



February 2018

#FivePointsOn

Youth in Southeast Europe

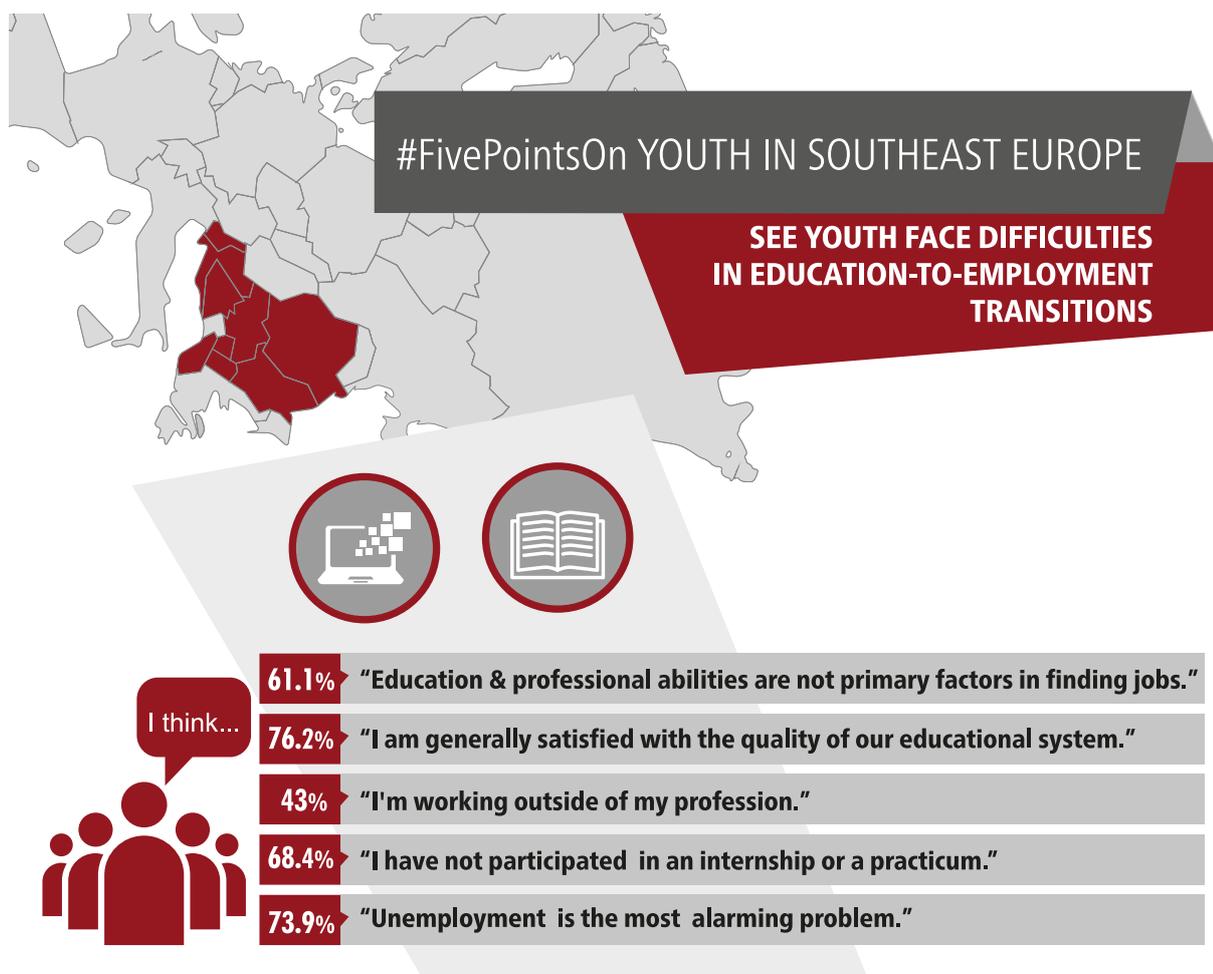


The traditional narrative in the new democracies of Southeast Europe (SEE) – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia – frequently blames young people for their precarious situation.

However, these states and societies as a whole have not met the challenge of providing equal opportunities for the development of youth. Disillusionment and a sense of powerlessness deprive youth of their future and may undermine the prospects of SEE societies in general.

If SEE countries are to stem mass emigration and prosper as societies, there is a need for a substantial paradigm shift in the policies and instruments deployed towards youth in different areas of life.

This publication features the key findings of youth surveys conducted between 2011 and 2015 by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) in nine SEE countries.

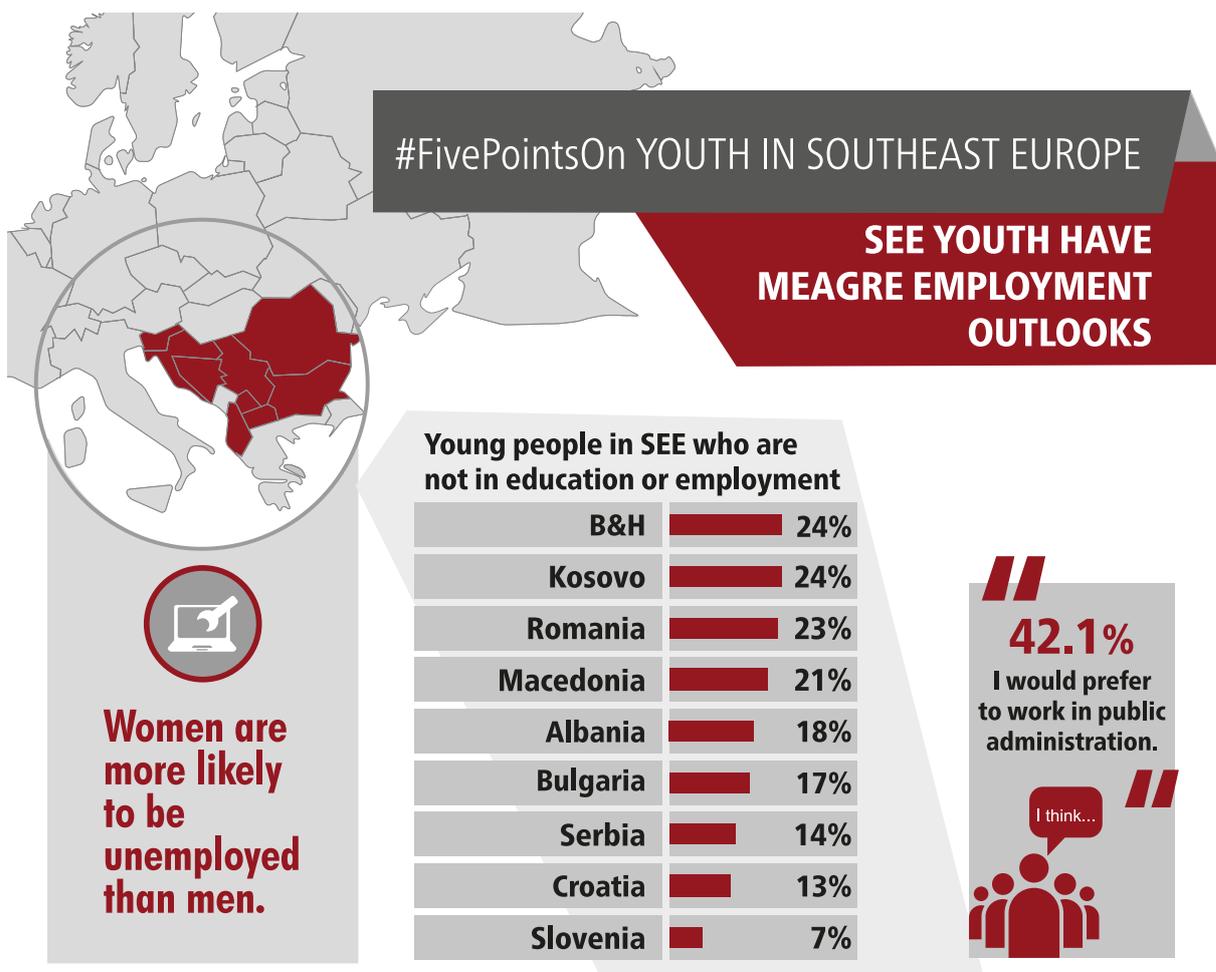


The system of formal education is integral to the lives of young people and represents a key mechanism of social mobility and personal and professional development. Youth without access to quality education both at secondary and postsecondary levels may face difficulties in finding meaningful employment. Statistical analysis of our survey results shows a connection between the levels of respondents' completed education and important structural factors, as young people with lower levels of education more frequently live in households of lower material status, have parents with lower levels of educational attainment and live in rural settlements.

Thus, educational systems in SEE, as they are currently set up, appear not to properly address the problem of exclusion and may further perpetuate inequalities.

A practical orientation to education would provide students with the ability to obtain skills sought by the labour market and thus make it easier for them to find employment. Youth surveys show that the majority of young people – an average of 68.4% across SEE countries – have not participated in an internship or a practicum. The fact that 43% of employed respondents are working outside of the profession for which they were educated bears witness to the skills mismatch between formal education and industry needs.¹ Not surprisingly, respondents in most countries are rather skeptical of the likelihood of finding a job soon after graduation.

¹ E.g. see: Rudi Klanjšek, "Youth (Un)employment and the Economic Situation of Youth in South East Europe," in *Lost in Transition?* Eds. Klaus Hurrelmann and Michael Weichert (Sarajevo: FES SoE, 2015), pp. 116–117.



Previous SEE research demonstrates the precarious socioeconomic position of young people and reliance on their family for material resources. Official statistics show a much lower equalized annual net income of youth in SEE than in the EU28;² moreover, their risk of poverty or social exclusion is high in most SEE countries, except for Slovenia and Croatia.³

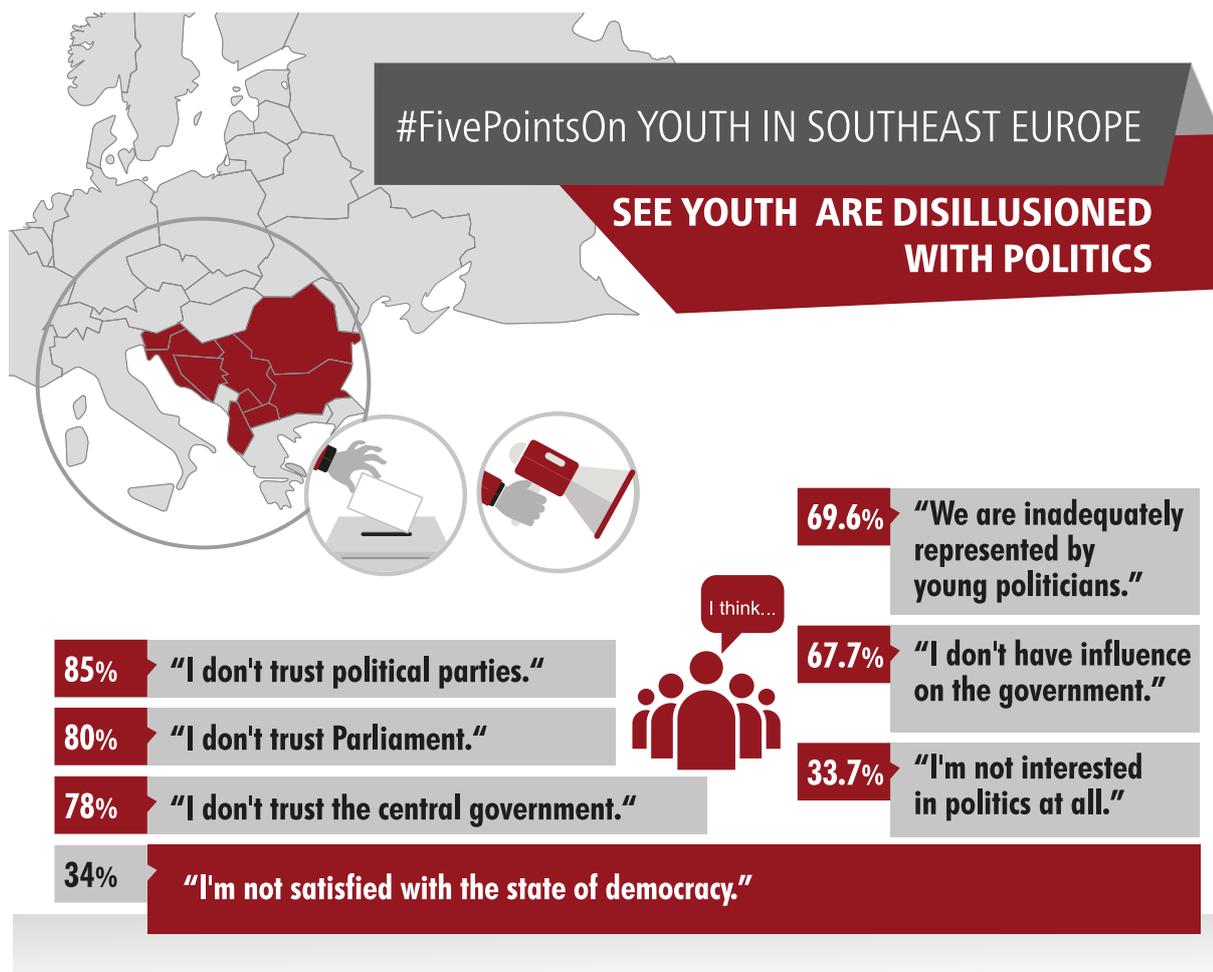
Youth surveys also point to a relatively high percentage of youth in some SEE countries (between 21 percent and 24 percent in BiH, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Romania) who are neither employed nor in education, signalling a lack of integration in social and economic life. The difficulty of finding work contributes to the generally poor material position of young people. In fact, youth unemployment is one of the main socio-economic challenges in SEE today. Youth in SEE tend to settle for temporary and flexible working arrangements due to the unavailability of permanent, full-time jobs.⁴

The prevalence of a large public sector and an underdeveloped private sector in most countries may also influence employment paths and preferences. Indeed, the majority of youth in all countries except Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovenia would prefer public to private sector jobs. Not surprisingly, only 39 percent, on average, perceive education and expertise as the most important factors in finding a job, while social connections and political affiliations rank higher in many SEE countries.

² Except for Slovenia, which is close to the EU28 average. Data not available for Albania, BiH and Kosovo. See EUROSTAT, Median equivalized net income of youth (16–24): http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/web/products-datasets/-/ILC_DI03.

³ Data for Albania, BiH, and Kosovo are not available. See EUROSTAT, People at risk of poverty or social exclusion (16–29) (percentage of total population): http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/web/products-datasets/-/ILC_PEPS01.

⁴ E. g. see: Rudi Klanjšek, “Youth (Un)employment and the Economic Situation of Youth in South East Europe,” in *Lost in Transition?* Eds. Klaus Hurrelmann and Michael Weichert (Sarajevo: FES SoE, 2015), p. 108, pp. 111–112.



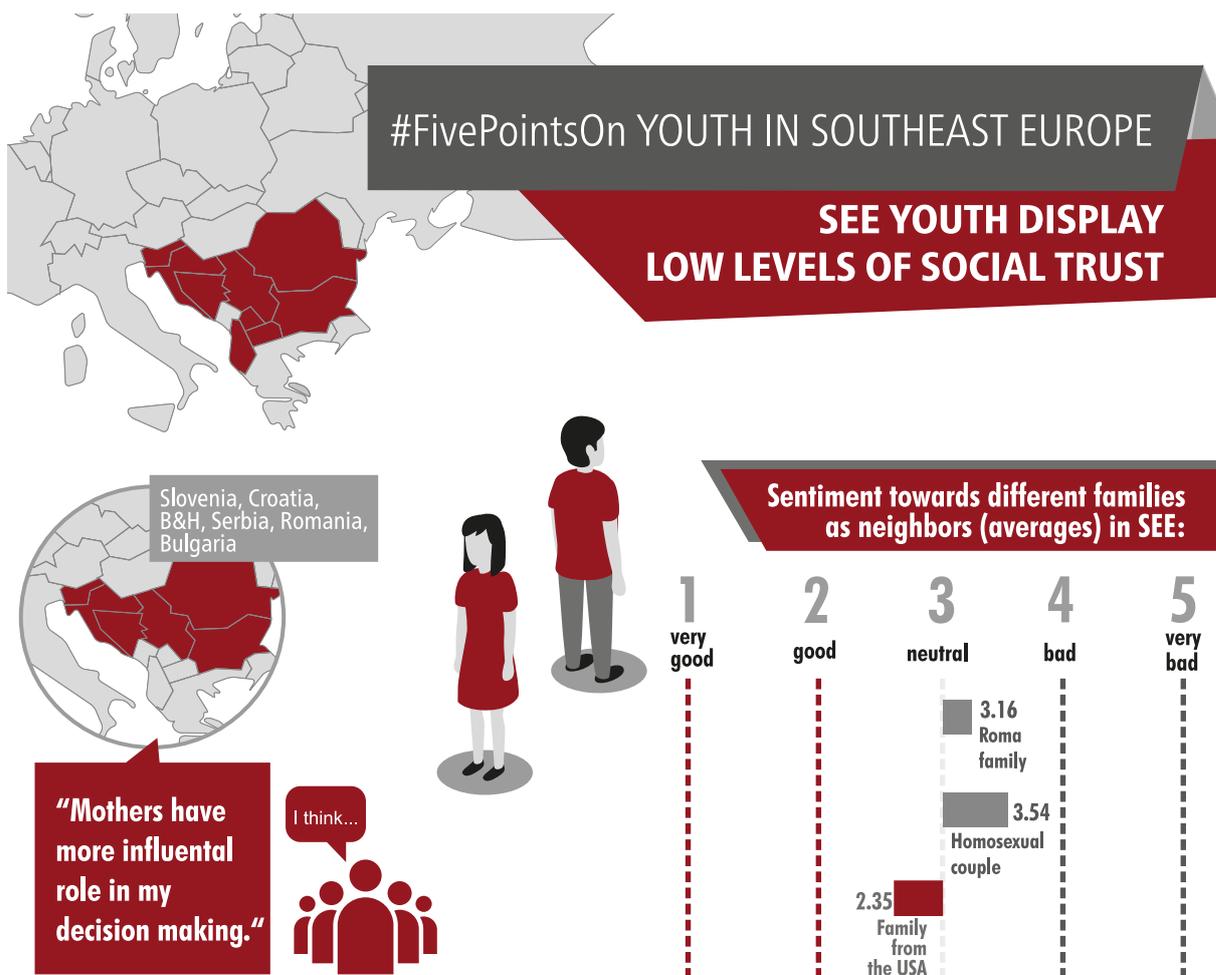
The political participation of young people is important if they are to become acquainted with the role of active citizenship and democratic values.⁵ However, survey results point to a worryingly low participation in elections of SEE youth, with only 28.6 %, on average, having voted in all elections in which they were eligible to vote. The vast majority of young people in all countries said they do not feel adequately represented in politics across SEE.

In most countries, a majority have a low sense of political efficacy or belief in their ability to influence state-level institutions through voting. It is thus unsurprising that SEE youth generally express moderate to high levels of dissatisfaction with the state of democracy in their countries. As could be expected, survey results show that young people who feel powerless tend to vote less. Moreover, SEE youth demonstrate an almost universal distrust towards political parties, parliament and central government across the region.

Results indicate deep detachment from traditional, institutional forms of politics and a lack of integration in political life. This may pose a threat to the future of democratic political systems in a region without long democratic tradition and incomplete democratic consolidation.⁶

⁵ Damir Kapidžić, "Politics, development and democracy," in *Youth Study BiH 2014*. Žiga, Jusuf et al (Sarajevo: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Sarajevo, 2015), pp. 121–122; see also Andrej Kirbiš and Barbara Zagorc, "Politics and Democracy," in *Slovenian Youth 2013: Living in times of disillusionment, risk and precarity*. Flere, Sergej et al (Zagreb: Center for the Study of Post-Yugoslav Societies and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2014), p. 211.

⁶ Kapidžić, "Politics, development and democracy," pp. 121–122; Vlasta Ilišin et al., *Youth in a Time of Crisis: First IDIZ-Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Youth Survey* (Zagreb: Institute for Social Research and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2013), pp. 110–111.



Social trust is considered to substantially contribute to the preservation of social norms and relations.⁷ Societies that embrace more universalistic values tend to have high levels of both social and institutional trust, as opposed to ones where solidarity is principally embedded in narrow ties often defined by kinship.⁸

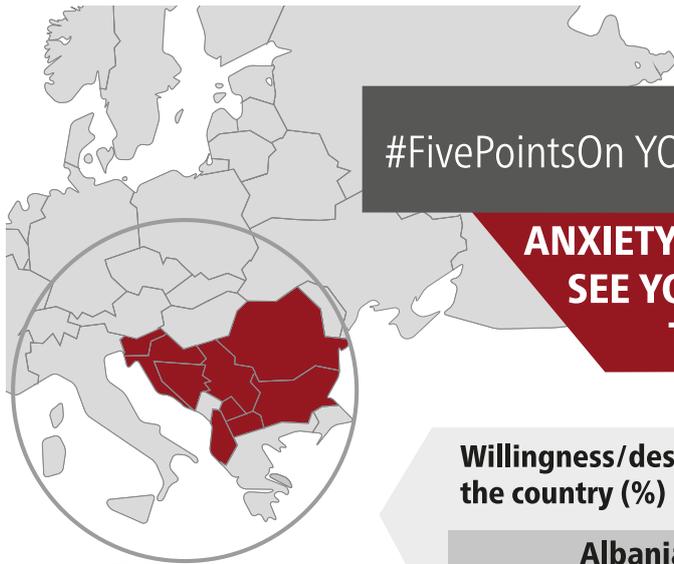
Previous studies showed that levels of social trust in the SEE region were relatively low. This is corroborated by the youth surveys: results signal the importance of primary networks for young people, which is not surprising given their age and the expectation that as they grow older, peers and other social groups will have more influence than the family.⁹

However, the youth had very low trust in people of different religious or political beliefs. Low levels of social trust were correlated with low levels of institutional trust across the region. To capture social distance, young people were asked how they would feel if certain types of families became their neighbours. Youth generally demonstrated high levels of intolerance particularly towards same-sex couples and Roma.

⁷ Ilišin et al., *Youth in a Time of Crisis*, p. 92.

⁸ Smiljka Tomanović and Dragan Stanojević, *Young people in Serbia 2015: Situation, perceptions, beliefs and aspirations* (Belgrade: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and SeCons, 2015), p. 75.

⁹ Cherylynn Bassani, "Young people and social capital," In *Handbook of Youth and Young Adulthood: New perspectives and agendas*. Ed. Andy Furlong (Oxon, Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), p. 76.



#FivePointsOn YOUTH IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE

ANXIETY ABOUT THE FUTURE DRIVES SEE YOUTH TO CONSIDER LEAVING THEIR COUNTRIES EN MASSE



Willingness/desire to leave the country (%)

Albania	66.6%
Kosovo	55.1%
Macedonia	55.1%
Serbia	46.2%
B&H	45.7%
Romania	40.3%
Bulgaria	32.6%
Slovenia	30.8%
Croatia	26.1%

Given the state of regional labour markets and their poor socioeconomic position, it is not surprising that young people in SEE perceive unemployment (73.9 %), poverty (68.3 %), and job insecurity (56 %) as the most alarming problems in their countries. Moreover, except for youth in Albania and Kosovo, respondents are generally sceptical that the economic situation in their countries will improve.

Material circumstances and bleak employment prospects, accompanied by other factors such as political instability, result in high level of willingness of young persons to leave their countries. Survey results show that desire to leave is highest in Albania and Kosovo, followed by Macedonia. Moreover, there is a stark difference in this respect between EU member states and non-EU SEE countries.

High levels of emigration may negatively affect the economic development of countries due to the loss of human capital and of return on investment in formal education. This is especially alarming considering the trend of emigration of highly qualified workers, or “brain drain” from several countries in the region.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of FES youth surveys signal that SEE youth face great obstacles which stem from a context of economic and political transition as they make their own transitions to adulthood. The established narrative in the new democracies of SEE frequently blames young people for their own precarious situation. However, through inadequate institutional policies and practices, their states appear to have largely failed to integrate youth in political, social, and economic life. This is especially evident in the failure to provide youth with an accessible and valuable education, as well as to enable their inclusion in the labor market and in political life. While other factors may also shape their worldviews, wider socio-political contexts certainly contribute to young people's anxieties about the future, their rejection of politics, low levels of institutional and social trust, and high levels of social distance to those different from them. Disillusionment and a sense of powerlessness deprive youth of their ambition and threaten to undermine the future prospects of SEE societies as a whole. Such findings signal the need for a substantial paradigm shift in the policies and instruments targeting youth in the SEE region. What follows is a set of broad recommendations that aim to contribute to such a shift in thinking:

On Education

- › **Inherent inequalities in access to education must be tackled** in order to build empowering educational systems. One way to do this is to improve the social safety net of students by providing them with adequate support schemes such as financial aid, subsidized housing and food, and other forms of support.
- › **Closer cooperation between educational institutions and the business sector is crucial** for an easier education-to-employment transition. Such cooperation would provide young people with the opportunity to gain experience, and may introduce a practical orientation in curricula. Standards on internships and capacity-building programs targeting educational institutions and employers are needed to ensure the usefulness of internship programs for participants in terms of obtaining new skills.
- › **Career guidance programs should be introduced at the high school and university level.** These programs should provide youth with advice on career choices and work opportunities as to ensure a faster and better transition from school to work.
- › **Curricula need to be modernized and adapted to respond to rapid automation and the changing nature of work.** They need to include digital literacy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills.

On Working Opportunities and Conditions

- › **Activation policies for unemployed and inactive youth are crucial.** Training programs that are responsive to contemporary market needs should be introduced, along with job search assistance and career guidance programs to help young people enter the labor market. Significant capacity-building of public employment services is needed for this to be feasible.
- › **Tax and contribution subsidies should be introduced to incentivize employers to offer longer-term employment for young workers.**
- › **Comprehensive macroeconomic** policies to increase demand for a youth labor force should be developed by states in the region.
- › **Policies targeting groups who face obstacles in accessing the labor market,** especially women and low-skilled youth, must be introduced.
- › **Measures to reduce the precarity of young people's working arrangements** must be taken, such as ensuring adequate working conditions, social security and remuneration for youth as to prevent in-work poverty.

- › **Youth representative bodies – such as youth councils and associations – should be included in social dialogue mechanisms and in the formulation of employment policies and programs.** They should be able to advocate for an easier entry into the labor market and improved working conditions and rights.

On Politics and Civic Participation

- › **Civic education** programs covering contemporary issues should be a part of formal education in the region, as they are a means to increase young people's civic and political engagement.
- › **Civic participation** should be mainstreamed in formal education and stronger links should be forged between educational institutions and the civic sector as to create opportunities for youth engagement.
- › **Mechanisms for exerting substantial influence on decision-making processes need to be put in place** to increase young people's sense of political efficacy and trust. These can include youth advisory bodies and the mandatory engagement of youth organizations in policy-making.
- › **Self-organizing of young people in own representative bodies – such as youth councils, youth associations and labor unions – should be systematically encouraged.** Capacity-building programs and funding opportunities may be introduced for such initiatives.

On Social Trust

- › **There ought to be greater emphasis on education that fosters tolerance, understanding and knowledge of other cultures, social groups and political views.**
- › **Programs facilitating the exposure of young people to diverse social groups should be developed,** especially through educational exchange programs and engagement in the civic sector.

On Mobility and Migration

- › **Youth mobility** – or temporary movement abroad in order to engage in educational, work and other opportunities – should be encouraged by states in the region through new or existing mobility schemes, by simplifying the procedures of recognizing educational degrees obtained abroad, and other relevant activities.
- › **Emigration or permanent leave should be dealt with strategically through policies that seek to improve the socioeconomic status and opportunities at home.** Increasing demand for youth labour as well as the opportunities to obtain quality education at home are crucial to encourage youth to stay in their countries. Enhancing such opportunities may also incite those who have emigrated to return as to curb the detrimental effects of losing talent and expertise.
- › **Given high levels of migration from SEE countries, states in the region should engage in transnational dialogue with countries that are the recipients of youth migration.** For instance, this may involve understanding, shaping, and promoting migration as a circular motion, so that, based on the sector-specific demand for labor in European and other countries, young people from SEE may travel abroad, gain work experience and return once the labor market is satisfied. Such sectoral circular migration may be agreed upon for specific time periods between countries.
- › **A more comprehensive understanding of the profiles of young people who would like to emigrate should be attained.** To that end, data-gathering and monitoring of youth migration dynamics is vital to inform policies in this realm.

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Southeast Europe

After more than two decades of engagement in southeastern Europe, the FES appreciates that the challenges and problems still facing this region can best be resolved through a shared regional framework. Our commitment to advancing our core interests in democratic consolidation, social and economic justice and peace through regional cooperation, has since 2015 been strengthened by establishing an infrastructure to coordinate the FES' regional work out of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina: the Regional Dialogue Southeast Europe (Dialogue SOE).

Dialogue SOE provides analysis of shared challenges in the region and develops suitable regional programs and activities in close cooperation with the twelve FES country offices across Southeast Europe. Furthermore, we integrate our regional work into joint initiatives with our colleagues in Berlin and Brussels. We aim to inform and be informed by the efforts of both local and international organizations in order to further our work in southeastern Europe as effectively as possible.

Our regional initiatives are advanced through three broad working lines:

- Social Democratic Politics and Values
- Social and Economic Justice
- Progressive Peace Policy

Our website provides information about individual projects within each of these working lines, past events, and future initiatives:
<http://www.fes-southeasteurope.org>

© 2018

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

Publisher: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Dialogue Southeast Europe
Kupreška 20, 71 000 Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
www.fes-southeasteurope.org
Orders/Contact: info@fes-soe.org

Responsible: Felix Henkel, Director, Dialogue Southeast Europe
Project coordinator: Denis Piplaš, Ana Manojlović

Design/Realization: perTEXT, Berlin
Infographics: Foundation Dokukino, Belgrade/Sarajevo
Cover image: "Shouting out for the better future" by Ivan Bandura (CC BY 2.0)

The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), or of the organization for which the authors work. The FES cannot guarantee the accuracy of all data stated in this publication. Commercial use of any media published by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung is not permitted without the written consent of the FES. Any reference made to Kosovo is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence. Any reference made to Macedonia is understood as reference to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

