends, tensions within the Eurozone risk to be exacerbated (ILO 2012b, 38). The marginalisation of youth exacerbates the already existing polarization between *insiders* and *outsiders* of the society, and could lead to dangerous social conflicts. Comparing rioters’ movements of the last decade in Sweden, France and the United Kingdom, it can be gathered that most of the rioters were very young aged—some of them in their early teens—who felt like outsiders on the basis of their work, education or family background (Lodi Rizzini 2013).<sup>7</sup> The probability of being NEET is higher for specific conditions, such as: lower education (the low-educated are three times more likely to be NEET than those with tertiary education); immigration background (70%); disability or health issues (40%); parents who divorced (30%) or experienced unemployment (17%); living in remote areas (1.5%) (Mascherini 2012).

One last consideration to be raised is that the new generations can be considered as the first “European generations”, born and grown up during the consolidation of the European Union and the introduction of the single currency. European programs such as Comenius, Erasmus and Leonardo have shaped a whole generation of people that are more likely to consider themselves “European” and to be engaged with the bloc’s politics (European Commission 2013): 45% of 15-24-year olds describe themselves as European in addition to their nationality (European Commission 2012b) and tend to have a more positive view of the EU than their parents and grandparents (European Commission 2013). This trend seems to suggest to tackle youth unemployment at the European level rather than at national level, even if employment policy remains under the jurisdiction of Member States. Moreover—thanks to the right to move and live in each Member State and as a result of the debt crisis that followed on the heels of the financial crisis in a number of countries—in several countries the deteriorating labour market situation resulted in an increase in the outflows of their nationals in search of work towards other countries that have been less affected by the economical downturn and the

<sup>6</sup> Even in those countries where NEETs are more politically engaged (such as Spain), they do not identify themselves with the main political parties.

<sup>7</sup> Growing distrust and dissatisfaction of youth towards the political class and institutions in Italy at present do not seem to be associated with a significant growth of protest, especially of the violent protest—with the exception of local-based movements like *No TAV*. Protest movements have been more significant in other countries instead, like Spain, cradle of the *Indignados*, and Greece.

debt crisis. This is especially true for the countries of Southern Europe (OECD 2013, 23). According to a recent OECD report, between 2009 and 2011 the number of migrants from Southern Europe—those who have been hurt the most by the impact of the brutal recession and the severe government spending cut-backs—moving to other EU States (principally United Kingdom and Germany) jumped by some 45%.<sup>8</sup> Movements from Greece and Spain have doubled since 2007—to 39,000 and 72,000 respectively—with most of this increase occurred in 2010 and 2011 (Table 1). This is a phenomenon often affecting young people and the highly qualified, and therefore leading to a brain drain that can be costly for the future competitiveness of both the single States and Europe, and it can also have impacts on the indoor equilibrium of the host countries, insomuch that there are growing calls for limiting welfare benefits for foreign citizens,<sup>9</sup> accused to excessively increase social expenditure and favour social “tourism”.<sup>10</sup>

Table 1 • Outflows of nationals from selected OECD countries to main European and other OECD destination countries, 2007-2011

	Index					Number (thousands)
<b>• Country of origin</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2011</b>
Greece	100	106	102	143	236	39
Iceland	100	111	163	165	135	4
Ireland	100	104	174	210	181	21
Italy	100	116	111	132	142	85
Portugal	100	120	98	103	125	55
Spain	100	114	123	173	224	72
<b>• Country of destination</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2011</b>
Germany	100	105	116	133	188	78
United Kingdom	100	120	113	174	195	88
Switzerland	100	116	96	102	121	33
Belgium	100	142	146	169	193	15
Netherlands	100	138	144	157	184	12
Other OECD countries	100	109	116	124	129	50

Source: OECD (2013)

<sup>8</sup> For example Germany witnessed a 73% surge of Greek immigrants from 2011 to 2012, nearly a 50% increase for Spanish and Portuguese and a 35% jump for Italians.

<sup>9</sup> In 2012, Nordic Labour Ministers met in Svalbard and agreed to work together to prepare for the consequences of a possible increase in immigration from Southern Europe, since migration from there had risen significantly (Lindahl 2013). In 2013 the governments of Germany, UK, Austria and the Netherlands announced to the European Commission the possibility of welfare restriction to foreign citizens, asserting that European Law increases social travel and migration of the poor, and therefore social expenditure.

<sup>10</sup> Even if the data do not show any social travel, there is a growing amount of people who live outside their country of origin (2%, with more than 3% in Ireland, UK, Belgium, Austria and Germany), but they are mostly people looking for work and only 5% can benefit of the same benefits of national citizens.

## 2. THE YOUTH GUARANTEE

A prolonged recession is typically associated with growing long-term unemployment. Labour market policies (LMPs) are needed for two reasons: if effective, they can reduce the risk of demoralization and labour market exclusion of long-term unemployed workers, preventing them from falling into poverty and social exclusion; they are crucial elements for preparing for the economic recovery, for example by providing retraining and upgrading skills (ILO 2012a, 36). Support for young talents is therefore at the core of a competitiveness strategy. How can the European Union be of help? The Youth Guarantee is one of the most crucial structural reforms that the European Union has introduced to tackle youth unemployment and inactivity and to improve school-to-work transition (Vesan 2014). Inspired from the experience of Finland and Austria<sup>11</sup> (Mascherini et al. 2012), it ensures that all young people under 25<sup>12</sup>—whether registered with employment services or not—get a good-quality, concrete offer within four months after leaving formal education or becoming unemployed. The good-quality offer should be for a job, apprenticeship, traineeship, or continued education, and should also be adapted to individual needs and situations.

How is it going to be financed? By far the most important source of EU money to support the implementation of the Guarantee is the European Social Fund (ESF), which should continue to be worth more than €10 billion every year in the 2014-20 period. Moreover, every Member State has to devote a significant proportion<sup>13</sup> of its European Social Fund allocations for 2014-20 to implement the Youth Guarantee. Finally, Member States that present the highest rates of youth unemployment (more than 25% in at least one region) are eligible for additional funding from the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI).<sup>14</sup> This will ensure that, where challenges are most acute, the level of support per young person is sufficient to make a real difference. The YEI funding will comprise €3 billion from a specific new EU budget line dedicated to youth employment, matched by at least €3 billion from the national allocations of the European Social Fund. The YEI will be programmed as part of the ESF 2014-20. The European Commission has proposed to frontload the €6 billion provided under the YEI so that the whole amount is employed in 2014 and 2015 rather than over the seven-year period of the Multi-annual Financial Framework.

<sup>11</sup> The concept of a Youth Guarantee however is not new. In 1981, the Nordic Council defined it as “a social situation where all young people are guaranteed genuine opportunities for education, training and employment in accordance with, on the one hand, the aspirations, capabilities and interests of the individual, and, on the other, the needs and objectives of society”.

<sup>12</sup> The YEI will target NEETs aged under 25 years, and where the Member States consider relevant, also those aged under 30 years. In this case Member States should allocate additional European Social Fund resources to these measures in order to ensure equal levels of support per person.

<sup>13</sup> It should be at least as the same amount of the funding received from the European Union.

<sup>14</sup> Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom.

Following the EU Council recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee (April 2013) and the endorsement of the European Council (July 2013), each Member State willing to enter the scheme had to submit a Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan that: 1) identifies national investments and structural reforms for modernizing employment, social and education services for young people and for improving education access and school-to-work transition; 2) clarifies how the partnerships between responsible public authorities, employment services, education and training institutions, social partners, youth organizations and other stakeholders will be organized for designing, implementing and assessing education and training courses. Together with the Implementation Plans, Member States had to prepare their operational programs setting out the planned use of their ESF allocations in 2014-20 as well as of additional funding under the YEI.

The Youth Guarantee is thereby important because it encourages the Member States to invest in structural reforms for modernizing their labour market systems. For example, public employment services are demanded to ensure that every young person receives appropriate advice and a tailor-made, concrete offer within four months.

### **3. THE ITALIAN IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

The Italian Implementation Plan will be mainly concentrated in two years, 2014-2015, in the hope that by doing so it will have a deeper impact on the current youth situation, working as a “shock therapy”. Then, the programs originated from the Guarantee and supported by the European funds will be carried on in the following years too.

According to the Council Recommendation, the Guarantee is mainly addressed to people from 15 to 24 years old, but given the seriousness of the “youth issue” in Italy—as we will see in the next section—it has been extended to people up to 29 years old. Italy will receive 567 million euro from the European Social Fund, plus some 567 millions euro from YEI, and with a national co-financing evaluated up to now in 40%. Total funding should be some 1,513 million for the time being.

Given the Italian system of jurisdiction in the field of labour policies, the implementation of the Youth Guarantee needs a comprehensive strategy, strongly shared by Government, Regions and the other public and private stakeholders. The government believes it is necessary to manage the Guarantee through a single national program with Regions as delegate managers. Beside a national implementation plan, every Region should therefore define a local implementation plan that will be debated with the Ministry of Labour. With regards to the assignment of tasks, the central government is charged with coordinating, monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Youth Guarantee, as well as its communication.

Regions, as “intermediate entities”, contribute to the definition of the programs and manage the realization of ALMPs in their territories. The activation of the Guarantee, in a subsidiarity perspective, will also involve other stakeholders: the Ministry of Education, third sector organizations, the *Istituto Nazionale di Previdenza Sociale* (Italian Social Security Agency), Chambers of Commerce, Provinces, employment agencies and municipalities. Finally, great importance should be given to the implementation of a new system of monitoring and evaluation, which is usually a weak point in Italian public policies.

The key for the success of the Guarantee can be identified in the ability to improve partnerships between job services and local administrations (Rosolen 2013). Measures similar to the Guarantee have already been activated at a local level: the *Piano integrato per l'occupazione giovanile* (Integrated Plan for Youth Employment) introduced in the Veneto Region is aimed to empower young people's training and employability with particular focus on the school-to-work transition. The program *Giovani sì* in Tuscany supports youth not only in school-to-work transition but also in the transition to adulthood and independent living, providing funds to support the hiring and buying of a house, and guaranteeing funds for non-standard workers and self-employees. Finally, *Job Town*, a program included in the Europe 2020 strategy, pursues targets which are partly similar to the Guarantee: social stakeholders' partnerships development; school-to-work transition; monitoring of labour market; start-up programs and social innovation. The program involves 11 municipalities and offers several examples of success, such as the City of Biella, that in 2012 developed a partnership agreement with trade unions, Unindustria, CNA and Confcommercio for financing scholarships and traineeships covering the 70% of young workers' wages or refunds. Thanks to this program, more than 100 high skilled traineeships have been offered and 70% of them have been turned into job contracts (of which 40% permanent work and 30% fixed-term contracts).

#### 4. WHAT VIABILITY IN SOUTHERN EUROPE? THE ITALIAN CASE

The European Youth Guarantee needs several conditions to be effective and successful. For this reason there is great concern that not all Member States will be able to achieve the expected outcomes, especially those who have been hit the most by the crisis and on top of that were already characterized by weak labour policies and services, such as the Southern European countries. With regards to this concern, the Italian case can offer several contributions, as it is one of the clearest examples of the “austerity versus growth dilemma”. On the one hand, the country must respect the European monetary tightening due to the reaching of alarming levels of its public debt; on the other hand, the country needs structural investments for modernizing the existing set of labour policies and for turning the unemployment rate down. Moreover, there is a lively debate about the “age fac-

tor”: what can be considered to be “youth”? As we will see, the crisis is affecting not only the youngsters, but also people up to—at least—30 years old. Finally, the success of the Guarantee risks to be undermined by the inheritance of the Mediterranean model characterized by weak ALMPs, inefficient public employment services and ineffective traineeships, which are all founding elements of the Youth Guarantee.

#### *4.1. The impact of crisis and austerity*

This work does not want to discuss the merits of the “austerity approach”,<sup>15</sup> on which much has been already said elsewhere.<sup>16</sup> What matters here instead, is to take into account that the crisis and the austerity policies—whether effective or not—can have a deep impact on the feasibility of the Youth Guarantee.

As we will see, Italy—similarly to the other Southern Member States—needs to improve its labour policy in order to get in line with the best performing States and increase the effectiveness of the Guarantee, but in order to do so it requires sizeable investments and funds. Several options for raising the budget are at hand: tax measures (however this option does not seem feasible considering the already high level of Italian fiscal pressure); cuts in wasteful spending (ILO 2012a, 16); re-balance between spending sectors (i.e. transferring funds from passive labour market policies to active ones); gathering help from European funds such as the European Social Fund and the extra funding of the Youth Employment Initiative.

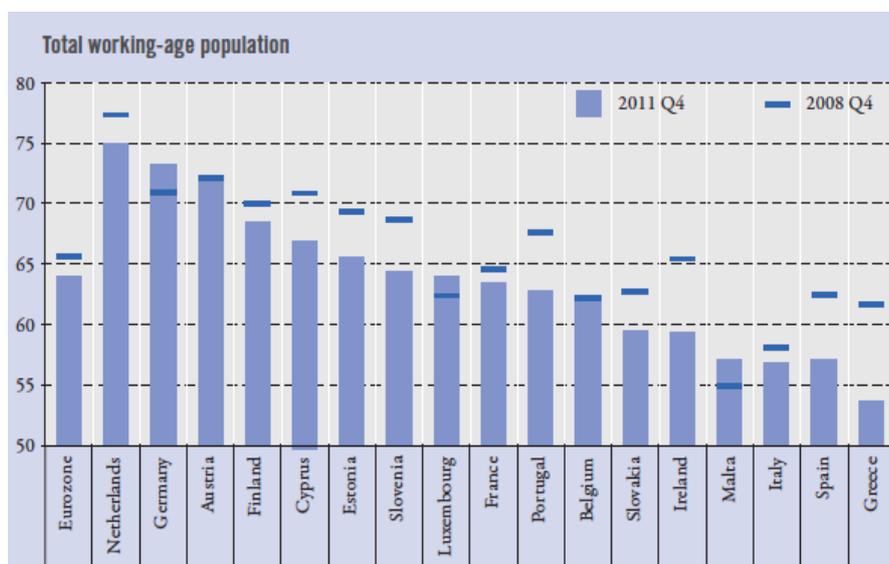
Finally, Italy faces an unemployment rate that is quite generalized and not only affecting the young: how are new jobs to be created if the whole economy is struggling? Although labour markets in the Eurozone have not yet recovered from the global crisis that hit the world economy in 2008, the effects vary significantly across countries (Figure 2).

<sup>15</sup> After the explosion of the global crisis and the growth of the European debt, several governments have implemented a fast deficit reduction policy, placing spending cuts before higher revenue: in the Eurozone, government spending as a percentage of GDP decreased about 2.1% between the third quarter of 2009 and 2011, while the share of government revenue in GDP increased only 1.1% in the same period (ILO 2012a, 26). For further consideration about the austerity approach in Member States see also Macroeconomicus (2014).

<sup>16</sup> According to the ILO report (2012a), for example, austerity has resulted in weaker economic growth and a worsening of banks’ balance sheets, leading to a further contraction of credit, and consequently lowers investment and more job losses. “There is growing concern that the Eurozone policy response to the crisis—mainly focused on a combination of fiscal tightening and labour market reforms—may have affected employment while failing to arrest the deterioration in fiscal deficits. As noted in World of Work Report 2012, these policies—implemented in a context of limited demand prospects and with the added complication of a banking system in the throes of its ‘deleveraging’ process—are unable to stimulate private investment. The austerity trap has sprung. Austerity has, in fact, resulted in weaker economic growth, increased volatility and a worsening of banks’ balance sheets leading to a further contraction of credit, lower investment and, consequently, more job losses” (ILO 2012a, 30).

Germany, Luxembourg, Malta and—to a lesser extent—Austria are the only Eurozone countries where the employment rate has increased since the start of the crisis. The employment rate has also recently increased in Belgium, Estonia, Finland, the Netherlands and Slovakia, but not enough to reverse earlier falls. In Cyprus, France and Italy, the employment rate has declined to different degrees since the beginning of the crisis. Finally, in Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain the employment rate has declined significantly, in some cases reversing all the gains made during the expansionary phase between 2000 and 2007 (ILO 2012a).

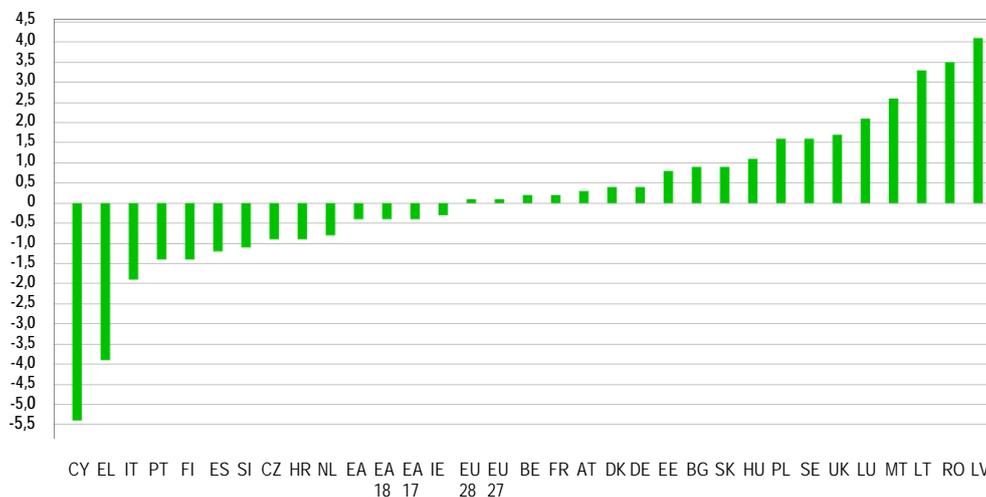
Figure 2 • Employment rates before and after the 2008 crisis (2008 and 2011)



Source: ILO (2012a)

Some countries have been hit more severely than others, and job losses have been especially acute in Southern Europe. In January 2014, the unemployment rate has risen to 10.8% in Europe (EU-28), 28% in Greece, 25.8% in Spain, 15.3% in Portugal and 12.9% in Italy (Eurostat Database). The quality of jobs has deteriorated as well (ILO 2013, 11). Deficit countries have, to some extent, restored cost-competitiveness. On average, half of the relative increase in unit labour costs since the introduction of the Euro has been reversed in 2008 through real wage cuts and labour productivity improvements, but these efforts do not seem sufficient. In 2013 in the EU-28 the real GDP growth inverted its negative trend achieving a moderate 0.1%, but in many countries it keeps on decreasing, like in Cyprus (-5.4%), Greece (-3.9%), Italy (-1.9%), Portugal (-1.4%) and within the Euro area (-0.4%) (Figure 3).

Figure 3 • Real GDP growth rate (volume) in Europe, 2013 (percentage change on previous year)



Source: Eurostat Database 2014

#### 4.2. *The age factor*

The Youth Guarantee is targeted at people aged less than 25 years and, when the Member States consider it relevant, also at those under the age of 30. In this case Member States should allocate additional ESF resources to these measures in order to ensure equal levels of support per person.

Given the importance of the “age factor” in Italy, the Italian Ministry of Labour has decided to extend the Guarantee coverage up to 29 years.<sup>17</sup> Firstly, here the access to the University system is set one year later than in a lot of other European States, like France, Spain or Britain. Because of this “delay” in the Italian education system, young Italians enter the labour market later than their foreign fellows—the average age of graduates is in fact 25.6 for a bachelor degree and 27.8 for a master’s degree (AlmaLaurea 2014). Moreover, the percentage of NEETs between 20 and 25 is 29.5%, not much higher than the percentage of NEETs between 25 and 29 (28.9%) (Eurostat Database). The largest share of Italian young people finished their education in the very middle of the financial crisis and they either remained unemployed for a long time or they found precarious, low-paid or unsuitable jobs. The crisis is hitting not only the youngest, but also young adults, the “boomerang kids” forced to return home after having moved out for study or job reasons (Istituto Giuseppe Toniolo 2013). Limiting the Guarantee to 25 years could have thereby led to the loss of a whole generation, the one that has been hit the most by the crisis. If the Guarantee had been limited to 25 years, the youth would have been excluded not only from the present system of social absorbers, but also from the new one provided through the Guarantee. A guarantee that—in

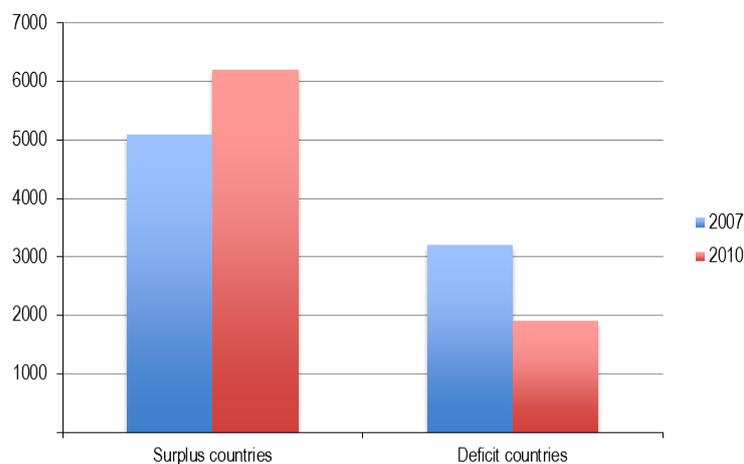
<sup>17</sup> It is worth noting that the Italian National Statistic Institute (Istat) has recently extended the maximum limit for the group of NEETs to 34 years old (formerly it was 29).

addition to a long-term goal, that is reforming and strengthening labour policies—has the short-term aim of giving a prompt answer to the consequences of the recession.

#### 4.3. *The influence of previous labour policy model*

Given the existence of policy factors like path dependence and policy legacy, it can be reasonably said that, in those countries that already have some guarantees or ALMPs for young unemployed, the Guarantee could have higher chances of success than in the countries that do not have any. According to a study by the European Commission (2012a), the young unemployed who participated in training programs show positive effect on their finding employment. ALMPs can be a suitable answer to the crisis because they reduce the risk of labour market exclusion for long-term unemployed workers, and prepare them for the recovery. Nonetheless, public spending on ALMPs per unemployed person has tended to decrease in recession-hit Eurozone countries. The opposite holds true in relatively better-off countries (ILO 2012a) (Figure 4).

Figure 4 • Spending on active labour market policies per unemployed person (in Euros) in surplus countries and deficit countries\* in 2007 and 2010



\* Surplus countries refer to Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. Deficit countries include Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain.

Source: ILO (2012a)

ALMPs in Italy are traditionally weak and they show some peculiar characteristics that differentiate it from other European countries, Southern ones included. The Italian model of labour policy stands on three pillars (Jessoula et al. 2010, Vesan 2012):

- labour laws focusing on standard full-time permanent jobs;
- a system of social security cushions based on a distorted insurance pillar,

since it over-protects the “insiders” (full time permanent workers, mainly belonging to middle and big companies) and under-protects—or does not protect at all—the “outsiders”, such as jobseekers and non standard workers (Fullin 2002);

- an ineffective placement system and inadequate investments on ALMPs, in favour of passive labour market policies (PLMPs) like out-of-work-income support.

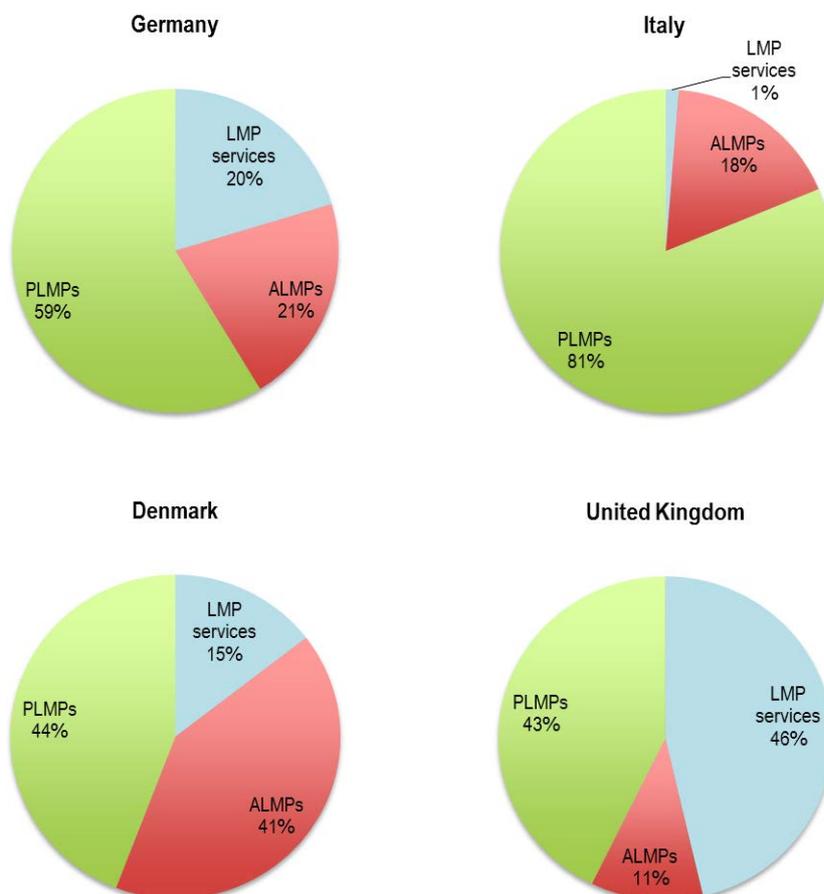
Since the early 1990s, new tendencies from the European Union and OECD in the sector of labour market policy have increased the rebalancing of the Italian model in favour of ALMPs, stressing the importance of the promotion of people skills to adapt and integrate into the job market and of improving the abilities of the subjects in charge of providing solutions. Nevertheless, after 2003 the gap between active and passive policies has started expanding again, until it exploded in 2008 when out-of-work income maintenance support gained the upper hand (Vesan 2012).<sup>18</sup>

Italian public expenditure on ALMPs<sup>19</sup> in 2011 was lower than the European average (respectively 0.31% of GDP and 0.49% of GDP) and one of the lowest in Europe—a paltry amount if compared to countries like Denmark (1.54%), Sweden (0.93%), Spain (0.70%) and France (0.68%) (Eurostat Database). In 2012, when the crisis was already at alarming levels, Italy invested in PLMPs the 81% of its public expenditure on labour market policies, while only 18% in ALMPs and 1% in labour market policies services. Compared to other countries, Italian public expenditure by type of action appears therefore highly unbalanced (Figure 5). If this trend shows the importance of introducing a measure—like the Youth Guarantee—that could enforce ALMPs, on the other hand it witnesses the fact that it is likely to be very difficult to rapidly change such an unbalanced system.

<sup>18</sup> Fifteen years after the “season of reforms” 1997-2003 (including the liberalization of fixed-term contracts in 2001), Italian labour market has changed deeply, but the labour policy of the country is still strongly Bismarckian, associating the access to social security schemes to the occupational status. In spite of some improvements, the flexibilization of the labour market without an equivalent revision of the existing social security system has produced a “flex-insecurity” problem (Berton et al. 2009) that is far to be solved. Having a fixed-term contract still doubles the probability of experiencing severe economical disadvantage compared to permanent contracts (Sacchi 2012).

<sup>19</sup> According to Eurostat, expenditure on LMPs is limited to public interventions which are explicitly targeted at groups of persons with difficulties in the labour market: the unemployed, the employed at risk of involuntary job loss and inactive persons who would like to enter the labour market. Total expenditure is broken down into LMP services, which cover the costs of the public employment service (PES) together with any other publicly funded services for jobseekers; LMP measures, which cover activation measures for the unemployed and other target groups including the categories of training, job rotation and job sharing, employment incentives, supported employment and rehabilitation, direct job creation, and start-up incentives; and LMP supports, which cover out-of-work income maintenance and support (mostly unemployment benefits) and early retirement benefits.

Figure 5 • Public expenditure on labour market policies by type of action in Italy, Denmark, Germany and the United Kingdom\*



\* Data on Italy and Germany refer to 2012, Denmark to 2011 and the United Kingdom to 2009.

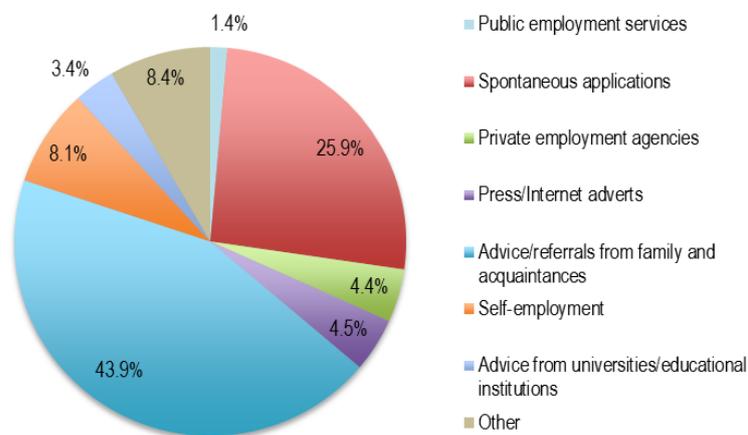
LMP services = PES and other services for jobseekers; ALMP's = active labour market policies; PLMPs = passive labour market policies.

Source: Eurostat Database 2014

#### 4.4. Public employment services in Italy: a fragmented and inefficient system

Another condition for the success of the guarantee is the role played by public employment services, which have been designated to be the point of connection between employers and young jobseekers, providing them with tailor-made offers (Mascherini 2012, 2). Do they really have the means to play this role? Available data suggest broad ineffectiveness of Italian public employment services: in 2012 only 1.4% of the young Italians found a job through them. A very modest percentage, especially if compared to the two main channels for hiring: advices and referrals from family and acquaintances (43.9%) and spontaneous applications (25.9%) (Figure 6).

Figure 6 • Main actions for finding a job, 2012



Source: Istat (2013)

Several factors can be pointed out as reasons for such ineffectiveness. Firstly, the legacy of the Italian labour policy system that for long time—and even now—has favoured passive policies rather than active ones (Barbier 2004). The public monopoly on employment services held until recent years has reduced the tasks of public employment services to mere administrative tasks, thus putting placement tasks aside.

Since the late 1990s, following the incentives provided by the Legislative Decree no. 469/1997, changes have been introduced in the following directions: devolution of the jurisdiction of jobseekers' placement and assistance from the central government to the local authorities;<sup>20</sup> end of public sector's monopoly on employment services and empowerment of the partnerships between public and private job centres; development of tailor-made offers for jobseekers; engagement of employment services in monitoring jobseekers' activities when receiving unemployment benefits (Larsen and Vesan 2011). The new system of employment services is now composed of a network of public employment centres coordinated from local authorities and responsible for both vocational guidance and assistance, supported by new subjects belonging also to the private sector (companies, company associations, trade unions, job agencies, universities, high schools, labour consultants, municipalities and chambers of commerce) (Vesan 2012).

Despite these reforms, investments on public employment services remain considerably low, especially if compared to other countries. Italy is one of the countries with the lowest expenditure on public employment services: in 2012 it invested only the 0.025% of its GDP, a very low amount if compared to Germany (0.34%),

<sup>20</sup> After the reform of the Fifth Title of Italian Constitution, State and Regions have concurrent jurisdiction of ALMPs.

Netherlands (0.29%) and Austria (0.18%) (Eurostat Database). The expenditure has been decreasing since 2008—regardless of the growth of unemployment—because considerable resources from the European Social Funds have been transferred on out-of-work income supports. Fewer funds result in fewer services. Italy has 556 public employment services, and few operators working for them: 1 operator for 228 registered jobseekers. In the UK the ratio is 1 to 19, in France 1 to 54 and in Germany 1 to 28 (Italia Lavoro 2013). Operators therefore spend most of their time on administrative tasks, while little room is left for active labour tasks (Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies 2013). Empowering the staff of public employment services with operators specialized in tutoring and in developing relationships with local companies and actors could be a useful option in order to catch up on the results of other countries (Eichhorst et al. 2012).

Finally, it should be taken into account that the results of public employment services vary considerably at the local level. As already said, the Italian labour policy system confers the jurisdiction of labour policy to Regions—and for the time being to their Provinces—that must then only abide by national guidelines, determining contrasting performances among territorial areas. In particular, in the Regions where efficient employment services would be mostly needed, outcomes so far have been quite disappointing: in 2012, Campania guaranteed only 7,000 young jobseekers, Apulia 8,000, while Calabria 4,000. Only Sicily did better, placing 30,000 young jobseekers (Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies 2013). Obviously, these results are in part due to the weakness of the local economic system, but they also suggest some concerns about the capability of public employment services to efficiently implement the Guarantee without a strong enforcement from the national—and possibly European—level.

#### *4.5. Do traineeships really matter?*

The European Youth Guarantee scheme confers a central role to traineeship programs as a primary way to ensure the strengthening of young jobseekers' skills and knowledge and the development of suitable workplace behaviours, thus enhancing their entry into the labour market. Moreover, traineeships seem to be particularly effective in facilitating the school-to-work transition, since considerable skill mismatches between demanded and offered skills have been observed: half of young people are not sure that their post-secondary education has improved their chances of finding a job and almost 40% of employers report that lack of skills is the main reason for entry-level vacancies (Mourshed et al. 2013). This awareness has prompted Governments across the EU to increasingly focus on traineeships as effective school-to-work transition mechanisms (European Commission 2012a). Despite a growing awareness of the benefits of traineeships across the EU,<sup>21</sup> there

<sup>21</sup> According to the available literature, the main success factors of traineeships seem to be: strong links with the labour market; well-structured approach; active engagement of stakeholders, including employers; and robust quality assurance mechanisms. On the other hand, failure factors are identified in: inadequate educational contents; inadequate work conditions; low payment/no payment; low number of international traineeships (European Commission 2012a).

is an uneven and rather patchy body of evaluation literature on the effectiveness of traineeships.

What about Italy? Are traineeships really effective? Although evaluation is quite hard, due to the fragmentation of available data,<sup>22</sup> the chances of being hired after a traineeship program seem quite poor. Fewer than half of the Italian youth (46%) completed a traineeship program—well below the European average (61%)—and the likelihood of being unemployed six months after leaving education decreases only by 6% if they have undertaken one—a percentage that decreases to 36% in France (Mourshed et al. 2013). According to the annual survey carried out by Unioncamere Excelsior Training and Employment Information System with the Ministry of Labour and the European Union, in 2010 13.3% of interviewed companies were willing to host young trainees, mainly for short periods (with larger companies generally being more willing to host) and a total of 310,820 traineeships were implemented. Only some 38,000 of these (12.3% of the total) were transformed into employment with either a limited-term or a permanent contract (European Commission 2012a)—a percentage that decreased to 11% in 2012.<sup>23</sup>

It can definitely be objected that even if the chances of being hired by the company where the internship has been undertaken are poor, the gained experience might as well increase the chances of being hired in general. This is true, but only if the internships provide people with useful skills. Instead, as the crisis endures, researches report vocational and orientation traineeships to be used as a low-wage workforce recruitment channel with no training value or even orientation (European Commission 2012a). These studies suggest that traineeships often become a mean through which companies that cannot—or do not—want to make long-term investment can acquire low-cost labour force for a determined range of time—usually six months—without any obligation of hiring afterwards. Several factors encourage this dynamic: fiscal advantages, no need for any administrative obligation or any sickness or retiring benefits except accident insurance (Bertagna et al. 2013). The risk of reducing traineeships into mini-jobs with fewer guarantees could be proved by two elements: the scarce quality of educational projects, that often become a simple list of elementary tasks that hardly produce an effective improving of professional skills, and the demonstrated predominance of the very job side on the educational one (Bertagna et al. 2013). According to a 2012 European Commission Survey, all interviewed stakeholders agree that the main problem requiring urgent attention is the quality of the traineeship itself: no adequate

<sup>22</sup> Given the great variety of traineeships offered in Italy and the differing levels of government responsible for each type, there is no single comprehensive, nationwide source of information or data regarding traineeships. Quantitative and qualitative data on traineeships from different data sources need to be considered and integrated in order to obtain a comprehensive national overview, although accurate estimates are almost impossible (European Commission 2012a).

<sup>23</sup> This is not only an Italian failure anyway. With regard to the transition from traineeship to employment, also in Germany—where the youth unemployment rate is one of the lowest in Europe—the results indicate some difficulties for young people in getting into regular employment and only for 15% of them traineeship is a direct path into employment (European Commission 2012a).

mechanisms are as yet in place to ensure the quality of the traineeships.<sup>24</sup> After all, for the hosting companies there are few incentives for investing on quality—unemployment increases the request for traineeships, so companies are not induced to make offers with a better quality than their competitors—and few sanctions discourage opportunistic behaviours (Bertagna et al. 2013).

It is also significant that in 2009, a year with strongly negative employment figures, traineeships nevertheless increased by 5.4% over 2008, despite the on-going recession. This figure, especially if evaluated in light of the trend in apprenticeship contracts (-8.5% during the same year), suggests that companies may be taking improper advantage of traineeships.<sup>25</sup>

For these reasons, in the last two years the Italian Government has begun to limit the use of traineeships in favour of the use of apprenticeship contracts (Bertagna et al. 2013, 416). The recent legislation provides stricter controls, limiting the timeframe for undertaking a vocational or orientation traineeship to a certain number of months (12) after receiving an educational certificate (diploma or university degree). After all, there is evidence that the most effective traineeships are those undertaken during education. School-to-work transition seems to be still quite complex indeed (Mourshed et al. 2013). The need to promote an effective connection between training and the demand for labour has repeatedly been identified by various levels of government, both regional and national (European Commission 2012a). Matching labour-force supply with labour-force demand is a challenge of Italy, too. Many Italian companies state they could not find people with the qualifications they sought: in 2011 place shortfall was esteemed at some 76,319 unfilled technical positions (according to Confindustria) and 23,446 craftspeople (according to Confartigianato). Istat estimates Italy's unfilled jobs at 85,000. If we take the sum of Confindustria and Confartigianato figures (which obviously cannot count for the same job twice) in 2009 vacancies amounted to approximately 99,765 (European Commission 2012a).

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

As the Commission stated, when designing a Youth Guarantee scheme a number of principle-based questions are likely to arise, and different situations in each individual Member State (at regional or at local level) could lead to differences in how the scheme will be set up and further implemented. Moreover young people, in spite of the fact that they all require specific programs and monitoring through a general Youth Guarantee, are not a homogeneous group and live in different social environments.

<sup>24</sup> For further information see [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-14-236\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-236_en.htm).

<sup>25</sup> We must certainly also consider the increasing share of curricular traineeships within this trend, but this is not sufficient to explain such a growth.

The already-existing context sets a path-dependent trajectory (Pierson 2004) that must be taken into account when designing a new policy. Prior policy structure produces some policy legacy mechanisms (Rose and Davies 1994) that can highly affect its implementation and effectiveness. As we already said, Southern Member States have inherited a peculiar welfare state model that could jeopardize the success of the Guarantee. The youth are in fact one of the most numerous group of outsiders of the current social system for several factors: high fragmentation and scarce advocacy power; non-standard contracts that allow them to access only poor entitlements and services; inadequate income support. At the same time, the previous system of labour policies and services appear to be too weak to provide youth with the help they need. Finally, there is little evidence suggesting that unemployment rate and economic recession will improve soon enough.

Because of these specific features, new European policies like the Youth Guarantee cannot be “one-size-fits-all” but have instead to take into account the differences between Member States, focusing on those where changes have to be radical, and consequently harder to achieve. Giving the influence of previous paths in fact the consolidated institutional order obstacles change, making it more costly (Levi 1997, 28) and if in-country necessary labour market reforms fail to come, the leeway at the European level can be limited (Eichhorst et al. 2012). Otherwise the Youth Guarantee risks failure and exacerbating the division between a “good” and a “bad” Europe, thereby perpetuating a Mediterranean model of welfare where families—not the economy and neither the State<sup>26</sup>—are the main source of welfare provision for their younger members. A result that could eventually bring about negative consequences for the whole Union and favour the “resurrection” of social conflict, nationalism and anti-European feelings.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> One of the main findings related to the difficulties faced by unemployed young people is that social exclusion increases when unemployment and financial vulnerability are associated with no family support. As a matter of fact, in countries with rigid labour markets but with family support, such as Italy, youth were excluded from the job market, but not socially marginalized (European Commission 2014).

<sup>27</sup> According to recent surveys, one out of three voters under 35 vote for of the Italian anti-Euro and Europe-skeptic Five Stars Movement—even if in the last European Elections (May 2014) this trend decreased to 25.4% for 18-24-year olds and 25.8% for 25-34-year olds (Ipsos Public Affairs 2014). This tendency can be observed also in other countries, like France, where in the same elections the Front National got the 30% of the under 35 (about +5% than the national average).

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