

# Tracing the Interface Between Numerical Flexibility and Income Security for European Youth during the Economic Crisis

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## Tracing the interface between numerical flexibility and income security for European youth during the economic crisis

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### **STYLE-WP10: Flexicurity**



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- i) to 'advance the knowledge base that underpins the formulation and implementation of relevant policies in Europe with the aim of enhancing the employment of young people and their transition to economic and social independence', and
- ii) to engage with 'relevant communities, stakeholders and practitioners in the research with a view to supporting employment policies in Europe.' Contributions to a dialogue about these results can be made through the project website [www.style-research.eu](http://www.style-research.eu), or by following us on twitter @STYLEEU.

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## Abstract

This paper traces convergences in terms of flexibility and security with a focus on younger and older youth in European countries. Youth were one of the groups hardest hit by the economic crisis. Young people in most European countries are more likely to work on temporary contracts of limited duration than adults. In a majority of EU countries youth are also disadvantaged with regard to unemployment benefits. Eligibility criteria require a certain minimum period in employment before unemployment insurance benefits can be accessed; and means-testing applies to unemployment and social assistance benefit schemes.

This paper adopts a comparative European approach in order to shed light on the interaction between flexibility and income security, for youth. Special extracts of the aggregate European Labour Force Survey data are used to trace the development of (involuntary) temporary employment among youth and access by youth to unemployment benefits as well as participation in short-time working. This is complemented by an institutional analysis charting changes in unemployment benefit criteria during the crisis.

To frame this analysis, we employ a more dynamic version of the flexicurity matrix (Wilthagen and Tros 2004). The paper analyses trade-offs, vicious and virtuous relationships between external and internal numerical flexibility as well as income security (Leschke, Schmid, Griga 2007; Schmid 2009) among youth and thereby tackles a combination of dimensions of flexibility and security so far underexplored. This allows us to assess if developments during the economic crisis have improved or rather deteriorated the situation of youth with regard to different dimension of flexibility and security.

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# 1. Introduction

This paper traces the interface between flexibility and security with a focus on younger and older youth in European countries. To begin with some context on aspects of the flexibility- security interface, young people in most European countries are more likely to work on temporary contracts (external numerical flexibility) than adults. Temporary contracts are by definition of limited duration whereas due to strict employment protection legislation permanent workers are often difficult to fire. Youth are therefore disproportionately hit by unemployment and this was particularly evident during the economic crisis. At the same time, they are, in the majority of countries, disadvantaged with regard to unemployment benefit receipt (income security). Adequate unemployment benefit coverage not only renders youth more independent from their parents but it has also been shown to lead to better post-unemployment outcomes including earnings and job stability (e.g. Gangl 2004). Access to unemployment insurance benefits usually requires a certain period in employment within a specific reference period; unemployment assistance and social assistance are frequently means-tested on the household. In both of these aspects, youth can be disadvantaged by comparison to adults. Turning to short-term working, due to (on average) lower tenure and work experience, an important asset when employers decide about whom to keep and whom to fire, it is likely that young people did not benefit as much as adults from short-time working measures – reduced working time with partial income replacement (internal numerical flexibility) – which were popular measures in several countries during the economic crisis (Arpaia et al. 2010). Youth thus seem to be disadvantaged on both dimensions of the flexibility-security interface.

Particularly in the first years of the crisis, serious efforts were made in several countries to improve the income security of those groups disproportionately hit by unemployment, among them in particular youth and temporary workers. These efforts focused both on employment (opening up of state-subsidized short-term working schemes to new groups) and on unemployment (more inclusive unemployment benefits). There was also a focus on income security of non-standard workers and youth at the European and international level as various publications testify (e.g. OECD 2010, EEOR 2011). Moreover, a Euro-area wide basic unemployment insurance, which could serve as an automatic stabilizer in downturns, has been discussed (Dullien 2013; del Monte and Zandstra 2014), though such a scheme would not automatically cover all unemployed workers. The subsequent austerity measures were, by contrast, often geared towards employment and social policies (e.g. Heise and Lierse 2011; Lehndorff 2014), with likely impacts also on these initial expansionary adjustments to unemployment benefits in some countries.

Against this background, this paper adopts a comparative European approach. It traces developments on the interface between external and internal numerical flexibility and income security for youth during different phases of the economic crisis. Section 2 frames this paper, presenting a more dynamic version of the flexicurity matrix (Wilthagen and Tros 2004). It thereby adopts a critical stance towards flexicurity, drawing out not only trade-offs but also virtuous and vicious relationships between flexibility and security (Leschke, Schmid, Griga 2007; Schmid 2009). Section 3 briefly discusses the developments in external and internal flexibility for youth during different phases of the economic crisis. Section 4, the core of this paper, then turns to income security in unemployment, a dimension of the flexibility-security matrix so far underexplored. In a first subsection we map the institutional changes occurring in the design of unemployment benefits in a number of European countries during the crisis with the intention to make benefits more inclusive for youth and other labour market groups particularly affected by the economic crisis. This section is complemented by an analysis of benefit coverage of young and older youth as compared to adults based on special extracts of aggregate European Labour Force Survey data. The paper concludes with a discussion of the results in light of the extended flexibility-security matrix.

## 2. Trade-offs, virtuous and vicious relationships between external and internal flexibility and income security

There has been a long-standing criticism of the flexicurity concept as proposed by the European Commission (e.g. European Commission 2007), notably on the strong emphasis on external numerical flexibility as opposed to job and income security during the second half of the Lisbon Strategy (e.g. Burroni and Keune 2011; Tangian 2009). The European Trade Union Confederation has repeatedly criticised the shift from job security granted by strict employment protection legislation to employability security, to be achieved for example by active labour market policies and life-long learning measures. The economic crisis has put the flexicurity concept further under pressure (Heyes 2011; Lyne Ibsen 2011) and – in view of the youth unemployment crisis and the fact that workers with temporary contracts were disproportionately affected – also put a question mark on the previous strong focus on flexibility rather than cushioning security. All too often have flexibility and security been treated as trade-offs or compromises between employers and workers with flexibility mostly catering to employers and security to workers. In view of the criticism and in particular the crisis experience, the European Commission with their Europe 2020 strategy, in place since 2010, has somewhat modified its take on flexicurity. In the Europe 2020 strategy it puts more emphasise on the role of job security for those countries that have very segmented labour markets<sup>1</sup> and draws out the importance of income security at transitions. More adequate social security benefits for some groups of non-standard workers are specifically mentioned in the integrated guidelines on economic and employment policies (Council of the European Union 2010, guideline 7). Also the positive role in buffering employment shocks of internal flexibility devices such as short-time working measures and working time accounts are emphasised in the Commissions agenda on new skills and jobs (European Commission 23.11.2010).

A critical use of the flexicurity concept is particularly important with regard to youth who tend to accumulate negative flexicurity outcomes which the crisis has further emphasised (Madsen et al. 2013). They are more prone than adults to hold a temporary contract (see section 3) and at the same time, due to contracts of shorter duration and thereby greater difficulties of fulfilling the eligibility requirements for unemployment insurance benefits, their access to unemployment benefits is considerable lower than that of adults (see section 4). Thus, the flexibility-security nexus could be described as vicious (losing out on both dimensions as higher contractual flexibility means more frequent unemployment which is less often secured). As we show below the crisis has not only triggered a change in discourse at the EU and international level but also institutional change (though often only of a temporary nature) which made unemployment benefits initially more inclusive towards youth and temporary workers in a number of countries. In the second part of the crisis some of these developments have been taken back again or passive benefit receipt of youth has been linked more

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<sup>1</sup> See for example the discussion on the single open-ended contract which however has been ardently criticised by the European Trade Union Confederation.

<sup>2</sup> Note however that due to differences in definition and delimitation of short-time work the EU LFS figures vary somewhat from other



strongly to education or training. Table 1 shows the different possibilities for combining the various dimensions of flexibility and security (for an extensive discussion of the different dimensions and illustrations of trade-offs, vicious and virtuous relationships refer to Leschke, Schmid and Griga 2007 and Schmid 2009).

Table 1: The flexibility-security nexus: trade-off (t), virtuous (vr) or vicious relationship (vc)

<b>Flexibility</b>	<b>Security</b>			
	Job Security	Employment/ Employability Security	<b>Income Security</b>	Option Security
<b>External Numerical</b>	t	t / vr / vc	<b>t / vr / vc</b>	t
<b>Internal Numerical</b>	vr	vr	<b>(t) / vr</b>	t / vr
Internal Functional	vr	vr	t / vr	(t) / vr
External Functional	vr	t / vr / vc	t / vr	t / vr

Source: Leschke, Schmid and Griga 2007, adapted from Wilthagen and Tros (2004).

In our concluding section we will use these dimensions to assess the developments on the interface of external and internal numerical flexibility and income security for youth during the economic crisis.

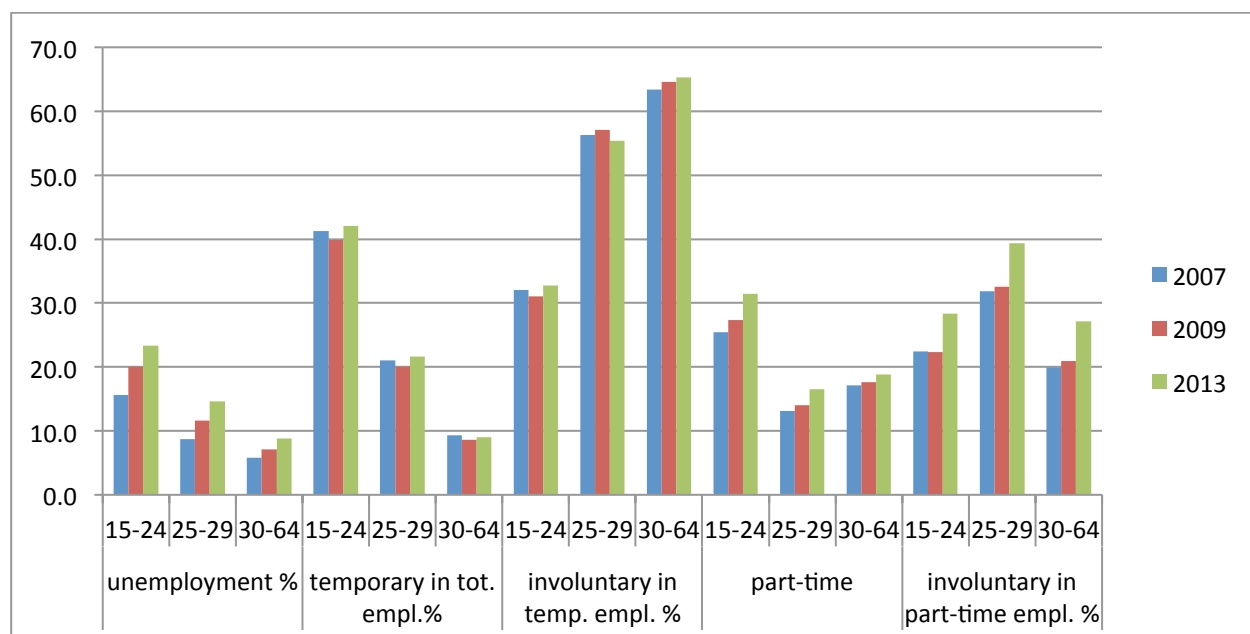
### 3. Developments in external and internal numerical flexibility for youth during the crisis

Labour market transitions are a common phenomenon among youth – the school-to-work transitions is often characterised by moves in and out of the labour market before a stable job is found (OECD 2010). These transitions are due to first-time jobs that are rather unstable (e.g. temporary contracts for probationary periods) or by definition of shorter duration (e.g. training contracts). Some youth withdraw from the labour market for prolonged periods of time for example to return to education. Unemployment (and inactivity) is therefore a frequent phenomenon among young people and one which has increased manifold with the economic crisis.

Figure 1 illustrates for the EU as a whole the disproportionate levels of unemployment and forms of non-standard employment (temporary employment and part-time work) experienced by youth. Youth both started from higher levels (with the exception of part-time employment for the older youth group) than adults and were more affected by increases in unemployment and non-standard employment over the course of the crisis. Unemployment currently (2013) lies at 23.3% for the younger and 14.6% for the older youth group, this compares with 8.8% for adults. The spread is large across Europe with an unemployment rate of 58.3% for youth (15-24) in Greece and 7.8% in Germany. Temporary employment is the prime example for external numerical flexibility – here the share of young youth lies at 42% and for older youth at 21.7%, the adult share stands at 9%. Both youth groups have slightly higher temporary employment shares in 2013 than before the crisis (2007) whereas the adult temporary employment rate is still slightly below its 2007 level. Temporary employment rates vary strongly across Europe in line with how strictly they are regulated (OECD 2013). Also, employment protection legislation for permanent jobs has an impact on temporary employment rates. For example, in the UK, few temporary jobs are disposed of as there is a weak regulation of permanent jobs.

Temporary employment is often involuntary (could not find a permanent job) and this is on average more pronounced around older youth and adults (around 55% and 65%) than younger youth (around 33%) across the EU27. In the 15-24 age group, more than half of the respondents say they have a temporary job due to not being able to find a permanent one in most EU countries. Only in Austria, Germany and Denmark are the majority of temporary contracts of young youth due to training contracts (see also Eurofound 2013).

Figure 1: Development in unemployment and non-standard employment over the crisis period



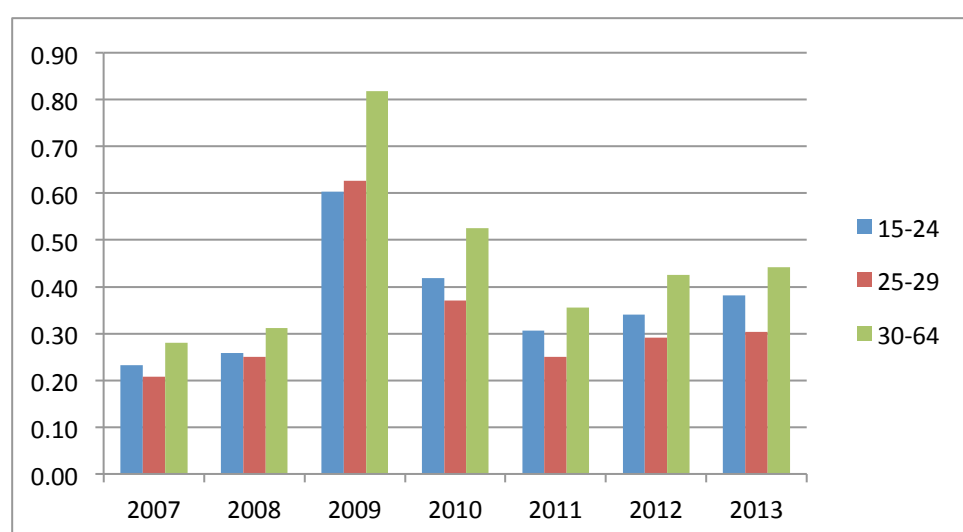
Source: Eurostat LFS data, special extracts.

Working time accounts or short-time working measures also create flexibility for employers in times of slack demand. Both have been used during the economic crisis with a slightly stronger focus on short-time working, as many countries which already had these publicly funded schemes in place before the crisis almost all expanded the schemes to increase their reach, with some other countries (BG, CZ, HU, LT, LV, NL, PL, SI, SK) newly introducing these schemes temporarily during the crisis. Newly introduced schemes are usually less generous in terms of duration and benefits than already established ones; they have, however, usually a wider coverage of employees (Arpaia et al. 2010). Some countries have introduced temporary schemes during the crisis that cover specific types of firms or sectors, only (Greece for small and medium-sized enterprises already having introduced short-time working and Sweden for manufacturing (LABREF 2015)). No schemes exist in Cyprus, Estonia, and Malta which implies that in those countries working time reductions usually go hand in hand with wage cuts of the same proportion (ibid). In contrast to temporary employment which often is involuntary, as shown above, short-time working measures carry advantages for employees as they have allowed the preservation of jobs and the avoidance of unemployment during the crisis (Hijzen and Martin 2012). Short-time working schemes partially compensate lost wages through the unemployment benefit fund – in some countries topped up by sector-level funds (e.g. Belgium) either directly or via the employer.

In the past, short-time working measures were in many countries restricted to core workers either explicitly by way of requiring that temporary workers would have to be released first, or implicitly by way of offering participation in these schemes only to workers eligible for unemployment benefits. During the crisis however several of these countries (e.g. Austria, Belgium, Germany, France, Luxembourg) deliberately opened their schemes – temporarily or permanent – to new groups of workers (for country details see Arpaia et al. 2010; European Commission 2010c). The available empirical evidence indicates however that the positive impacts were limited to permanent workers (Hijzen and Martin 2012; Hijzen and Venn 2011).

Figure 2 illustrates short-time working over the crisis for both youth and adults. It displays, for the EU27 average, the share of people working fewer hours than usual during the interview reference week due to slack work for technical or economic reasons (main reason) as a share of total employment. In all years adults are more likely than youth to participate in short-time working measures. In line with the expansion of these schemes to new groups of workers and among them temporary employed, for all groups (and somewhat more pronounced for adults and older youth) participation peaked in 2009. Thereafter it has been falling again though still stands at a higher level in 2013 than before the crisis for all three groups.

Figure 2: Development in short-time working\* (with or without partial benefits) over the crisis period for youth and adults (% of total employment)



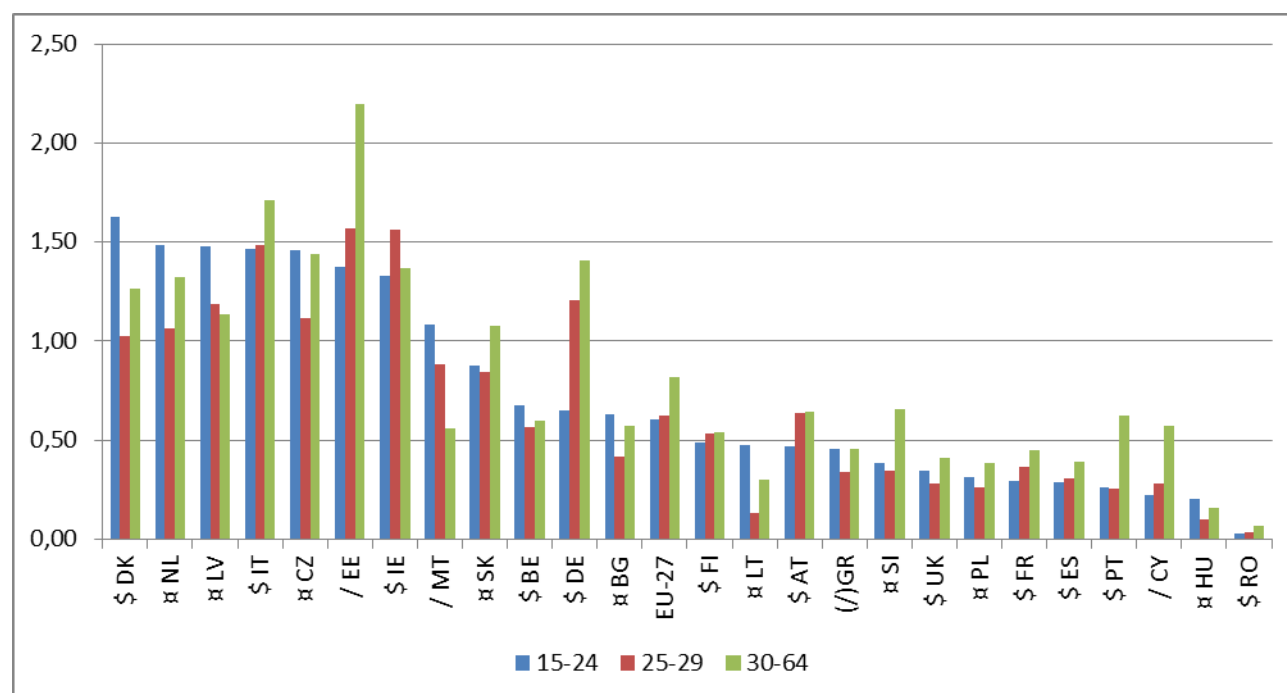
Source: Eurostat LFS data, special extracts.

\*Person worked less than usual due to slack work as share of overall employment.

Figure 3 provides information for short-time working by country and age group for the peak year, 2009. The EU LFS data carries the advantage that it is more comparable across countries – it does however not tell us anything about if short-time working is compensated by partial unemployment benefits.<sup>2</sup> Using Arpaia (2010) we therefore group countries into those without compensation (/), those with longstanding and usually more generous schemes (\$) and those with new temporary and usually less generous schemes (α). Figure 3 illustrates that young youth (15-24) were considerably more likely to participate in short-time working measures during the peak year in Denmark, the Netherlands, Latvia, Malta, and Lithuania – though with large variation in overall participation across these countries. In Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece and Hungary the participation of young youth was slightly higher than that of adults.

<sup>2</sup> Note however that due to differences in definition and delimitation of short-time work the EU LFS figures vary somewhat from other available figures including OECD and national level data.

Figure 3: Short-time working\* (with or without partial wage replacement) by age group and country, 2009 (peak) (% of total employment)



Source: Eurostat LFS data, special extracts.

Note: data for Sweden and Luxembourg missing or incomplete. Countries are ordered by coverage of youth (15-24).

\*Person worked less than usual due to slack work as share of overall employment.

\$ Countries with longstanding short-time working schemes.

⌘ Countries with newly introduced temporary short-time working schemes which are often less generous than in the countries where they have already been in place before the crisis.

(/) Countries without publicly supported short-time working schemes (/) or publicly supported short-time working schemes only for selected sectors.

Overall, in contrast to external numerical flexibility where youth are considerably over-represented – and particularly younger youth, internal numerical flexibility, as captured by short-time working here, is less segmented than initially expected. It is younger rather than older youth who seem to have been over-represented in short-time working. Note that a positive assessment of short-time working only holds as long as it has prevented even stronger increases in unemployment. Also, in countries or cases where no partial compensation of working hour reduction is available, short-time working will have adverse effects on the economic situation of affected workers.

## 4. Has income security at unemployment improved for youth during the economic crisis?

Substantial shares of unemployed persons do not have access to unemployment insurance benefits. In part, this is deliberate policy (i.e. a link between contributions and benefits is intended), while in other cases it is unintended, as qualifying criteria for unemployment insurance are frequently based on “standard employment” (dependent, permanent and full-time) and are thus in many cases no longer in line with the changes in employment relationships (see e.g. OECD 2009a).

Unemployment insurance benefits are the first tier of provision usually based on contributions by employers and employees. All European Union countries have unemployment insurance schemes though their eligibility conditions and benefit rates (generosity) differ substantially. If not eligible for unemployment insurance or if the entitlement is exhausted, the unemployed may be entitled to unemployment assistance which is typically less generous non-contributory, means tested at the household level, and financed by general taxation. The fact that it is assessed at the household level rather than the individual level implies that young people living at home have these broader household means taken into consideration as part of their assessment (Eurofound, 2013). Hours and earnings thresholds, as well as qualifying periods, are in most cases not of relevance for secondary benefit schemes. These secondary schemes exist in only eleven European countries (Eurofound, 2013). New member states do not, for the most part, have unemployment assistance benefits. Unemployment assistance benefits are not always universal; for example, they are in some cases restricted to unemployed persons with families, youth or specific types of youth are in some cases explicitly excluded (compare OECD Benefits and Wages Indicators). In almost all European countries as a last minimum layer, tax funded social assistance subject to means testing exists. Table 2, provides figures on the generosity of unemployment insurance benefits and the existence of secondary unemployment benefit schemes.

Table 2: Benefit generosity and existence of means-tested basic benefits – 2012

<b>Generosity</b>	<b>Benefit Insurance net replacement rates for single earners at 67% at initial phase of unemployment.</b>	<b>Secondary Assistance Benefit net replacement rates at 60 months' unemployment</b>	<b>Secondary Benefit Assistance for Limited Groups</b>
<b>Most generous (OECD, 2012)</b>	Switzerland, Portugal, Iceland, Netherlands, Bulgaria, Spain, Luxembourg, Denmark, Slovenia, Latvia, Belgium.	Austria, Finland, France, Ireland, Malta, Portugal.	Belgium*, Luxembourg, Sweden.
<b>Middle (OECD, 2012)</b>	Romania, Ireland, Poland, Turkey, Estonia, Austria, Germany, Slovak Republic, Sweden, Hungary, Norway, France, Italy.	Germany, Spain, United Kingdom.	Spain, Poland.
<b>Least generous (OECD, 2012)</b>	United Kingdom, Greece, Malta.	Estonia, Greece.	Lithuania

Source: OECD Benefits and Wages. Own compilation.

\*Belgium has unemployment insurance benefits of unlimited duration.

This section seeks to highlight the disadvantages suffered by youth in access to unemployment benefits, with special reference to changes during the first period of the crisis (2008-2009) and to developments throughout the austerity period (2010-2014). As unemployment benefit systems are designed to meet complex (and fast changing) conditions, there is no room here to refer to the detailed qualifying conditions and other design features, though some details are provided as they relate to youth (also as temporary workers). Regularly updated comparative information on the design of unemployment benefits systems can be found in LABREF (2015), and the MISSOC comparative tables (2014). Detailed comparative information on unemployment benefit schemes, particularly with regard to part-time workers, is also available from a special OECD (2010b) survey.

## 4.1 Review of disadvantages of youth with regard to unemployment benefits

Young workers are subject to both explicit disadvantage in terms of differential rules of access to unemployment benefit and implicit disadvantage in access through their over-representation in temporary contracts and their on average shorter tenure. Earnings or hours thresholds represent a direct criterion for excluding those who work shorter hours and the qualifying period (usually a minimum contribution period within a given reference period) can further restrict the access of young persons whose contracts are of short duration (for details and specific country examples see Leschke 2012 and 2013 and Eurofound 2013). There are also rules affecting youth directly with both positive and negative implications on benefit coverage. In the following we give some concrete examples.

Three countries explicitly restrict the eligibility to unemployment benefits for certain types of temporary workers: Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia (for details see Eurofound, 2013). For example, in Slovakia, all temporary workers were excluded from unemployment benefits until January 2013. Now temporary workers above a certain earnings threshold qualify more easily than permanent workers (2 years employment within a reference period of 4 instead of a reference period of 3 years for permanent workers) (Eurofound 2013).

More generally speaking, it is easier for young people (and temporary workers) to access unemployment benefits in countries with short contribution periods within a long reference period (however, this says nothing about the generosity of the benefits received). According to Eurofound (2013), in practice it seems to be easiest for workers with short contract duration, and in particular temporary workers, to qualify for unemployment benefits in France, Spain, Greece, Malta and Finland. Qualifying conditions are likely to be most difficult to meet in the Netherlands, Ireland, Latvia, Poland and Bulgaria (for details refer to Eurofound (2013: 20 – 21).

Age can also come into play in relation to access to benefits, an explicit factor that can negatively impact access by young people. For example in the UK, those under 18 years are not entitled to any form of benefit insurance, irrespective of what type of contract they have (European Commission, 2011a). On the other hand, in some countries qualifying criteria for unemployment benefits can be more relaxed for youth or allow them to enter in other ways than the usual contribution period within a specific employment reference period. For example, in Finland, youth (17-25 years) wishing to assess unemployment insurance benefits can have either a vocational qualification, 5 months' work history,

or 5 months' participation in ALMPs. Romania allows graduates who are searching for work exemptions from a qualifying period for unemployment benefit (MISSOC, 2014).

Young people can also be entitled to lower amounts, and shorter benefit duration. In Italy and Ireland, for example, younger workers' benefit rates are lower than for older workers (European Commission, 2011a). Several countries make benefit duration dependent on length of contribution payments (e.g. Austria, Bulgaria, Germany and the Netherlands) which disproportionately affects younger workers with lower employment tenure (MISSOC, 2013).

## 4.2 Reforming unemployment benefits to better include youth

This section looks at reforms in unemployment benefits during the first period of the crisis (2008-2009). The focus during this time was predominantly – but not exclusively – on opening up access to unemployment benefits. It also takes account of the period 2010-2014, where in several cases unemployment benefits were the target of austerity measures. A number of benefit reforms were explicitly geared towards youth, usually comprising direct links to education and training programmes (see examples below). The majority of reforms, however, were of a more general nature, and related to relaxed qualifying conditions or increasing benefit levels, which indirectly impact on youth. Here, we review the changes to unemployment benefit systems in the EU27 with regard to qualifying criteria, benefit level, including one-off payments and duration. For country examples of these reforms see the text below and Table 3.

### Stimulus period

In the first part of the crisis (2008-2009) which was characterised in most countries by stimulus measures, **qualifying criteria** were relaxed in Finland, France, Spain, Italy, Sweden, Portugal and Latvia– the latter two countries previously had rather strict qualifying criteria – with positive impacts on employees with short tenure (for details see European Commission 2010b: 137; European Commission 2011a: 18 - 24). This happened either through reducing contribution periods, increasing reference periods (or both) or opening schemes explicitly to new groups of workers. Sweden, for example, temporarily lowered the membership condition (in an unemployment insurance fund) for income-related unemployment benefits from one year to six months and made it possible for students to join an unemployment insurance fund by way of abolishing the work requirement (European Commission 2011a). In Italy, from 2009 to 2011 ordinary unemployment allowance was extended to apprentices with at least 3 months' tenure and a broad group of employees including fixed-term, temporary agency workers and apprentices were allowed to apply for exceptional unemployment benefits (European Commission 2011a). France made means-tested welfare benefits available to jobseekers between 18 and 25 years who were previously excluded. To prevent students from gaining access to this benefit a relatively strict qualifying condition of 2 years' employment within 3 was added, taking into account all types of employment contracts (LABREF 2015). Several of the measures introduced in this time period were temporary.

A number of countries and among them Greece, France, Spain and Italy granted temporary **lump-sum or one-off payments** to unemployed workers not eligible for regular unemployment benefits. In France these were directly targeted to youth who did not fulfil eligibility criteria for unemployment benefits (LABREF 2015).



**Unemployment benefit levels** were increased in Belgium, the Netherlands, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Poland as well as Latvia and Finland (European Commission 2011: 76-78). An exception to this trend of improving the situation of groups with less coverage, Ireland substantially reduced the benefit level for young claimants (18-24 years) in 2009. However, these reduced benefit rates did not apply to those participating in training or education programmes (European Commission 2011b).

**Benefit duration** in unemployment insurance or assistance was increased in Finland, Romania, Latvia and Lithuania, in the latter only in municipalities hit particularly hard by the crisis (European Commission 2011: 76-78). Targeting benefit duration of persons already eligible for unemployment benefits, the Spanish government approved a temporary flat-rate unemployment assistance benefit payable for six months to all unemployed persons whose unemployment insurance benefit had ceased.<sup>3</sup> A similar reform was carried through in Portugal. Inversely, Ireland, the Czech Republic, Poland, France and Denmark<sup>4</sup> decreased the maximum duration of unemployment benefits. The Irish reform explicitly targeted young youth (<18 years) by reducing the duration of Job Benefit from 12 to 6 months for this age group (European Commission, 2011a).

Second-tier systems such as social assistance were improved in a number of countries, as evidenced by increases to housing support, for example. Some countries (e.g. Estonia) had already planned improvements to their unemployment benefits systems which then were not carried through or postponed due to the crisis. Only a few countries had already reduced benefits during this initial crisis period as a part of fiscal consolidation measures (see Ireland) - in most cases these reductions were geared towards benefit duration.

### Austerity Period

As evident from Table 3 while, in the first part of the crisis, the focus was often on relaxing eligibility and increasing benefit levels, the austerity period was characterised by tightening eligibility and decreasing benefit levels. Particularly, reforms relating to eligibility, even when not explicitly geared towards youth, usually have a disproportionate effect on young unemployed given their shorter average tenure. However, during this period there were also a few countries which relaxed qualifying criteria often with a view to youth. These reforms usually stipulated a link between passive benefit entitlements and participation in education and training programmes (MISSOC, 2014; European Commission, 2014a).<sup>5</sup> Below we give some details on a number of reforms targeting youth explicitly (marked with a star in the table).

In Ireland **benefit levels** for those of 22 to 26 years were reduced further (a first reduction already took place in 2009). Higher rates apply if the jobseeker participates in education or training or has dependent children. Belgium and Denmark tightened **qualifying criteria** for youth: In 2012, Belgium increased the waiting period before benefit allowance is granted to 12 months for all recipients (previously 6, 9 and 12). It is now called "vocational development benefit" and requires proactive steps with regard to finding

<sup>3</sup> Unemployment assistance in Spain is usually restricted to specific labour market groups such as unemployed persons with family responsibilities and older workers. The special benefit introduced in January 2009 was removed in February 2011; it had covered about 700,000 unemployed people (Sanz de Miguel 2.3.2011).

<sup>4</sup> Denmark formerly had a comparatively long universal duration of unemployment insurance benefits of four years; in 2010 this was reduced to two years.

<sup>5</sup> Labour market integration is for example promoted through one off benefits, special benefits for the young, and benefits for partial and temporary employment (for details refer to MISSOC, 2014).

employment. In Denmark, since 2013, young people under 30 years without education no longer receive social assistance.<sup>6</sup> There is an equivalent student benefit if youth embark on education and those not ready for education will still receive social assistance if they participate in activation measures geared at inclusion in education. In Spain, Slovenia and Italy, on the other hand, qualifying criteria for youth were relaxed in this period – the benefits to be accrued are usually short-run and/or means-tested. In Spain, for example, a temporary programme was introduced in 2011 geared towards youth, long-term unemployed, and other vulnerable groups making a means-tested flat-rate unemployment subsidy of 6 months dependent on participation in individualized training actions (European Commission 2011a). In Slovenia, qualifying conditions were relaxed for all unemployed in 2011 and further relaxed for youth under 30 years in 2013 (Eurofound 2013). In Italy, since 2013, young people on apprenticeships are eligible for regular unemployment benefits (ibid). The Czech reform was interesting, as it shortened the reference period for eligibility, making benefits more difficult to access, but at the same time opened up unemployment benefits to those students fulfilling the eligibility criteria (Eurofound 2011). Table 3 provides a summary overview of countries that modified their unemployment benefit schemes during the stimulus and austerity period.<sup>7</sup>

Table 3: Initial typology of countries with modifications in unemployment benefit systems directly or indirectly targeted at youth during the first period of the crisis (2008-2009) and austerity (2010-2014)

(Temporary) modifications of	Direction of change	2008-2009	2010-2014
<b>Eligibility (qualifying conditions)</b>	<b>Relaxed</b>	Finland, Latvia, Portugal, Sweden(*), Italy*	Portugal, Slovenia(*), Spain*
	<b>Tightened</b>		Czech Republic, Romania, Hungary, Greece, Denmark <sup>*1</sup> , Belgium*
	<b>Explicitly opened to new groups of workers</b>	Spain, Italy(*), France*	Slovenia, Czech Republic*, Italy*
<b>Benefit level</b>	<b>Increasing</b>	Belgium, Netherlands, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Poland, Slovenia	Belgium, Bulgaria, Slovenia
	<b>Lump-sum/One-off payment</b>	Greece, Italy, Spain, France*	Spain
	<b>Decreasing</b>	Ireland(*)	Greece, Spain, Ireland*, Romania, Latvia, Poland, Portugal
<b>Benefit duration</b>	<b>Increasing</b>	Finland, Romania, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, Spain	Denmark
	<b>Decreasing</b>	Ireland, Czech Republic, Poland, France, Denmark,	Greece

\*Reform explicitly relating to youth. (\*)Parts of the reform explicitly relating to youth.

Note: Due to the complexity and variation in benefit systems some of the changes are difficult to classify.<sup>8</sup> Also in some cases there are uncertainties in which year exactly the reforms became active.

1 Refers to social assistance. Source: own depiction based on European Commission 2010d, 2011a, Eurofound 2013, MISSOC

<sup>6</sup> Given its level, Danish social assistance can be seen as a functional equivalent to unemployment benefits.

<sup>7</sup> It is important to note here that it is challenging to compile extremely comprehensive data on these. The difficulty lies in the frequent changes to policy, in the time limits enacted on some policies, and in the time that is needed to establish the impact of general policies on youth. Here, we draw on MISSOC and on LABREF as sources, and on all publications to our knowledge available on the topic at the time of writing. However our analysis represents a first effort at mapping this policy landscape and we believe that more work is needed to fully complete the analysis.

<sup>8</sup> 2013, for example, the number of days for which unemployment benefit could be paid was capped. The maximum of 450 days within a four year period could not be extended if one became unemployed again. This affects both benefit duration and general eligibility. We have therefore placed Greece in both lines.

2015, LABREF 2015, Leschke 2013.

### 4.3 Income security - access to unemployment benefits for youth during the crisis

The remainder of the section looks at access of youth versus adults to unemployment benefits during different stages of the economic crisis. Special extracts of the aggregate European Labour Force Survey (LFS) data are used and we show figures on persons registered at the public employment office and in receipt of unemployment benefit or assistance. We will exclusively look at short-term unemployed persons (1-2 months) here.<sup>9</sup> As the LFS information on persons in receipt of unemployment benefits has been identified as unreliable due to, among other things, underreporting and misreporting (Immervoll et al. 2004: 58-67)<sup>10</sup> when we report country results we show relative distributions and changes over time in benefit coverage rather than absolute levels (for a similar strategy see OECD 2011). It is unlikely that reporting errors vary strongly between different age groups in the same country and over time. Table 4 uses ranges on benefit coverage with regard to the adult population (30-64 years) in order to put the following analysis into perspective.

Table 4: Coverage with unemployment insurance or assistance benefits as share of all unemployed adults (30-64 years), 2013, EU27=44.7%

<20	Italy, Malta, Romania
<=20<35	Bulgaria, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia
>=35<50	Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Luxembourg, Latvia, Portugal, Sweden, Slovenia, United Kingdom
>=50<=65	France, Austria, Czech Republic, Spain
>=65	Belgium, Germany, Denmark, Finland

Source: Eurostat LFS, special extracts.

Note: Duration of unemployment 1-2 months. Registered at PES and receiving benefits or assistance as % of all unemployed.

As a first indication, Figure 4 highlights the difference in unemployment benefit coverage for the EU27 by previous contract type, age, and over time using the main reason for having left the previous job as a proxy for a permanent or a temporary job prior to being unemployed. We calculate the coverage rate as those registered at the Public Employment Service (PES) and receiving benefits or assistance as percentage of all unemployed. Older youth (though only limited data is available) are doing better than younger youth and if they have been on a permanent contract prior to unemployment their coverage rate is in fact close to the adult coverage rate. Distinguishing now by previous contract type, temporary workers are in all age groups less likely than permanent employed to have access to unemployment benefits once they become unemployed. Previous temporary workers in the young youth group are least likely to have access. The differences across age can be due to both the explicit difference of youth in access to benefits or to variations across age groups in the distribution of

<sup>9</sup> This allows us to get around questions such as varying average duration of unemployment (different long-term unemployment rates) as well as differences in duration of unemployment insurance benefits and timing of set in of unemployment assistance benefits across countries.

<sup>10</sup> Differences in the wording of survey questions across countries plays a crucial role here and Immervoll et al. (2004) show for selected countries that the figures on unemployment receipt rates from administrative data sources and those from labour force surveys differ substantially with no clear direction in difference.

different types of temporary contracts. In line with the improvements in benefit design during the stimulus period, the situation of temporary workers seems to have improved somewhat in the first years of the crisis. Yet, the positive development stalled and indeed turned to the negative during austerity. This confirms our above findings that national and supra-national attention to disadvantages in benefit coverage of certain labour market groups were not sustained.

Figure 4: Unemployment benefit receipt of short-term unemployed by previous contract type (temporary vs permanent\*) and developments during the crisis (% of all unemployed), EU27



Source: Eurostat LFS, special extracts.

\*Dismissed or made redundant is used as the “best” proxy for a permanent contract.

Note: Duration of unemployment 1-2 months. Registered at PES and receiving benefits or assistance as % of all unemployed.

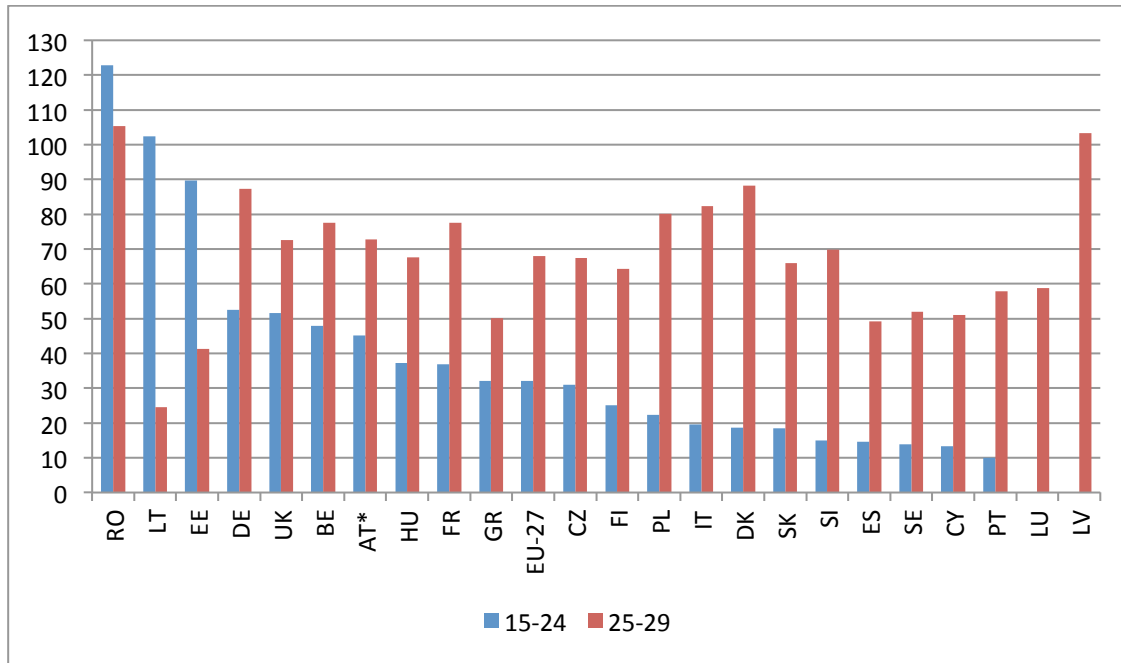
Note: 2007 and 2009 EU27 values for age group 25-29 are deemed not reliable due to missing values in the German data among others.<sup>11</sup>

Figure 5 shows for 2013 the benefit coverage of youth as a share of adults for all EU27 countries with complete data. With few exceptions (Romania, Lithuania and Estonia), in the majority of countries youth are considerably less likely to receive unemployment benefits than adults. On average the coverage is around 30% and 70% to that of adults for younger and older youth, respectively. Regarding young youth in Germany, the UK, Belgium and Austria, the coverage is about one half that of adults. The examples of the UK and Germany show that for youth coverage, universal basic-benefit schemes (as second-tier benefits) work relatively well. However, the benefits payable under these schemes are means-tested and relatively low. In all other countries with available information the share lies under 40% and in 8 countries under 20%. Among the countries with very low youth coverage the majority also have high temporary employment shares among youth – which points to a vicious relationship between flexibility and security. It is important to square these findings with youth unemployment rates; generosity of benefits; and other transition options, for example apprenticeship

<sup>11</sup> Germany (with a large weight in the EU27 average figures) probably due to small case numbers has missing values for this age group on all other categories but “registered at employment office and receiving benefits” which leads to an artificial benefit coverage rate of 100% for this age group in Germany.

or study places with compensation.

Figure 5: Benefit coverage of youth (15-24 and 25-29) as share of adults (30-64) by country, 2013



Source: Eurostat LFS, special extracts.

Note: Complete or partial missing data for Ireland, the Netherlands, Malta, Bulgaria, Luxembourg and Latvia.

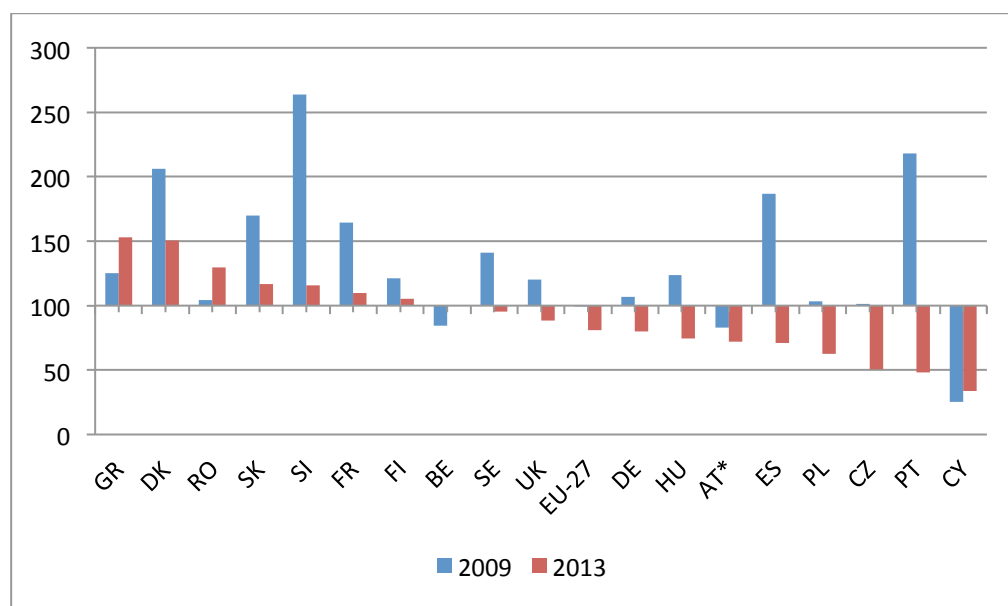
\*Date for Austria refers to 2012.

Note: Duration of unemployment 1-2 months. Registered at PES and receiving benefits or assistance as % of all unemployed.

Figure 6 shows relative developments in benefit coverage over the crisis period for young youth using 2007 as the basis. For ease of readability we only display data for 2009 (peak of the stimulus period) and the most recent available year, 2013. The majority of countries with available information saw an increase in unemployment benefit coverage of youth during the first part of the crisis, with most pronounced increases in Slovenia, Portugal, Denmark and Spain. Both improvements in eligibility to unemployment benefits systems, and importantly also changing characteristics<sup>12</sup> of newly unemployed during the crisis will have played a role here. When we compare 2007 pre-crisis data with 2013 austerity period data we see that for only a limited number of countries is this positive trend in coverage still visible. It is most pronounced in Italy (not included in the figure), Greece, and Denmark, countries which have medium to low relative coverage rates of youth as compared to adults (figure 5). Benefit coverage in 2013 was lower than in 2007 in Spain, Portugal and Cyprus, among others.

<sup>12</sup> Men were for example more affected by unemployment than women in the first part of the crisis and due to being more often in standard employment they are usually more likely to fulfil eligibility criteria for unemployment benefits.

Figure 6: Development in benefit coverage for youth (15-24) by country over the crisis (stimulus and austerity period), 2007=100



Source: Eurostat LFS, special extracts.

Note: Complete or partial missing data for Ireland, the Netherlands, Malta, Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Latvia and Malta.

Italy not shown due to graphical limits (exponential change from minimal level (0.3-3.7 in 2013)).

\*Data for Austria refers to 2012.

Note: Duration of unemployment 1-2 months. Registered at PES and receiving benefits or assistance as % of all unemployed.

Table 5 summarises the findings of the above analysis also including information for older youth and adults.

Table 5: Relative change in access to unemployment insurance and assistance benefits to 2007 in stimulus (2009) and austerity (2013) period

Age group		Substantial decrease in access	Substantial increase in access	missing data	EU27 (rel)	EU27 (abs)
15-24	2009	CY	GR, SE, FR, SK, ES, DK, PT, SI, IT	IE, NL, BG, EE, LT, LU, LV, MT	99	-0.1
	2013	CY, PT, CZ, PL, ES, AT (2012), HU	RO, DK, GR, IT		81	-3.3
25-29	2009	GR	PL, UK, PT, CY, ES, SI, IT, RO	IE, NL, BG, EE, LT, LU, MT	100	0.1
	2013	GR, SE, AT (2012)	UK, PL, RO, SI, IT		85	-5.4
30-64	2009	LU	IT, PT, BG, LV, ES, EE, LT, MT	IE, NL	102	0.9
	2013	MT, RO	UK, ES, IT		104	1.7

Source: based on Eurostat LFS special extracts.

Cut-off points for substantial decrease <75% of 2007 value and for substantial increase >125% of 2007 value.

Note: Duration of unemployment 1-2 months. Registered at PES and receiving benefits or assistance as % of all unemployed.

We want to make two final points here. First of all, our analysis shows that it is important not to limit the analysis to youth between 15 and 24 years and to not just merge the younger and older youth groups (25-29). Older youth according to our analysis are better off than younger youth in terms of

external – but not internal – numerical flexibility (however we are lacking detailed and age-specific information on compensation at short-time working though). They are also better off with regard to income security. At the same time both youth groups differ from adults in that they do worse on all three dimensions. Secondly, this analysis has emphasised how complex unemployment benefit schemes are; how much they vary both in terms of access and generosity as well as availability of secondary schemes across Europe; and that they are frequently adjusted (and not always in a strategic way as seems to have been the case during the first part of the economic crisis). In this regard, comparative analysis on the dimension of benefit access is difficult. Attempts to create “simple” indices on benefit coverage – as they exist for benefit generosity – have so far not been successful (see Alphametrix 2009). The data testifies to this complexity. Indeed, because the LFS, among other potential problems of comparability, does not allow a distinction between insurance and assistance benefits we put a question mark on the reliability of the information on benefit coverage rates in a cross-national perspective and therefore only used relative change within countries in our analysis.



## 5. Conclusions

The above analysis highlighted trade-offs, vicious, and virtuous relationships in terms of combinations of flexibility and security, as well as changes over the course of the crisis. Our analysis illustrates that external numerical flexibility - temporary or short-term contracts - is very high among youth, particularly the group of young youth. The fact that temporary contracts are frequently involuntary indicates that they are beneficial mostly from an employers' perspective to screen new employees. Nevertheless, they do allow youth to gain first hand labour market experience, albeit with limited job security. This situation could be termed a trade-off between flexibility and security. Youths' overrepresentation in temporary employment implies that their employment is fluctuating more than that of adults, thereby rendering them more prone to unemployment. The above analysis illustrated that youth are not only more prone to becoming unemployed, but are also less likely to have access to unemployment benefits. This is because their lacking, or shorter-term, labour market experience and the predominance of temporary contracts means that they have greater difficulty in fulfilling the eligibility conditions for access to unemployment benefits. This combination of higher contractual flexibility and unemployment and lower income security at unemployment can be termed a vicious relationship between flexibility and security. The initial crisis period with its stimulus measures witnessed an opening up of short-time working measures to new groups of workers and the new temporary introduction of such schemes in a large number of countries. These are a tool of internal numerical flexibility that allow the preservation of jobs, while at the same time often cushioning working time reductions to a certain degree and thereby granting some income security. According to the LFS data, short-time working was relatively common among young workers; in cases where reduced wages due to reduced working time are partly compensated, this can be seen as a virtuous relationship between flexibility and security – if they are not compensated it is rather a trade-off.

In light of surging youth unemployment - and indeed a youth unemployment crisis - in a number of European countries the limited access of youth to unemployment benefit schemes in many countries came on the international and supranational agenda (e.g. OECD and European Commission focus), especially in the early period of the crisis. The previous focus on supply-side measures was no longer deemed very fruitful, given the lack of realistic possibilities to include large numbers of youth in employment again within a reasonable period. A number of European countries – particularly, but not exclusively, during the first crisis period – accordingly improved income security for youth. More generally, temporary workers also experienced improvements with regard to access and the generosity of unemployment benefits schemes. This was done through relaxing qualifying criteria; offering lump-sum or one off payments; and increasing the benefit amounts or duration of benefits. However, already during the first period of the crisis (here defined 2008-2009), the reforms in terms of unemployment benefits were not only towards greater generosity. While no countries have restricted access to benefits during the stimulus period and only Ireland cut benefit levels, a sizable number had already reduced the duration of benefits before the austerity period. In the second crisis period (2010-2014) eligibility has been tightened and benefit levels have been reduced in a sizable number of countries. In a few countries there was still a focus on improving the income security of youth, though usually conditional on participation in education or training. These developments have been summarised in Table 3.



Using the LFS data on access to unemployment benefits and notwithstanding the limitations of this data (especially compositional effects besides changes in access due to changing eligibility), our analysis reveals, in line with the institutional changes, an improved situation in coverage for both groups of youth and adults in the first period of the crisis (for details see table 5). When we use the latest available data, which takes into account the austerity period, we see that on European average both younger and older youth are worse off than before the crisis. This is not the case for adults. Accordingly, we can see that the benefit coverage of youth, which is considerably lower than that of adults, has decreased further in a number of countries.

Reliable unemployment benefits of a certain generosity and duration render it possible to search for an adequate job. Income security at transitions thus can facilitate a better match between education and occupation instead of forcing unemployed youth to take the first best option - potentially informal or casual labour. Unemployment benefits can also have wider societal effects as they put youth in a situation of independence from their families where they can consider family formation. A crucial question here, not addressed in this paper, is if there are functional equivalents such as possibilities for further training or education at times of transitions. When looking at the interface of flexibility and security in a comparative perspective, it is important to consider the context. A point in case here are countries such as Spain, Portugal, Cyprus and Slovakia which combine very high youth unemployment rates (labour market flexibility) with very low relative benefit coverage rates (income security). On the other hand, the low benefit coverage rate for young youth in Denmark has to be seen in light of a relatively small youth unemployment population; a high focus on obligatory activation as part of the unemployment benefit schemes; a generous education allowance as well as comparatively generous social assistance which can act as functional equivalents. A positive development in this context is the EU coordinated and supported action on the implementation of a youth guarantee across Europe, which strives to offer education, training or employment to youth at an early stage of their unemployment or inactivity. Whether this new tool will be successful, particularly in countries with high youth unemployment rates, remain to be seen.

Our analysis of the interface between internal and external numerical flexibility and income security shows a complex picture. Our paper identifies trade-offs, virtuous and vicious relationships at the interface of external and internal numerical flexibility and income security. While virtuous relationships were strengthened for youth and other, in terms of security, disadvantaged labour market groups in the first part of the crisis, the more recent trends point to trade-offs and vicious relationships again for the most part.

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**Mapping patterns of self-employment**

(forthcoming)(2015)

STYLE Working Paper WP7.2

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**WP8 FAMILY DRIVERS****Work-poor and work-rich families: Influence on youth labour market outcomes**

Berloffa, Filandri, Matteazzi, Nazio, O'Reilly, Villa and Zuccotti (2015)

[STYLE Working Paper WP8.1 Work-poor and work-rich families](#)

**Leaving and returning to the parental home during the economic crisis**

(forthcoming) (2015)

STYLE Working Paper WP8.3

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**WP9 ATTITUDES AND VALUES****Value system shared by young generations towards work and family**

Hajdu and Sik (2015)

[STYLE Working Paper WP9.1 Searching for gaps: are work values of the younger generations changing?](#)

### **The impact of youth unemployment on social capital**

O'Higgins and Stimolo (2015)

[STYLE Working Paper WP9.2 Youth unemployment and social capital: An experimental approach](#)

### **Aspirations of vulnerable young people in foster care**

Hart, Stubbs, Plexousakis, Georgiadi and Kourkoutas (2015)

[STYLE Working Paper WP9.3 Aspirations of vulnerable youth in foster care](#)

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## **WP 10 FLEXICURITY**

### **Mapping Flexicurity Performance in the Face of the Crisis: Key Indicators and Drivers of Youth Unemployment**

Eamets, Beblavý, Bheemaiah, Finn, Humal, Leschke, Maselli and Smith (2015)

[STYLE Working Paper WP10.1 Mapping flexibility and security performance in the face of the crisis](#)

### **Youth School-To-Work Transitions: from Entry Jobs to Career Employment**

Berloffa, Matteazzi, Mazzolini, Sandor and Villa (2015)

[STYLE Working Paper WP10.2 Youth School-To-Work Transitions: from Entry Jobs to Career Employment](#)

### **Balancing Flexibility and Security in Europe: the Impact on Young People's Insecurity and Subjective Well-being**

Russell, Leschke and Smith (2015)

[STYLE Working Paper WP10.3 Balancing Flexibility and Security in Europe: the Impact on Young People's Insecurity and Subjective Well-being](#)

## 9. Research Partners

- |                                           |                       |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. University of Brighton – BBS CROME     | – United Kingdom      |
| 2. Institute for Employment Studies       | – United Kingdom      |
| 3. Institute for the Study of Labor       | – Germany             |
| 4. Centre for European Policy Studies     | – Belgium             |
| 5. TARKI Social Research Institute        | – Hungary             |
| 6. University of Trento                   | – Italy               |
| 7. National University of Ireland Galway  | – Republic of Ireland |
| 8. Democritus University of Thrace        | – Greece              |
| 9. University of Oxford                   | – United Kingdom      |
| 10. Economic & Social Research Institute  | – Republic of Ireland |
| 11. University of Salerno                 | – Italy               |
| 12. University of Oviedo                  | – Spain               |
| 13. University of Tartu                   | – Estonia             |
| 14. Cracow University of Economics        | – Poland              |
| 15. Slovak Governance Institute           | – Slovakia            |
| 16. Metropolitan University Prague        | – Czech Republic      |
| 17. Grenoble School of Management         | – France              |
| 18. University of Tilburg                 | – Netherlands         |
| 19. University of Graz                    | – Austria             |
| 20. Copenhagen Business School            | – Denmark             |
| 21. Norwegian Social Research             | – Norway              |
| 22. Swedish Institute for Social Research | – Sweden              |
| 23. Koç University Social Policy Centre   | – Turkey              |
| 24. University of Turin                   | – Italy               |
| 25. EurActiv                              | – Belgium             |

<http://www.style-research.eu/research-organisations>

## 10. Advisory Groups

### **Consortium Advisory Network**

Business Europe

[www.buinesseurope.eu](http://www.buinesseurope.eu)

ETUI: European Trade Union Institute

[www.etui.org](http://www.etui.org)

European Youth Forum

[www.youthforum.org](http://www.youthforum.org)

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

[www.eurofound.europa.eu](http://www.eurofound.europa.eu)

ILO: International Labour Office

[www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org)

OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

[www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org)

OSE: Observatoire Sociale Européen

[www.ose.be](http://www.ose.be)

SOLIDAR: European network of NGOs working to advance social justice in Europe

[www.solidar.org](http://www.solidar.org)

EurActiv

[www.euractiv.com](http://www.euractiv.com)

European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1036>

### **Local Advisory Boards**

including employers, unions, policy makers and non-government organisations

[www.style-research.eu/project-advisors/local-advisory-boards/](http://www.style-research.eu/project-advisors/local-advisory-boards/)