TRAINING, JOBS
AND DECENT WORK
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

RESEARCH ON PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT IN THE PUBLIC SERVICES
AND INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE EMPLOYMENT FOR YOUNG WORKERS

A report for EPSU by Nick Clark.
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PREFACE

It is time to give them a chance!

Youth unemployment is one of the major problems in today’s Europe. More than 5.4 million youth are unemployed and many more are working under precarious conditions. The financial and economic crisis has hit those primarily bearing the least responsibility for this crisis. Those looking for work in 2013 were under ten when the global crisis first unfolded, yet they will be confronted with the biggest challenge that any generation has had to face since the end of the second world war. This is true particularly for those (few) young workers that will be able to find a job in the public sector.

The European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU) has commissioned this study on youth employment and the public sector across Europe to get an insight into the situation of young workers in the sectors represented by EPSU affiliated unions. The conclusion is: we need to ring the alarm bell! Young workers are disappearing from the public sector and with the crisis the replacement rate is being reduced. This has consequences for the quality of public services and for the service that citizens receive. We believe that action has to be taken urgently at both European and national levels.

The aim of this study is to encourage action for job creation in the public sector.

We strongly believe that employing more young nurses, teachers, fire fighters, tax inspectors, social workers, prison officers and administrators is an investment in the future, can only improve our societies and help to reduce the social and financial price to be paid for not employing young people. The financial and economic crisis must not be used as an excuse for keeping millions of qualified people willing to work, out of employment, pushing them into precariousness, or worse even into desperation.

Europe must re-think its priorities, if we want to sort our pension challenges. We cannot afford to create a lost generation of people, with no access to the regular labour markets. Our social fabric is at stake.

The data shows that the mantra about the public sector not being able to create employment is just not true. It is socially necessary and economically smart to start creating decent work for the millions of unemployed young people. This is not exclusively an issue of countries where the unemployment rate is over 30% like Greece, Spain or Italy, all European countries typically have youth unemployment figures that are two or three times higher than those for older workers. This is a ticking time bomb waiting to explode. We therefore demand solutions and concrete action now.

We hope that this report will push policy makers to come forward with solutions and assist our affiliates in increasing their efforts to improve public services with younger and enthusiastic new workers, willing to play a key role in the welfare of our future societies.
YOUTH AND PRECARIOUS WORK

Youth in Europe’s labour market

For the purposes of this report, we are taking young workers as including all those who are above the age of compulsory secondary education, up to 24 years old. Some national definitions and statistics will exclude those under 18, and some will include those aged up to 30.

17.5% of Europe’s working age population is aged 15-24, according to Eurostat (see table 1 below). But a much lower proportion - 9.1% of actual work those in work is young. The gap between these two figures is primarily explained firstly by participation by the young in full time education – although this does not necessarily remove them from the workforce, since around half of those in tertiary education also do some work during term-time.

The second factor explaining the gap is unemployment. Youth unemployment has been on the increase across Europe, showing a “marked deterioration” (Eurofound 2011) since 2008, and it now stands at 21% overall (compared to 8% for all age groups in the workforce).

In the first quarter of 2011, the employment rate for the young dropped to the lowest level ever recorded in the EU 32.9%. This effect is not uniformly spread across the EU. Germany, Austria, Malta, Luxembourg saw little change in unemployment rates between 2007 and 2010, while there were massive increases in Spain, Ireland and the Baltic countries. The map below shows the youth unemployment rates across the EU in October 2011.

The young have been very hard hit during the financial crisis and recession since 2008. According to O’Higgins (2012), “young people were more affected by the recession than adults in terms of long-run consequences”, with long term unemployment rising faster for the young than for prime age adults. As the European Foundation commented: “the young are often first to exit and last to enter the labour market” (Eurofound 2011).

Precarious work

Although a great deal of attention has been paid to the subject, there is no precise definition of what constitutes precarious work, or even precariousness. In general it is associated with insecurity in terms of work, but also with economic and social insecurity. Consequently, a number of commentators have argued that precariousness must be considered not only in terms of work, but also the welfare state and household dynamics (housing for example).

This paper, however, cannot do more than touch on non-work related factors. But even within the context of work alone, there is debate about what might constitute precarious work. On the whole, it is considered that one could not say that any particular type of work is automatically precarious – it depends on the national economic and legal context, and on the personal circumstances of the individual. So, for example in some member states (e.g. Sweden), temporary agency workers are paid between assignments, and have employment rights comparable to other workers, while in UK they are not even considered to be employees (they are “workers”, with fewer rights).

Part-time work, if deliberately chosen by the individual may not be precarious, either, but if the individual wanted to work full time, working part-time might appear more precarious. Undeclared work, false self-employment and the employment of migrants who are not permitted to work are further examples of working arrangements indicative of precariousness. McKay et al (2012) identify four typologies by which employment contractual arrangements can be judged to determine if they are precarious: Job insecurity, whether through the contract being of short duration or through its unpredictability; low pay or lack of opportunity to improve it; “Sub-ordinate” employment, leading to exclusion from social, welfare or employment rights; Absence of coverage by collective bargaining or union representation.

So, while national and international statistics can give us an idea of the prevalence of particular types of work which may be indicative of precariousness (such as temporary work), they cannot tell us for sure how this operates in practice as measured by these typologies. The interviews we have conducted with EPSU affiliates give us a better idea of what forms of precariousness may exist in practice in the sectors concerning us in this paper, but the information is essentially anecdotal.

The young and “precarious” work

Young workers are much more likely to have low paid work (relative to the rest of the labour market). Taking two-thirds of the median wage as a definition of low pay, Maître et al (2012) found that in 18 out of 22 EU states the incidence of low pay was much higher for those aged under 29 than for those older (the exceptions were Czech Republic, Lithuania, Slovakia and Estonia). In Germany, Netherlands, Luxembourg and Ireland, over 40% of young workers were low paid – in Germany the proportion stood at 57% (compared to 14% of those aged 30-44).

Both part-time and temporary working by...
part time working is slightly more frequent for the young than for other workers, but since many students who also work only want part-time jobs, the proportion amongst the rest of the young workforce must be higher still.

Another indicator of precarious work is self-employment, however this is reported to be at very low levels amongst the young, and remains static. However there are national variations, and in Greece, false self-employment amongst 16-34 year olds was estimated in 2008 to be 16% (cited in Kretsos 2011).

Exclusion from all or part of social security system is a factor in determining that someone is in a precarious position in the labour market. This was not a factor specifically examined in this research, although we are aware that some member states make lower out-of-work benefit payments to younger workers (for example in UK, Belgium). It is also the case that insecure housing, is more likely for the young in some (but not all) member states and this has featured in trade union campaigns in France and Italy.

The relative level of job insecurity – real or perceived - is also a factor contributing to precariousness. Clearly, high levels of youth unemployment will contribute to concerns over the ability to find a new job, should the worker lose their current one.

One factor contributing to precariousness, and specifically affecting youth is specific contractual arrangements relating to training: apprentices, work experience, internships and stages impact almost exclusively on the young, and are often of limited duration without necessarily offering permanent jobs at their end. They are often hard to count, and due to short duration of contracts may be difficult for unions to approach.

Youth in the selected countries

The EU average proportion of young people in working age population is 16.8%. Amongst our featured countries, Netherlands has highest proportion of the young at just over 21%, Greece the lowest at 15%.

Youth unemployment in the Southern European countries is extremely high (see map on page 3), in Spain approaching 50%, with Greece not far behind. In Italy, it stood at 29%, and at 27% in Bulgaria (where it had risen to 29% by Q4 2011). France and UK also show high rates of unemployment amongst the young – at 24% and 22% respectively. To some extent, higher levels of youth unemployment correspond to low levels of educational attainment - as in Italy, Greece and Spain for example (Eurofound 2011), but increasing levels of graduate unemployment across Europe show that this does not account for the entire unemployment problem.

Germany, Netherlands and Sweden have lower than average levels of youth unemployment, and extensive vocational training systems. However, they also display high levels of temporary working amongst the young, although in Germany and Sweden this declines rapidly as they get older.

While this may suggest some transition into more secure employment, the DGB trade union confederation in Germany report that only 7% of those entering temporary work from unemployment were still in jobs after two years (DGB 2012).

In Spain very high levels of temporary working amongst the young are accompanied by low mobility from temporary to permanent mobility. Both Netherlands and Sweden also have high levels of part time working amongst young workers, although in Netherlands this is largely voluntary, associated with work during full time study (82% gave this as a reason for working part-time in 2010). Part time work in Germany is less prevalent for the young than for other workers, and is declining.

Bulgaria reports very low levels of both part-time and temporary work amongst the young (and amongst older workers, too). It also has the highest rate in Europe of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET). The Czech Republic also displays low levels of part-time working amongst the young (at 9% of those in work), but has relatively low levels of NEETs.

Involuntary part time working amongst the young is high in France and Italy and moderate, although increasing, in the UK.

Nearly all of those EPSU affiliates we interviewed stressed that the young were particularly hard-hit in the general economy during the recession, and by increased insecurity in public services in the subsequent “austerity”. They drew attention to increasingly fragile employment in the economy as a whole, accompanying dramatic reductions in opportunities to enter public services.
Training, jobs and decent work for young people

Table 1: Young workers (15-24) as proportion (%) of all employees, Q2 2011 (see end of report for further tables)

<table>
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<th>EU (27)</th>
<th>Electricity, gas</th>
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Source: Eurostat, *Sweden figures for 2010

too small for publication in Eurostat, but the Bulgarian health union provided some national data. This showed only 500 workers aged between 15 and 24 in water supply, 6,200 in public administration and 1,500 in health and social work. By comparison, there were 52,200 young workers employed in wholesale and 35,200 in hotels and catering.

Public administration Among the countries included in this report, the proportion of young workers in the public administration workforce ranged from 1.5% in Italy up to 8.3% in Germany.

Figures published by Spanish government during their 2010 presidency showed that amongst central civil service, only 1.5% of women employees and 1.2% men were aged under 30. Overall (including local and regional administration) the figure was 3.1% in 2011.

Statistics published by the UK government showed that in 1991, 30% of civil servants were aged under 25 in 2010 (Local Gov - Local Government Association figures). Figures for 2009 showed that 12.9% of the civil service in hospitals was aged under 30, but only 10% of the staff in ministerial departments and 7.3% in the regionally employed civil service.

It should be noted that in no country we examined did the proportion of young workers in public administration rise as high as the proportion of the young in the economy as a whole (5.1% in Italy, 11.0% in Germany, for example). In most cases the gap was considerable – in Sweden almost 11% of the employed workforce was under 25, but fewer than 4% of the public administration workforce.

The OECD, in a recent report on government structures, made a similar point from the point of view of the ageing of public administrations. They pointed out “the ratio of government workers aged 50 years or older is on average 26% higher in the total labour force (OECD 2011).”

Widespread job losses are expected to continue in public administration, and this is now the single largest sector for announced job losses, accounting for 1 in 3 across the whole EU (European Restructuring Monitor). According to figures from the Labour Force Survey, between Quarter 1 of 2008 and Quarter 4 of 2012, over 165,000 young people’s jobs disappeared from the ranks of Europe’s public administration workforce.

Health and social services By contrast with public administration, employment in health and social care has been growing – and is up by 7% between the first quarter of 2008 and the first quarter of 2011 (European Restructuring Monitor).

Youth employment in health and social care ranged from 2.5% in Italy up to 11.6% in Germany. In the case of Germany, this is higher than the level of young workers in the economy as a whole, one of the few cases we encountered where a public service performed better than the rest of the economy in offering work to the young. The Italian union FPCGIL’s own figures show that in public sector health, only 2,500 out of 680,000 health workers are aged under 25 (0.4%).

Public utilities Best performer in the public utilities (energy and water) was again Germany (10.4% in electricity and gas, while the worst was Italy (2.9% in water and waste). Across Europe, however, even amongst temporary workers in public utilities, we found that the proportion of young workers was declining (see charts on page 22), suggesting that such flexible forms of work do not necessarily protect the employment prospects of young workers.

General trend Examination of the recent trend in youth employment across the sectors in general shows that the tendency is downwards, although this is less marked in the utilities, with some good performance particularly in Germany. Since 2008, public administration in particular has shown a continuing decline in the number and proportion of young workers.

The Italian interviewee, for example, reported that the proportion of public sector workers aged under 35 had been on the rise, while the trend had been downwards in the private sector (Eurostat figures). However it is more likely in France, Italy and Sweden – in Sweden for example, 62% of young workers in public services work part time, compared with 49% across the whole economy. It is high amongst young workers in the Netherlands, but this also holds true for the rest of the economy. By contrast in UK it is significantly less likely – 29% of the young in public services work part time compared with 39% overall. Some caution needs to be exercised over these figures, however, since they include education, where both younger workers and part-time working may be more frequent.

In the Netherlands (where the interview dealt primarily with health and social care), new starters were more likely now to have temporary and/or part time contracts. This is particularly the case in home care and elderly care, where contracts may be for only 12 hours per week over nine months. This is in response to cuts in central government funding to the publicly run care providers. Existing workers had their contracts observed, but there is a high turnover (18% per year), and new starters come in with the poorer quality contracts.

There is a widespread push for flexibility to meet budget cuts: greater use of shift and on-call working in both primary and acute healthcare – but the young seem less inclined to accept the new patterns. There is little use of agencies, except for specific skills such as anaesthetics and specialist nursing. The predominant form of precarious work is the use of flexible part-time contracts, offering between 16 and 30 hours per week. Fixed term contracts are common for new starters – one year probationary period now being repeated for up to four years. Labour legislation permits the use of such flexible working, but young workers tend not to stay in it, so staff turnover is high.

In the Swedish health service, agency work is also...
rare, and part-time work, while common, tends to affect older workers more than young ones. How-
over, in care homes there is widespread use of the “zero hours” or on call contract which particularly
affects the young, with 10,000 working on this pat-
tern. There is also going to be an increase in private
provision of primary healthcare via municipal gov-
ernment (Arbeitsfördemeldungen 2011), which is likely
to affect the type of work available to the young.
Cuts in the minimum wage for young workers
have been imposed, to 84% of the rate for over-25
year olds in Greece, while 17-19 year olds have an
even lower rate.

Young workers in UK are disproportionately rep-
resented in agency working and other temporary
work. This was reported by the UK interviewee as
being increasingly common in public services that
had been outsourced.

In Germany, young workers are disproportionately
represented amongst temporary workers – par-
ticularly those with fixed term contracts (DGB 2012).
Overall, two-thirds of young workers have fixed term
contracts, although this includes the relatively large
number of apprenticeships (OECD 2012).

German EPSU affiliate Ver.di reported that the
number of full time, permanent workers in public
services had halved over the last 20 years. Young
workers passing the entrance exam for public serv-
ices find themselves facing fixed-term contracts
which are outside the coverage of collective agree-
ments. This puts them under pressure to accept
lower pay in order to be re-hired at the end of their
contract. The DGB (2012) also reports that amongst
the sectors covered by this report, “mini-jobs” are
particularly to be found in health and social care.
These jobs are held mainly by women, and both the
young (aged under 20) and older workers (over 64)
are over-represented amongst them.

Even back in 2003 in Spain, there were protests
at the increased use of precarious working in public
services, especially in regional government, where
pressure on budgets combined with increased de-
mands for services led to local administrations abus-
ing temporary contracts. The rate of temporary con-
tracts amongst public servants had risen from 9.4% in
1987 to 22.8% in 2004. Most significant was local
administration (29.7%) and healthcare (29%). Since
1999, it was reported, temporary working amongst
young workers has been higher in the public than
the private sector (Miguez 2005). The interviewee
reported that there was no agency work in the pub-
lic sector.

Very short contracts were on offer to many
young workers in Category “B” (mostly adminis-
trative) jobs in France. These are normally for only
78 hours per month, and in the case of those hired
via agences, might be for only one or two weeks.

During the French interview a widespread practice
was identified of employing young workers for very
short periods, often without contracts to work in
entertainment (“animation”). This was being done
by local mayors, who were thought to be behav-
ing more and more like entrepreneurs. Young em-
ployees in central administration are substantially more
likely to be without established status than are older
workers.

Changes to labour market protections in Italy
have left young workers with weaker rights and the
interviewee from FP-CGIL estimated that 50% of
jobs were precarious. However, there are few new
jobs in either public administration or health. Fixed
term contracts are now being cut as well as new
recruitment blocked, as part of the spending cuts.

The prevalence of precarious forms of work amongst
young people seems to have offered them little
by way of protection from unemployment. Our
interviews have suggested that on the contrary,
they were more vulnerable to job loss. This confirms
O’Higgins’ finding (based on examination of the La-
bour Force Survey for the EU 27) that the ease with
which temporary contracts could be used by em-
ployers of young workers was positively related to
the level of youth unemployment. He failed to find,
however, a corresponding recovery in employment
in countries with more “flexible” labour markets
(O’Higgins 2012).

Training, apprenticeships, stages According to
O’Connell (2005), who looked at Ireland, those
working for large organisations and the public sec-
tor are likely to receive more training than those
with smaller or private sector employers. Similarly,
a study in the Netherlands concluded that workers
in public administration were the most likely (at 77%)
to receive internal training or education in 2009 (de
Jong 2011). This public service advantage appears
to be under pressure, from the detail reported to us
during the interviews.

In the healthcare sector in the Netherlands, it
was reported that a minimum of 3% of the budget
has to be directed to training in healthcare. How-
ever, this includes professional development, so is
not specifically directed towards the young. There
is a collective agreement covering the use of stagiaires
and setting their pay rates. It is a feature of the agree-
ment that those on stages are not counted against
the staffing complement, so they are not used in
place of permanent staff. A system for sponsored
traineeships used to exist, but died away. Employers
would now like to re-establish this and are discuss-
ing the setting up of a hospital education fund with
the government. The unions are not included in this
discussion. Stages in Netherlands healthcare are
paid at €300 per month for attachments of over 6
weeks – so employers try to keep stages under
6 weeks. Young stagiaires tend not to complain as
they are reliant on the goodwill of the employer.

In 2009 in Greece, the incoming PASOK govern-
ment announced the termination of 50,000 sta-
giares’ contracts in public sector.

The Italian interviewee said that there are
200,000 precarious workers in public administration.
The largest group of young workers is the 80,000
on “continuous collaboration” (coCo) contracts
which are not covered by collective bargaining – ef-
fectively working as low paid interns. Entry to the
permanent public sector workforce is through the
exam-based concorsi. 70,000 young workers have
won these, but have not been allocated jobs, which
in some cases have disappeared due to workplace
 closures.

Training contracts of up to two years remain, but
also face the same policy of cuts. No apprentice-
ships exist in the public sector, according to the Ital-
ian interview, but there are a few civil service intern
positions set up through agreements with universi-
ties. In the case of health, and as part of nurse train-
ing, there is a category of compulsory trainee, who
have specific rights.

Access to public service jobs in Spain is via “opsi-
ciones” – an exam system, but there is a dramatically
reduced level of hiring. Very few young workers are
now employed in the public services. Elsewhere in
the economy, there are reduced employment rights
being imposed. Recent graduates are being offered
so-called training posts, which is simply work on re-
duced pay.

According to Unison, some good UK local author-
ities (such as Yorkshire and Kent County Councils)
were making specific arrangements to ensure that
young people were brought into the workforce, and
offered apprenticeships, but this was determined lo-
cally. The Kent County Council staff handbook in-
cludes specific provisions for paid off-time for train-
ing and education. The Council also has a dedicated
staff group for younger employees (“Greenhouse”),
which uses social media to give them a voice, as well
as a work shadowing scheme to help them progress
in their careers.

Special labour market programmes for the young
There has been a system of “CIVIS” to secure re-insertion into labour market in France.
This involves up to six months’ mentoring aimed
at 70,000 18-25 year olds. However, the statistics
service DARES say that only 38% of these went on

to sustained employment. Overall, in 2010 23.7% of working youth had training contracts, three percentage points fewer than in 2007 (Le Monde 20 June 2011).

In the Czech Republic a system of job subsidies is being introduced for under-30 year olds who have been registered unemployed for over five months. These will provide part-work, part-training contracts for up to 5,000 workers. It is not clear, however, if this will apply to public sector employers (Hala 2011, EIRO).

Steps had been taken to increase the number of apprentices in the UK by both the present and previous government. However, there were proportionately fewer in the public than the private sector, according to the interviewee from Unison.

There are a number of special labour market programmes for under-29 year olds in Bulgaria. One in particular – “Career Start” – offers young unemployed graduates 6 months’ work in public administration. It also covers private sector enterprises but in total, during 2010, the programme had only 669 young workers in post.

Social dialogue and collective bargaining

The public sector collective agreement in Italy sets a maximum of agency workers at 7%, but in practice agency staff are not much used as they are regarded as being too expensive. In 2010, there were 12,500 agency workers amongst the 2.2 million public sector workers. By contrast there are 800,000 fixed term contracts.

A law in Italy dating back to 2006 had provided for the possibility of “stabilizing” precarious workers in public administration – effectively to transfer from temporary staff to permanent status. The last government had opposed it, and the route to stabilization fell victim to that opposition, the cuts, and the block on recruitment. Whereas in 2008 10,069 temporary workers made this transition, by 2010 the number had fallen to only 3,496.

In healthcare in the Netherlands, the collective agreement among the unions covers public and private sector employers (Hala 2011, EIRO). However, in the water industry, which is highly regulated, a system of job subsidies which encouraged employers to take on trainees was halted following the imposition of a 5% cut in public sector pay.

Within the German energy sector, training is reported to be a regular feature of collective bargaining, including the setting of the number of apprentices and their transition into permanent posts.

The use of agency staff in France means that contracts are difficult to improve, as there will be no collective agreement, and young workers have to rely on the minimum legal provisions. The training agreement which encouraged employers to take on workers for up to five years training with an 80% government subsidy was halted by the Sarkozy government. However, in the water industry, which is increasingly being taken into public hands, the need to develop a skilled workforce is resulting in more trainees being taken on in municipal water companies. Unions are trying to enforce agreements regulating training and stages, however they often have to rely on national regulations, and these do not take account of the newer forms of work such as flexible working, the union received 1500 calls saying that unsupervised work happened frequently.

A previously agreed arrangement to get Spanish public administration to assume some responsibility for the crisis by offering new vacancies to younger workers as a priority was halted following the imposition of a 5% cut in public sector pay.

Role of the public sector

The Italian public services were once seen as a benchmark, with some form of meritocracy operating but not any longer. There is now a lower level of access to employment in the public sector, according to our interviewee. The public sector took on fewer than 53,000 workers in 2010, and in both health and the civil service more staff left than started in that year.

The French public services, particularly national ones, have very short perspectives our interviewee reported, although they are trying to influence the type of training provided in schools, to make it more suitable for them. Since 2007, employers are only required to provide 20 hours of external training per year, which is not sufficient in the eyes of the unions. The sector is under attack, so although it is still a better employer in terms of security and minimum pay, it is less able to perform the role of a model employer.

The health service in the Netherlands was once very proactive, offering contracts to newly qualified nurses. There were three year nine month training contracts with training on the job. These no longer exist, and much of the training is classroom based. It has never been sexy to work in the public sector, but now the security is going, too. At the same time, reduced recruitment is encouraging the development of a division between the young and older work-

ers perceived to be “hanging on” to jobs. This is because early retirement is no longer available, and workers have to keep going until they are 67.

Some UK local authorities promote themselves as employers at jobs fairs and universities. Often they are better than the private sector at meeting their legal obligations, especially on discrimination (on age grounds for example). However, the cuts are making this more difficult. Young people may have to take agency or fixed-term contracts in order to get into the workforce. Privatisation has had a particular effect in public services, especially lower-paid jobs, which are increasingly flexible and potentially precarious.

Despite the government’s national approach to youth unemployment, internships to train to maternity nurses in Sweden are not now being offered permanent posts. Ten years ago, it was possible for young people to enter healthcare via summer jobs. This is much harder now, as there is more competition for fewer opportunities. In hospitals, there is considerable flexibility over interpreting the collective agreement offered to the, employer right down to the ward level.

The labour market position of young people is known to be a difficult one. Most governments are engaged in programmes aimed at the working age young to obtain work, or at least to obtain training aimed at making them more employable. The European Commission itself, in particular through its 2010 Youth on the Move initiative, is focused on improving the prospects of those entering the job market through youth education and training, on facilitating mobility for both study and work, and on providing a new framework for dealing with youth unemployment. Indeed it is this context that EPSU commissioned this research paper. However, this initiative says nothing about the role of the public sector as an employer, only as a facilitator of employment elsewhere (through the public employment service or education, for example).

What is notable from the reports on national labour market interventions examined for this report, and from the interviews with ESPU affiliates, is that few of the initiatives aimed at youth are expressed through public employment (and none exclusively so). This seems to be continuing a trend observed earlier. A World Bank study published in 2007 found that individual states in the USA and Canada had used the direct employment strategy as one of those deployed to reduce youth unemployment, but found none being used in Europe (Betcherman...
et al. 2007). Similarly, the European Employment Observatory’s Review, Youth employment measures 2010 (published in February 2011) reported no policy initiatives relating to the role of the state as an employer. One or two interviewees reported that earlier initiatives which could help young workers into public sector employment had been halted, either through government changes or as a result of austerity measures.

The focus of Commission policy seems to be on reducing early school leavers, and increasing the proportion of young adults moving into higher education. While there is clearly evidence supporting the thesis that poorer-qualified young people find it harder to get employment, this is not to say that improving the general level of qualifications would contribute to a reduction in unemployment or economic inactivity. The reports from affiliates, particularly relating to public administration, suggest that the public services are becoming increasingly reluctant to employ any young people, regardless of their qualifications, and that in fact well qualified young people are losing the opportunity to gain a foothold in public services.

Most of those interviewed also made the point that outside public services, employment rights are being reduced, in a way that particularly impacts on younger workers. The resulting insecurity of contracts being reduced, in a way that particularly impacts on those outside public services, employment rights are precarious nature has resulted in them being largely eliminated from the sectors we have considered. This appears not to apply so strongly in the public utilities, where one or two reports, and the few statistics available at sectoral level suggest that apprenticeship and other training aimed at young workers is continuing (in France and Germany, for example). It is possible that, because these are capital-intensive industries, staff costs represent a relatively small proportion of overall costs, but that also an renewed stock of skilled workers could have demonstrably catastrophic consequences.

In health, cuts and restructuring seem to be leading to those already engaged in training finding it harder to get employment, this is not to say that previous practices which might have delivered career development or aimed at improving the quality of the work undertaken by young workers. The majority of our interviewees reported that previous practices which might have delivered career progression, or the transfer from temporary to permanent employment (as an example of improving employment quality) have been abandoned by employers. There is, in all, an enormous contrast between the pronouncements of governments regarding the ageing of government workforces, that “the expected wave of retirements could provide an opportunity for governments to restructure their workforce by decreasing employment levels” (OECD 2013). As it stands, the overwhelming picture painted by this report is that if there is relatively little precarious working to be found amongst young workers in the public services, it is because their previously precarious nature has resulted in them being largely eliminated from the sectors we have considered. This appears not to apply so strongly in the public utilities, where one or two reports, and the few statistics available at sectoral level suggest that apprenticeship and other training aimed at young workers is continuing (in France and Germany, for example). It is possible that, because these are capital-intensive industries, staff costs represent a relatively small proportion of overall costs, but that also an renewed stock of skilled workers could have demonstrably catastrophic consequences.

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join unions (who distribute the funds). The interviewee from Kommunal reported that following a period of 10 years without a youth structure, this was once again under consideration. Ideas were being gathered from other unions.

The CGT confederation in France has been running a campaign over access to housing for young people. It has also been involved in campaigns against the growing precariousness of work for the young. There is a deliberate policy of giving more responsibility to young activists, who are the ones most likely to attract young members. This is succeeding in getting a growing number of new-young members.

In the UK, Unison is encouraging local negotiators to bargain for good quality apprenticeship schemes, and offers a low rate membership (£10 per year) to apprentice members. It is also engaged in lobbying over the level for the National Minimum Wage and for the adoption by employers of the higher London Living Wage. They have a joint campaign with the National Union of Students to promote trade union membership, and offer young members training in campaigning methods. This is aimed at improving their confidence. The union has 74,000 members known to be aged under 27 (out of 1.4 million). In the run up to the one-day public sector strike on 30 November 2011, 6,000 new members under 27 years old joined the union.

The Bulgarian health service union (FTU-HS) has young workers as a specific target group in its 2011-2016 programme of activities. At its 2011 Congress, the union adopted a resolution on attracting and encouraging youth participation. As well as developing recruitment and training, the union aims to develop work-related training plans and to target collective bargaining towards youth-specific needs. For example, within healthcare, a specific aim is to raise the minimum wage for the lowest paid – a group which includes a high proportion of young workers. Furthermore (also within the national healthcare agreement), additional leave has been negotiated for training and requalification.

Within the negotiations for German federal and municipal government, Ver.di negotiated an additional €90 for trainees and open-ended contracts for those passing the entrance exam (alongside a 6.3% pay increase for other workers). A Youth Council has been established in the CM-KOS confederation in the Czech Republic. The positions are filled by election, and are full time. Nevertheless, there is reported to be residual suspicion of trade unions relating to their role in the former communist system. Unions are seeking better access to schools to counter some of the misconceptions amongst the young – but must first win the support of the teaching unions, whose members appear to be reluctant to permanentise the role.

Unions have been less evident, some interviewees admitted, in their defence of young workers, or in the struggle to retain routes for the young into the public sector workforce. Commenting on the Greek experience of two years previously, the former Communist union KKE (and potential members), but it is clear that some are not certain how best to do this. There was only a little evidence from the interviews that the interests of young workers were featured as clearly in collective bargaining agendas, although recent struggles against greater casualisation of the workforce may have had both unions and young people at their centre.

Our methodology of conducting only one trade union interview in each of a minority of EU member states (which was driven by the availability of resources) could not hope to identify many examples of good practice in mobilising young members. We suspect that these may be taking place at a more localised level, rather than not at all.
However, there must also be a more general question of youth engagement with the most fundamental aspects of the collective provision of social benefits. If the public service workforce becomes youth-free, the possibility of the alienation of the young from those services is increased. The potential for the existing workforce to pass on a public service ethos will be lost, or possibly worse, left to a new generation of private contractors, consultants and managers who do not share it.

Implications for EU policy
The Commission’s emphasis on promoting “supply-side” mechanisms such as training for those out of work or changes to public employment services, needs to be reconsidered. More attention could usefully be paid to measures that public sector employers might deploy to increase the number of quality, secure jobs available to young workers through direct intervention.

This may present difficulties of course when the majority of governments appear to accept the orthodoxy that money spent on public services is money wasted. Nevertheless, this brief report suggests that this orthodoxy is failing the young in particular, and further work needs to be undertaken to examine this in more detail. In particular, the potential role which could be played by public employers in helping to reduce the level of NEETs should be examined.

The campaign to tackle precarious work needs a clearer focus on developing a typology of precarious work, but also needs to examine the relationship between public spending cuts and the availability of entry-level jobs for the young in public services. The specific measures that public employers needs to be included in policy development, and EU-level social dialogue, perhaps as an element of age discrimination.

Implications for EPSU
In their report on social partners’ and governments’ role in dealing with the effects of the crisis on the young last year, the European Foundation suggested “There is a danger of creating and deepening divisions between generations and of young people being disproportionately disadvantaged as a consequence of the crisis. The insecurity associated with precarious work sets up the very real possibility that problematic early experiences of work may feed through into reduced opportunities later in life and again raises the danger of disengaging young people from civil society.” (Eurofound 2011a)

This may be exacerbated if few or no young people are engaged in new forms of trade union action in public services. ESPU affiliates appear to be at an early stage of refocusing their work onto the needs of young workers. However, specific experiences of good practice need to be located and described in more detail. This research did not have the resources to do this, although it was clear that in a number of cases the work of developing young members’ organisations had commenced in response to the establishment of the EPSU Youth Network.

If these are to be effective, some chains of communication need to exist between young members and those taking part in the young members’ structures. Experiments with social media may play a role in this, but if this takes place outside of the decision making structures of the unions, young members could come to suspect that they are being kept out of the loop.

The key finding of this research is that years of lack of focus on the development of young workers in public services, coupled with the current drive for “austerity” have led to public employment being effectively denied to the young. This is a key topic for campaigning, and lends itself to developing a distinct European trade union campaign which was capable of reaching out to an increasingly restless layer of youth. EPSU might wish to consider how a “youth guarantee” might be developed specifically for the public services.

Areas for further study
All researchers tend to send reports by or for EPSU (network research was specified). The proportion under 25 in 2005 was 6.4%, but by Q2 2011, this had fallen to 4.8%.

Health and social care: Includes primary health care, acute care (hospitals), social care (e.g. for the elderly, infirm). Provided through a variety of means, through national and local administrations and by a variety of private and public and non-profit providers. Total employment in EU is 22.2 million. The proportion under 25 in 2005 was 7.5%, rising a little to 7.6% in 2011.

Public utilities: Includes the supply of gas, electricity, water and treatment of waste. Both publicly and privately owned, depending on national system. Total employment in EU is 1.7 million (electricity, gas, etc) and 1.6 million (etc). The proportion under 25 in 2005 was 5.8%, and had apparently stayed about the same in 2011: 6.2% in gas, electricity, etc, 5.4% in water, waste (changes in data recording had separated energy such as gas and electricity, from water and waste treatment).

Sources of information/data
We conducted a review of the principal international and European sources of youth samples. This should be seen as a fruitful avenue for further enquiry.

Selection of sectors and countries
The selection of which countries to include in the more detailed examination was made by EPSU, based on the principles of achieving a spread across Europe, and including national affiliates likely to have useful experiences to report. The countries selected were: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the UK.

Interviews were carried out with an EPSU affiliate from each of these nine countries, but unfortunately it did not prove possible to carry out an interview with the EPSU affiliate from Greece.

At the request of EPSU, three sectors of public services have been covered in this research as described below. It should be noted that due to the variety of national models of provision, the workers in these sectors may be public employees, or employed by private or non-profit enterprises and in some cases the statistics will include all three.

Public administration, defence and social security: This includes national administration (civil service), local administration, including regional government. National and Eurostat statistics may include public order and armed forces in this category, although these were not a focus for this study. Total employment in EU is 15.3 million (all figures in this section are for Q2 of 2011, unless otherwise specified). The proportion under 25 in 2005 was 6.4%, but by Q2 2011, this had fallen to 4.8%

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These tables refer to the table 1 in page 8

Youth as % all temporary workers: water, waste
q1 2008-q2 2011, EU 27

Source: Eurostat

Youth as % all temporary workers: electricity, gas, etc.
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