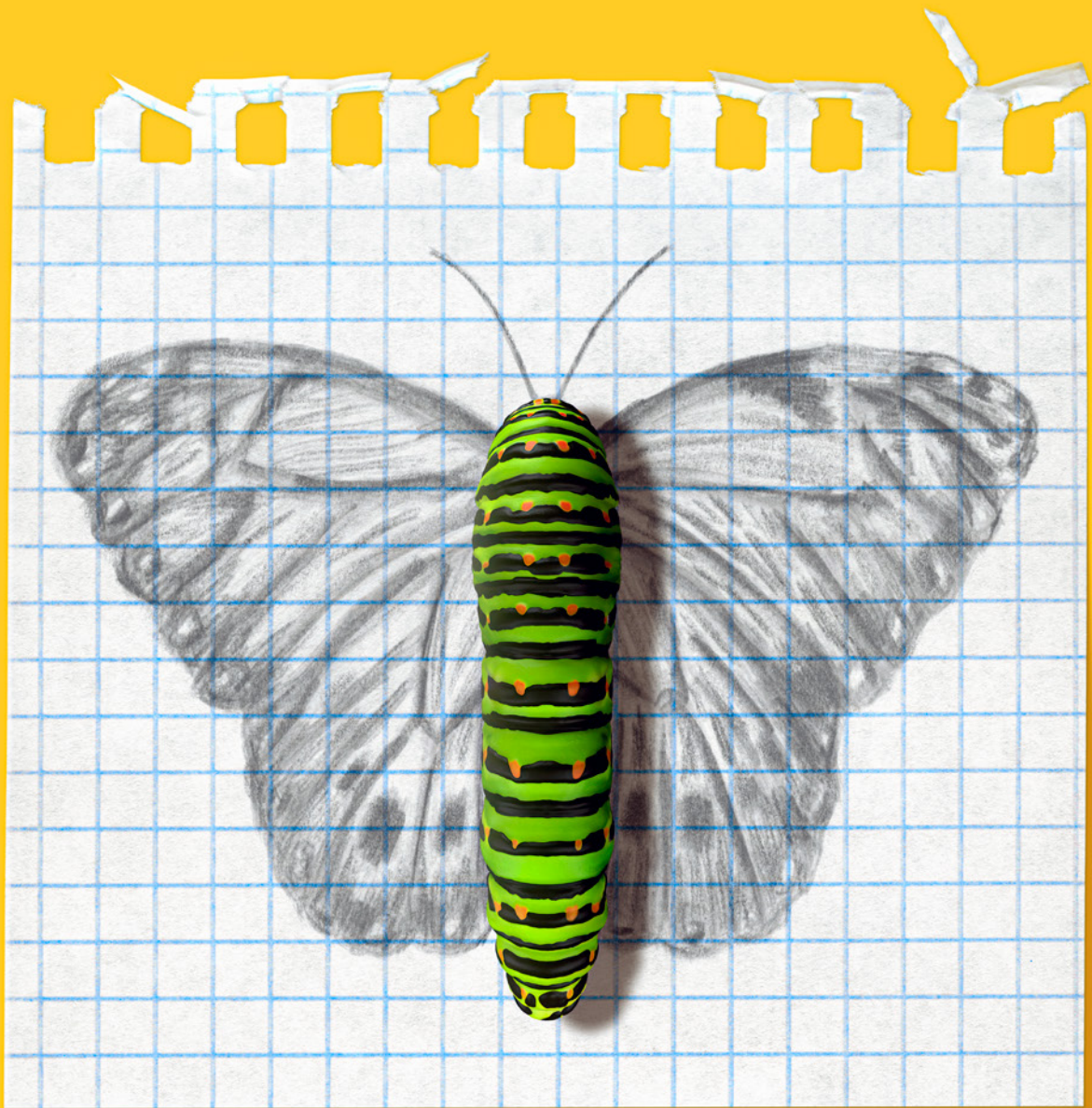


Spain and Portugal

Young people, opportunities and future





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Editorial

Open futures for young people in Spain and Portugal

Youth is a pivotal time in all of our lives; a period when a more realistic view of the world and the future is adopted. The experiences lived and decisions made during these years will be essential for initiating or decanting development pathways in one direction or another, pathways that may be extended over the life course. However, beyond personal decisions, each new generation of young people faces particular socio-historical circumstances that define it. In the case of today's youth, they have grown up in a globalised and fully digital world, one that has generated new leisure opportunities, possibilities for access to information, and modalities of social contact. On the other hand, they are also children of the global crisis of 2008, whose implications in terms of precarity in the labour market still persist today, and they experienced the great shock of the restrictions linked to the pandemic of 2020.

The consequences of these events are shaping the current situation for young people, their well-being, and their prospects for development. Their situation also changes depending on context. Thus, young people in Spain and Portugal face specific challenges in matters such as their participation and performance in the education system, their incorporation into the jobs market, or their possibilities for leaving the parental home, challenges that differ to some extent from those faced by their peers in other European countries.

In combination, these historical, social, and geographical circumstances determine both the enabling aspects and the obstacles present in the lives of young people, and have an important impact on their living conditions and the very nature of the households they will form in the future. Thus, knowledge of their situation and of the challenges they face will make it possible to design effective policies to help channel the adult realisation of significant life projects, and therefore not only facilitate the present and future well-being of today's younger generation, but also, based on the intergenerational connections inherent to any society, contribute to the welfare of the general population.

The *Dossier* presented here aims to provide research results and elements for reflection in this regard. To this end, it includes a series of indicators and data that offer a broad yet in-depth vision of key aspects in the life circumstances of Spanish and Portuguese young people from a European comparative perspective.

General context indicators

Global and temporal view of the situation in Spain and Portugal within the European context

Diederik Boertien, researcher at the Centre d'Estudis Demogràfics (CED-CERCA)

Level of economic development in 2022

Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in purchasing power standards Spain, Portugal, and EU-27 (=100)



Source: Eurostat, 2023.

The volume of GDP per capita in purchasing power standards is expressed in relation with the average of the 27-Member Europe (EU-27), which takes the value of 100. If a country's index is higher than 100, the level of GDP per capita of that country is higher than the average value of the EU-27, and vice versa.

People at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2022

AROPE indicator of poverty or social exclusion Spain, Portugal and EU-27



Source: Eurostat, 2023.

The AROPE indicator is used to identify the percentage of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This group includes people who live in households with very low incomes, with material deprivation and extreme social exclusion, or where paid work is scarce.

Unemployment rate in August 2023



Source: Eurostat, 2023.

The unemployment rate indicates the percentage of people who are out of work with respect to the total of people who are available to work.

Average annual household income adjusted by number of members, 2022



Source: Eurostat, 2023.

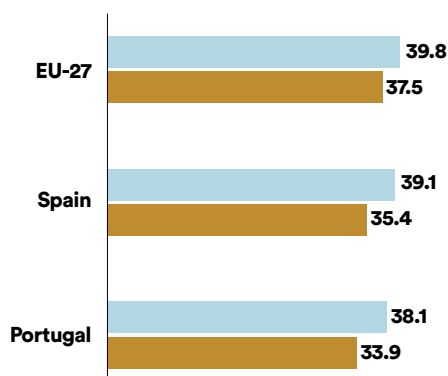
Household incomes are calculated based on the sum of incomes of all household members. This figure is adjusted by the number of household members using a formula that takes into account which members usually share expenses (for example, the rent).

Indicators on youth

This section presents a series of key indicators on the youth population of Spain and Portugal. The indicators originate from European and international databases (Eurostat and OECD).

Diederik Boertien, researcher at the Centre d'Estudis Demogràfics (CED-CERCA)

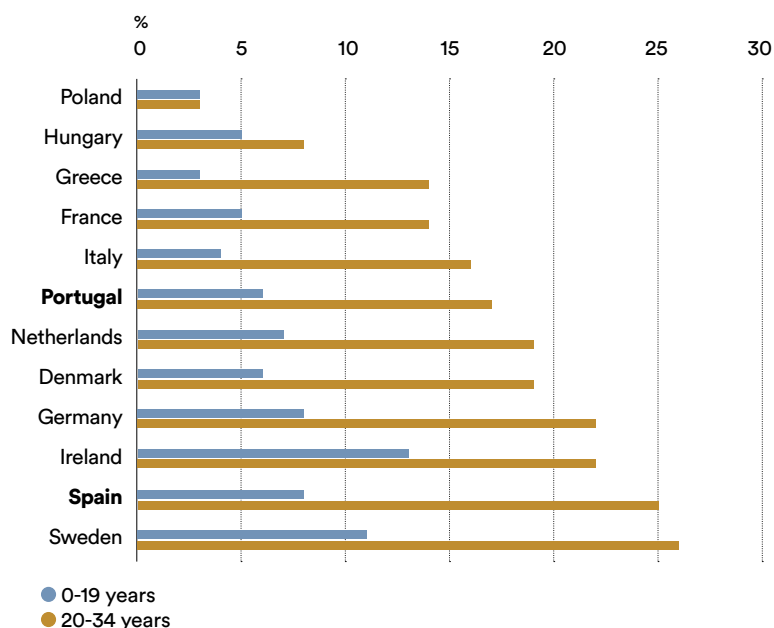
● Volume of **youth population** (percentage of the population aged under 35 years)



● 2013
● 2022

Source: Eurostat, 2023.

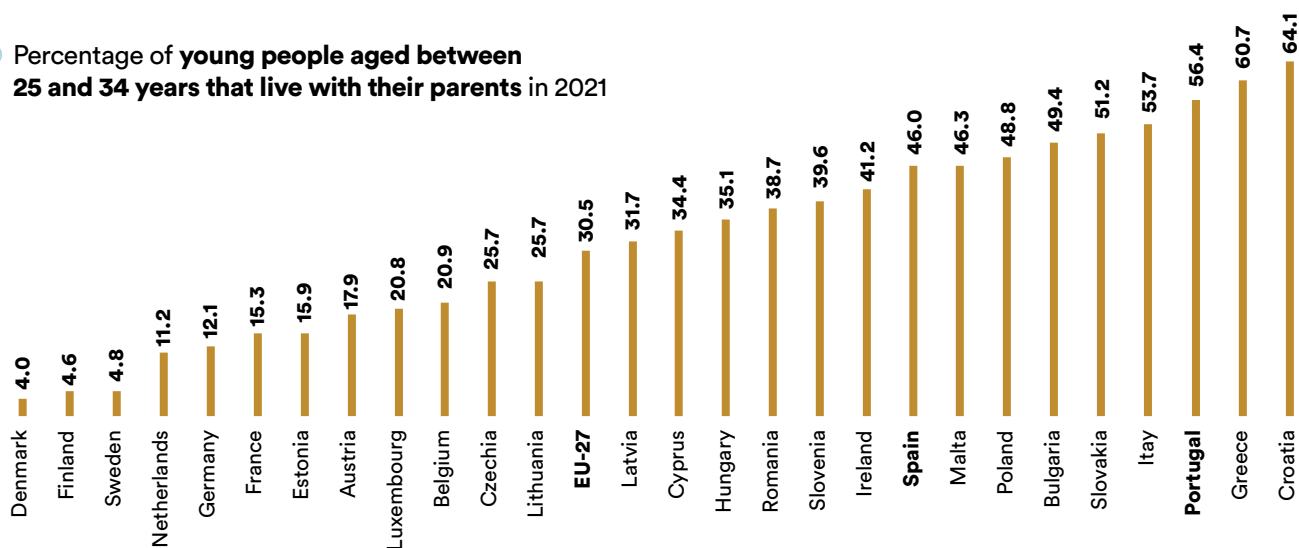
● Percentage of **young people born abroad, 2022**



● 0-19 years
● 20-34 years

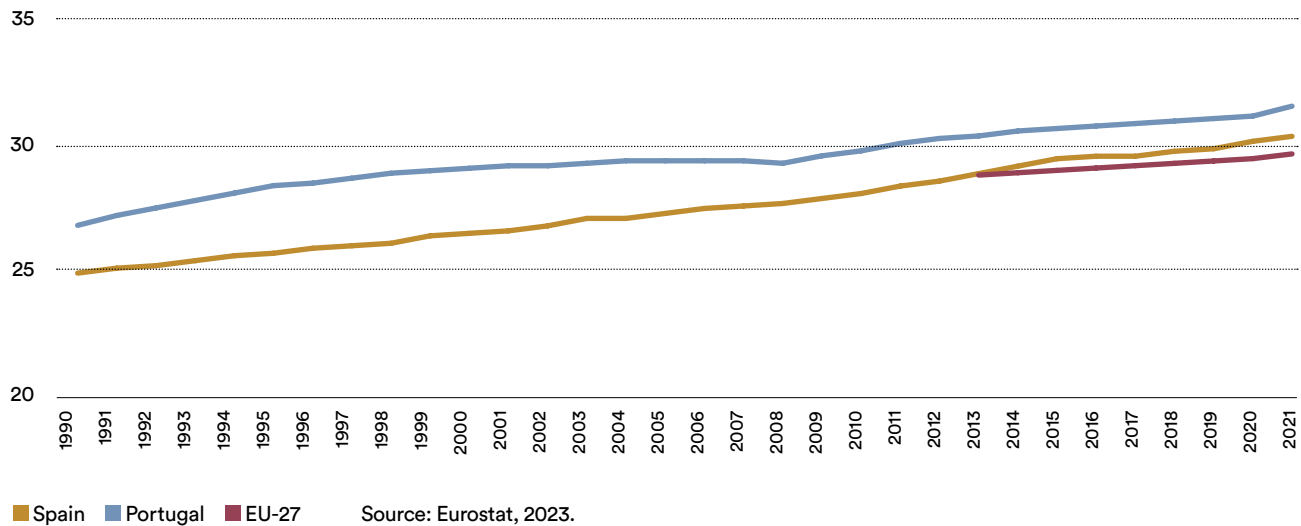
Source: Eurostat, 2023.

● Percentage of **young people aged between 25 and 34 years that live with their parents** in 2021

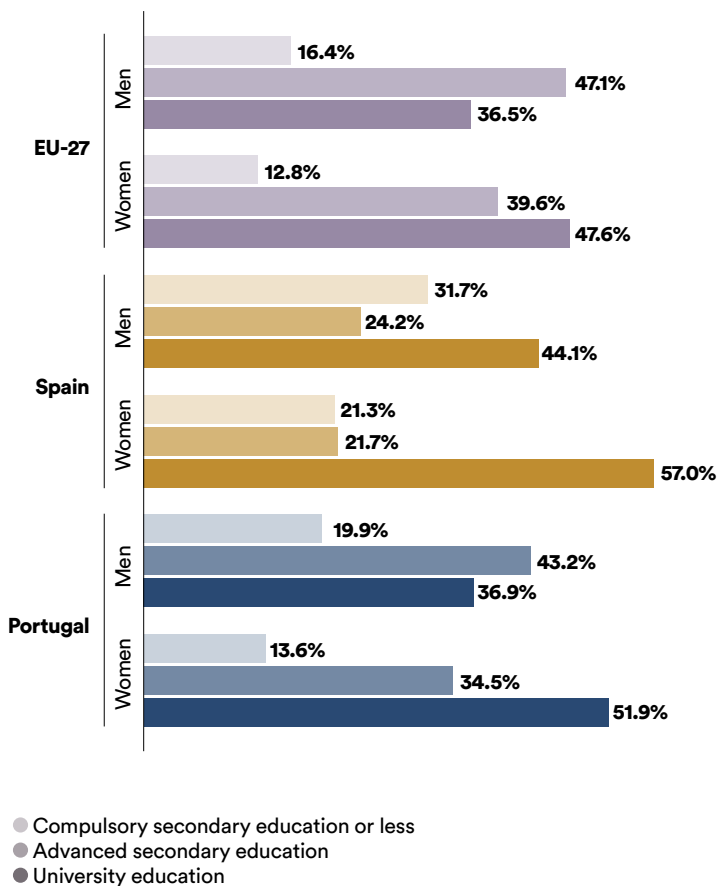


Source: Eurostat, 2023.

● Average age of **women at the birth of their first child**, in years



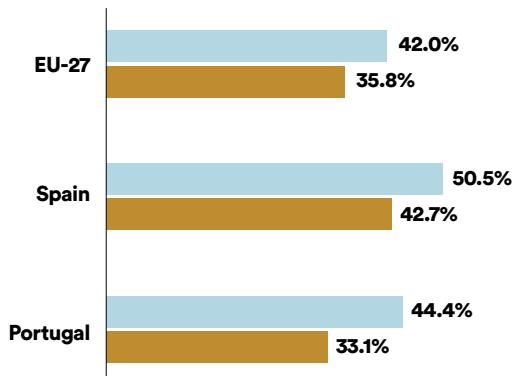
● **Educational level** of young people aged between 25 and 34 years by gender, 2022



Young people in Spain and Portugal: high levels of education, but also of unemployment

Young people as a percentage of the population in Spain and Portugal are decreasing faster than in other European countries, especially in Portugal where there are fewer foreign-born young people than in Spain. A large part of the young adult population in both countries has university studies, but there are also high levels of inactivity and unemployment. These disadvantages are more visible in Spain, where there is also an important part of the population that only has Compulsory Secondary Education (ESO) or less. This situation will improve significantly in the next few years, because the percentage of people that have only completed ESO is lower among younger age groups. Another challenge for the youth population in both countries is the low level of young people leaving their parental home, in comparison with other countries in the European Union.

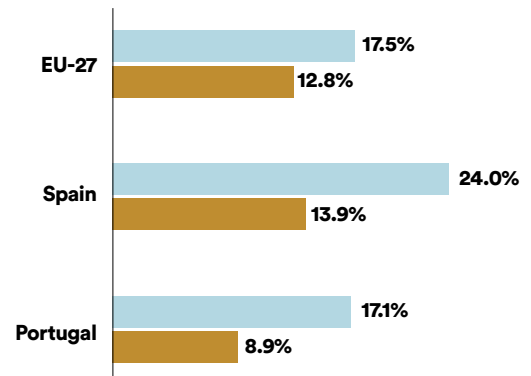
● Percentage of population with **university studies** by age, 2022



● 25-34 years
● 34-54 years

Source: Eurostat, 2023.

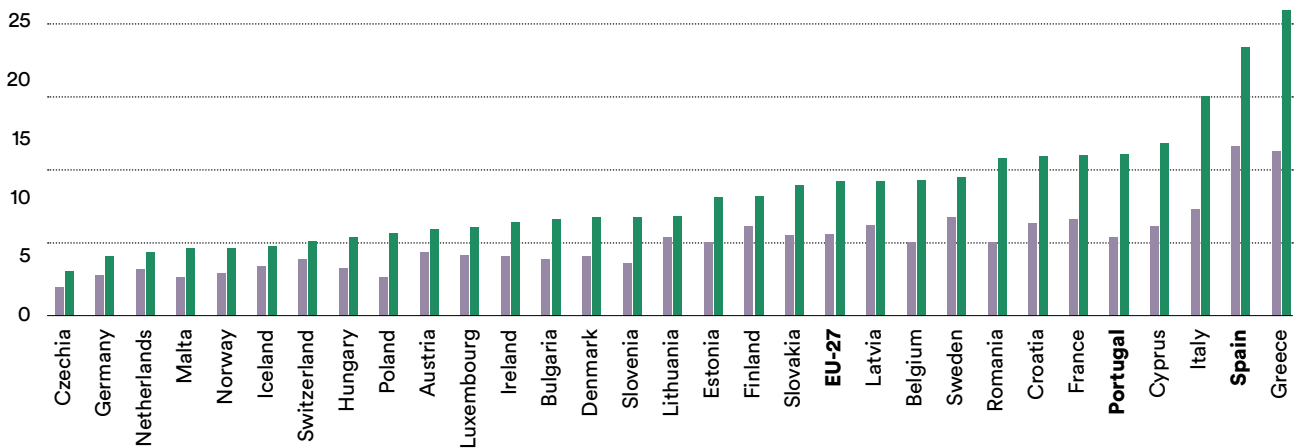
● Percentage of young people aged between 15 and 34 years who **neither work nor study**



● 2013
● 2022

Source: Eurostat, 2023.

● **Unemployment among young people aged 20-29 years** in comparison with the global population in 2022, %



● Total
● 20-29 years

Source: Eurostat, 2023.

● **Hourly wage of people aged under 30 years** as a percentage of the hourly wage of the whole population (=100), 2022

84.7%

EU-27

81.3%

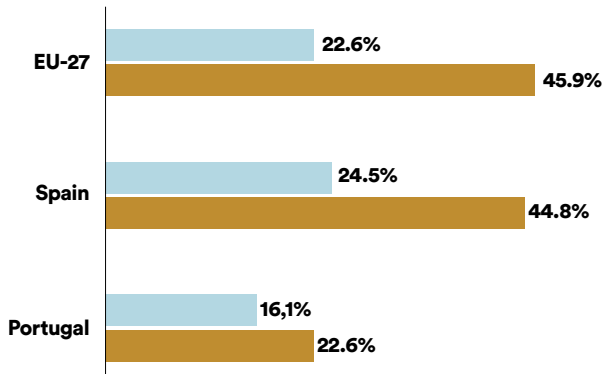
Spain

87.7%

Portugal

Source: Eurostat, 2021.

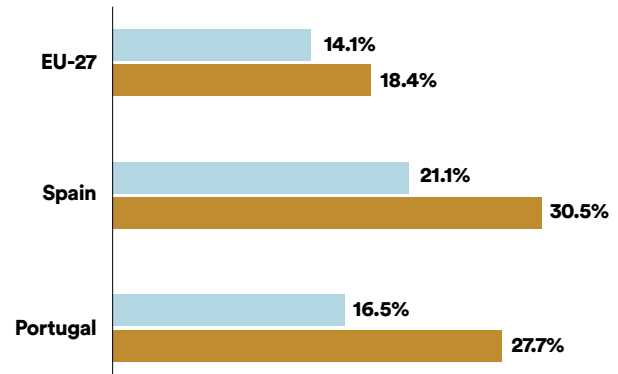
● Percentage of young people aged between 19 and 29 years at **risk of poverty or social exclusion** according to place of birth, 2022



● Born in the country
● Born abroad

Source: Eurostat, 2023.

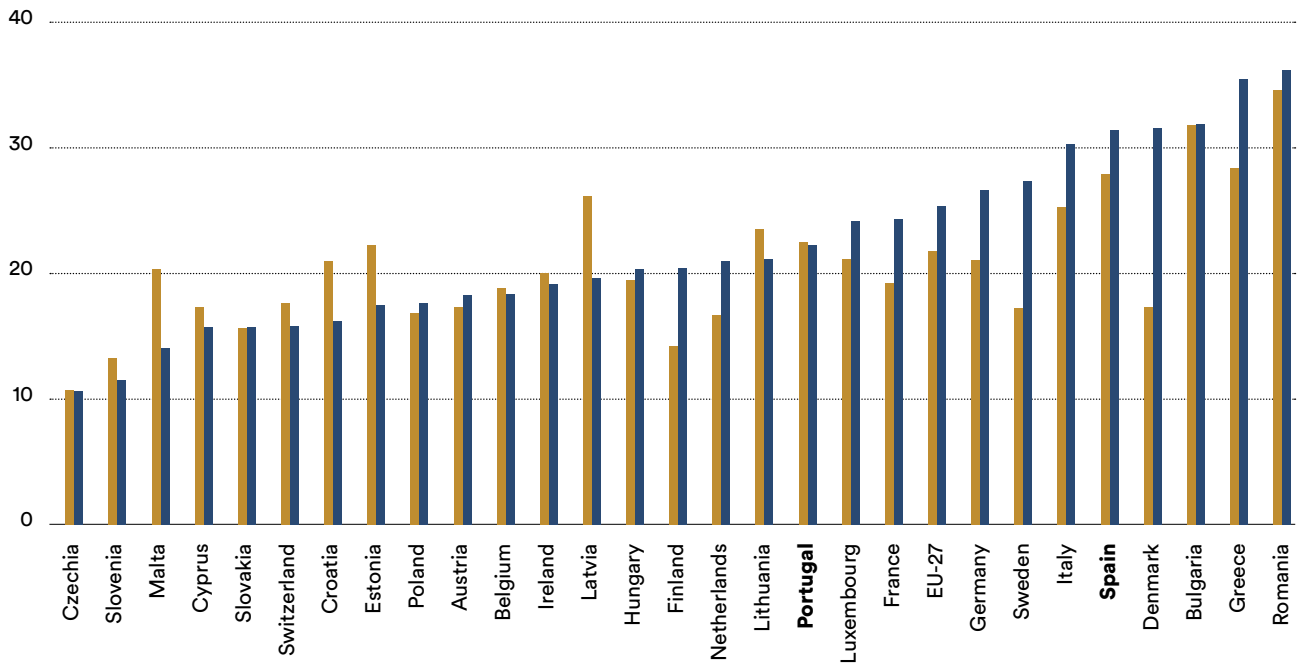
● Percentage of people with a **temporary employment contract**, by age group, 2022



● All ages
● 25-34 years

Source: Eurostat, 2023.

● Percentage of people at **risk of poverty or social exclusion** by age group and country

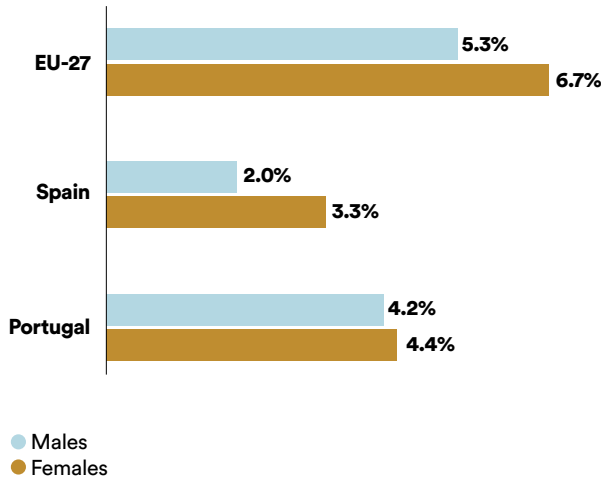


● All ages
● From 15 to 29 years

Source: Eurostat, 2023.

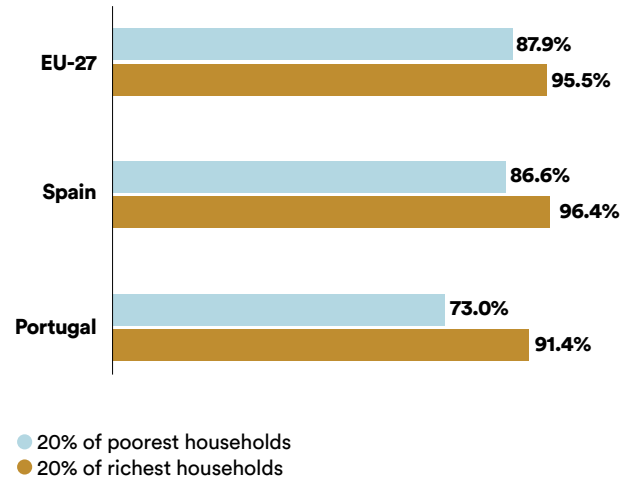
The AROPE indicator is used to identify the percentage of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This group includes people who live in households 1) with very low incomes, 2) with severe material deprivation or extreme social exclusion, or 3) with low intensity of paid work.

● Percentage of people aged between 25 and 34 years with **symptoms of depression**, 2022



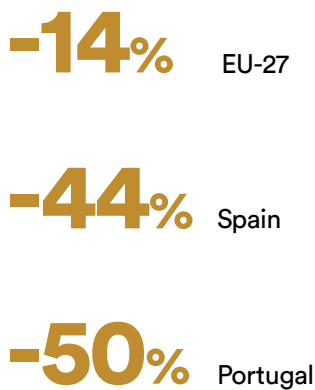
Source: Eurostat, 2023.

● Percentage of young people aged between 16 and 29 years who claim that they are in **good health**, according to the level of income of the household where they live, 2022



Source: Eurostat, 2023.

● **Probability of suffering from depressive symptoms** for young people aged 25 to 34 years (reduction in relation with the group aged 35-54 years), 2019



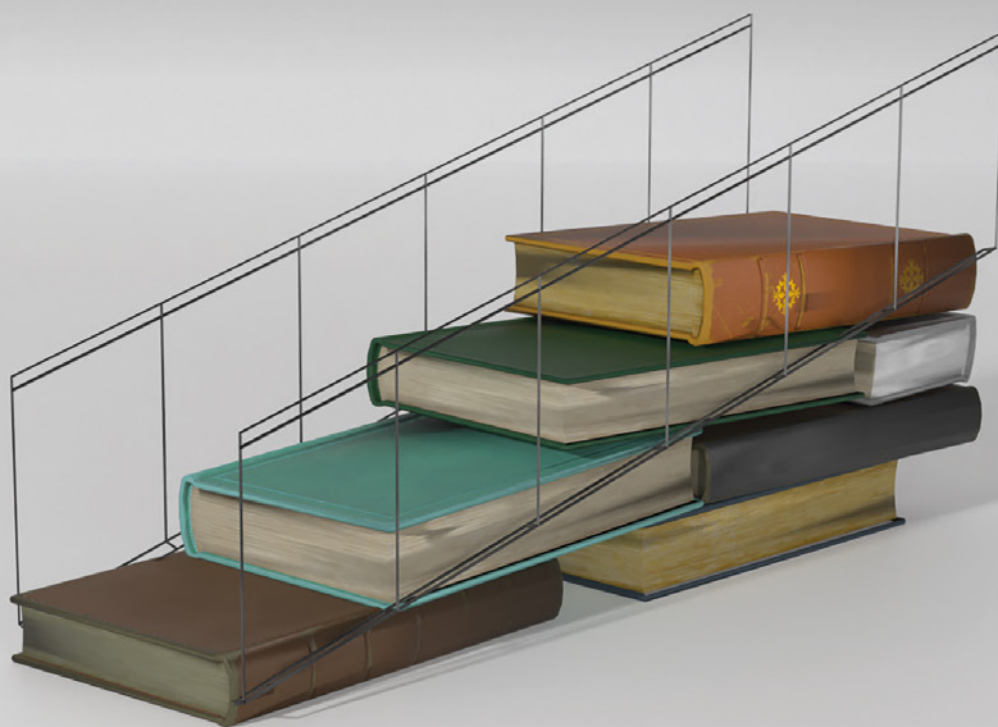
Source: Eurostat, 2019.

Good mental health, but with a high risk of temporary employment, of poverty and of social exclusion

In comparison with the European average, among the youth population of Portugal and Spain there is a high risk of temporary employment. In Spain there is also a high risk of poverty, while in Portugal the percentage is situated below the European average. In both countries alike, the risk of poverty or of social exclusion is higher among young people than among the adult population in general. This risk is especially high among people born abroad. The good news is that depression levels are relatively low in both countries, despite the fact that there are significant differences between women and men.

Education and its impact on young people's opportunities

Lígia Ferro, Universidade do Porto and Pedro Abrantes, Universidade Aberta and ISCTE–
Instituto Universitário de Lisboa



Using two key indicators (early school leaving and educational levels obtained by young people), the evolution of young people's educational paths in Portugal and Spain is interpreted. Based on comparative data from Eurostat and the OECD, the figures explore the impact of the education levels achieved, both on the employment opportunities of the young adult population in Portugal and in Spain and on their participation in social, community, cultural, sporting, and artistic life.

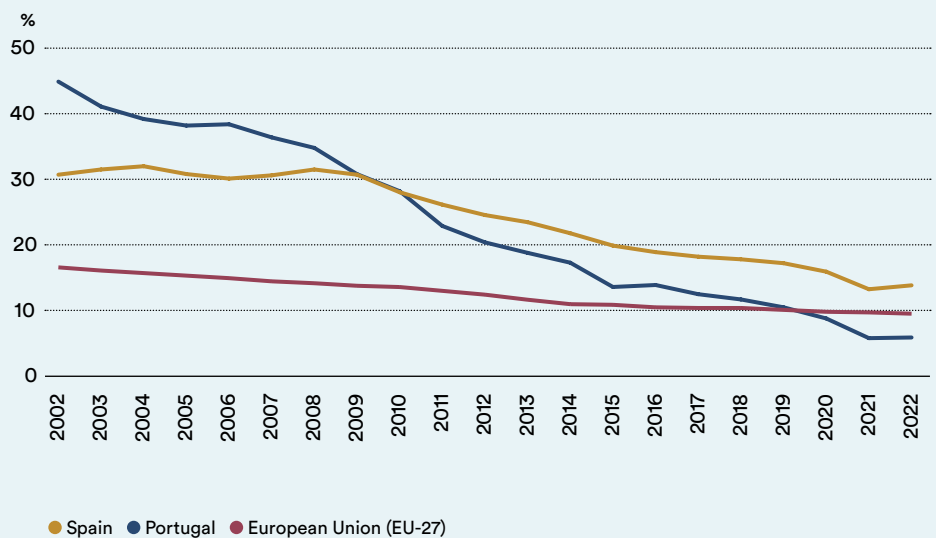


How far has early school leaving been reduced?

The proportion of young people aged between 18 and 24 years who have not completed upper secondary education (*bachillerato* or *formación profesional* in Spain; *ensino secundário* or *dupla certificação*, level 3-4, in Portugal) and are not enrolled in any education or training programmes has been a key indicator of educational development at European level, not least because it is measured using a common instrument (Labour Force Survey, Eurostat). As can be seen in figure 1, the evolution of this indicator over the last twenty years has been positive, but at very different

speeds: slow at European level, moderate in Spain and high in Portugal. The progress observed in the latter country, which exceeds even the European average, is still more remarkable if we take into account that, between 1992 and 2002, the percentage had only fallen from 50% to 45%, while in Spain it fell from 40% to 31%. It could be thought that this trend would be associated with a lack of job opportunities, but the percentage of young people with jobs in Portugal (30%) is also higher than in Spain (26%), a country that stands out for its high rate of young people who neither study nor work (20% in 2021).

Figure 1
Young people (18-24 years) who have not completed upper secondary education and are not in education or training, 2002-2022



Early school leaving in Spain and Portugal has come close to the European average

Source: compiled by the authors based on data from Eurostat (Labour Force Survey).

The fight against early school leaving has been a European priority for boosting both economic growth and social cohesion. This requires long-term consistency between education, labour, and social policies, and between local or municipal, regional, national, and European levels (European Commission, 2014). In this sense, individualised support and guidance for young people play a key role in connecting different sectors and levels (Psifidou et al., 2021). The Portuguese case reflects this coordination, with integrated programmes for social inclusion, educational quality, and professional qualifications, as it promotes networking between schools and a wide range of community organisations (Álvares et al., 2017).

In Spain, despite evident advances, research has observed more difficulties, with significant variations between regions, both in turning schools into more inclusive, open, and innovative spaces, and in the integrated development of educational, social and community policies that contribute to effectively combating the interconnected phenomena of school failure and early school leaving (Garrido et al., 2020; Martínez et al., 2016).

Risks of polarisation among young people by qualification levels and areas

If we take a closer look at the educational level of the young adult population (aged 25 to 29 years) in Portugal, we can confirm that there have been

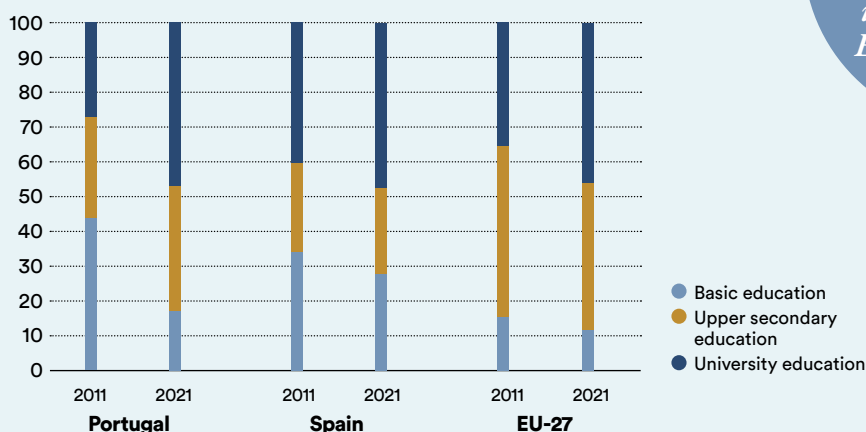
very positive developments over the last decade, especially in secondary level qualifications, with over 40% of these now corresponding to vocational qualifications. On the other hand, the progress observed in Spain for this period and age group is concentrated in higher education

Studies have shown that those who attain higher qualifications continue to achieve higher employment rates than those who only achieve a baccalaureate-level qualification

qualifications, which are now held by almost half of young people, a percentage that is even higher than the European average. Despite these advances, both countries are characterised, within the European framework, by marked educational inequalities, i.e. high rates of young people with high qualifications and low qualifications (figure 2), which poses risks of segregation and social polarisation.

The diversification of post-compulsory secondary education provision, especially with the development of a strong vocational training system, has mobilized strong investments in both

Figure 2
Educational attainment of young people (25 to 34 years) in Portugal, Spain, and the EU-22 in 2011 and 2021



Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the OECD (*Education at a Glance*, 2022).

The polarisation of qualifications among young people in Portugal and Spain is higher than the European average

Note: “University education” refers to all higher education qualifications (ISCED 5-8), awarded by universities or polytechnics; “Upper secondary education” refers to all intermediate level baccalaureate or vocational education and training qualifications (ISCED 3-4); “Basic education” refers to lower levels of education (ISCED 0-2).

countries. Although other European systems with a long tradition and recognition are a central reference in this field, studies have pointed out the importance of these policies taking into account the economic and cultural singularities of each country and even of each region, to ensure that these trajectories are valued both in academic and professional terms. In addition, research conducted in Portugal has shown that while many teachers and students value the more practical and work-oriented nature of this type of education, social, cultural and ethnoracial biases exist associated with a duality between academic and vocational secondary education pathways (Abrantes & Roldão, 2019).

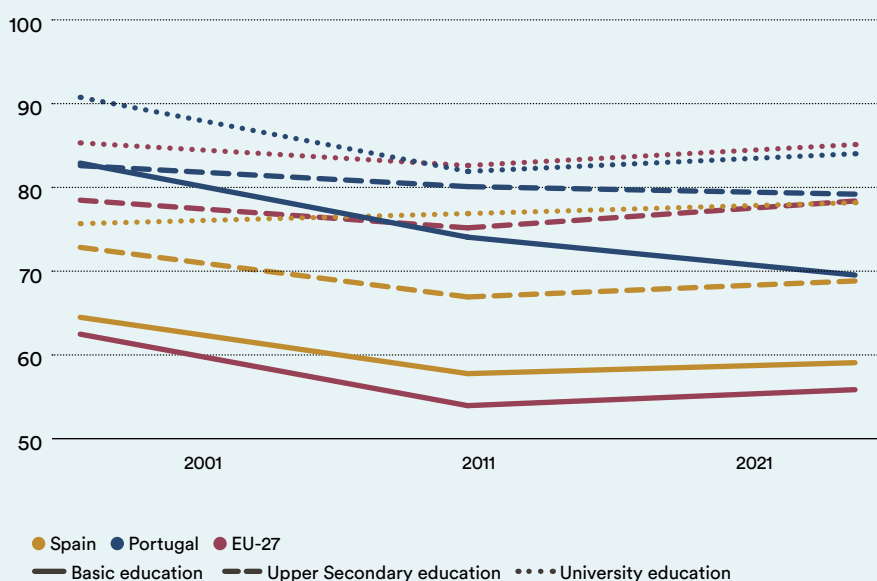
Education continues to impact young people's employment opportunities

In the court of public opinion, in Portugal and Spain alike, the reduction in early school leaving and the massification of secondary and higher education qualifications have often raised doubts about the value of this education for the opportunities of the young population, particularly in the jobs market. Even so, following a pattern common in Europe, those who attain higher qualifications continue to achieve higher employment rates than those who only achieve a baccalaureate-level qualification, while young people with a low level of schooling have the most difficulties in securing a job (figure 3). Over the last two decades, youth employment

rates have decreased in Portugal and increased in Spain, converging in both countries with the European average. However, inequality between young people with high and low qualifications has increased in both cases (and in the European area as a whole).

It is true that research studies have shown an intensification of employment precarity among young people, aggravated by austerity policies, as well as a “brain drain” from the Iberian Peninsula towards other latitudes (Tavares et al., 2021). Qualitative studies of a biographical type reveal how these situations lead to difficulties in leaving the parental home, finding a partner, or having children (Casal et al., 2011), leading to sinuous and uncertain life pathways, which in turn means consequences for birth rates and the ageing of the population. Even so, these generational trends are not exempt from profound social and educational inequalities, accentuated by the polarisation of labour markets, which includes the valuation of specific skills together with the devaluation of work considered “not specialised”. One must also take into account that, especially in Portugal, research has highlighted the education system’s inefficacy in reducing social inequalities, with a strengthening of the affinity between the school world and the most disadvantaged social classes, i.e. school does not seem to open up new social and cultural possibilities, but rather reinforces the expectations and aspirations of children from the

Figure 3
Employment rate of young people aged between 25 and 34 years old, by education level



Higher education continues to have a positive impact on access to the labour market in Portugal and Spain

Source: compiled by the authors based on data from Eurostat (Labour Force Survey).

popular classes (Martins, 2012). Although qualifications have a positive effect on employability, their impact is limited, as high or specialised qualifications often do not guarantee remuneration on a par with expectations (Lopes et al., 2019), a remuneration that is, in any case, lower than that earned in the countries of the north or centre of the European Union.

More sociability than citizenship activities? Education and social participation

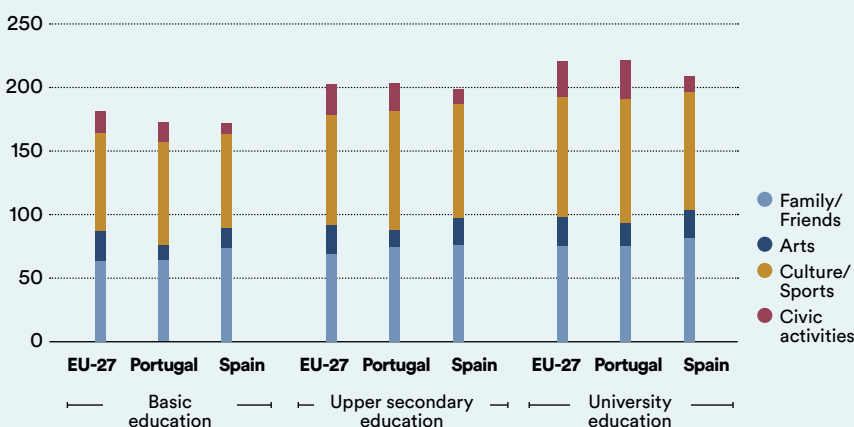
Since education and work do not exhaust the dimensions in which young people build their lives, it is also worth considering the impact that education has on other social spheres and on levels of citizen participation. The idea is often expressed that young people are disengaged in politics, but very active in the field of leisure and social life, for example. But is this really the case? According to Eurostat data (figure 4), participation is actually much higher in cultural and sports activities, as well as in family and friendship relationships, with relatively low figures for citizen participation (in formal and informal organisations) and artistic activities. These patterns are common all over Europe but are especially pronounced in Portugal and Spain. Even so, the data also show persistent – and marked, in the case of the Iberian Peninsula – inequalities, with participation rates in the various dimensions being higher among young people with higher qualifications, compared to those with lower educational levels.

In percentage terms, the participation of the young population in civic, cultural, and sporting activities in Portugal and Spain is relatively low, especially when considering young people with low qualifications. However, we know that the most socially disadvantaged young people, particularly in the peripheral social spaces of the major cities of the Iberian Peninsula, do actively participate in activities of this nature.

It will be important to consolidate youth policies that articulate the different dimensions in which young people often move in an unpredictable and non-linear way

We are talking about informal spaces for building citizenship and participation in the public sphere with the development of various creative dynamics, as we can see in the Iberian vitality of urban cultures linked especially to graffiti, street art and parkour, rap, and new musical genres such as reggaeton or kuduro, among other forms of social, cultural, sporting, and artistic participation. However, it is important to note that, in Portugal and Spain, females participate much less in these activities than males, and they

Figure 4
Participation of young people in civic, cultural, sporting, artistic, and community activities, according to their level of education (cumulative %)



Education continues to influence many dimensions of young people's lives

Note: "University education" refers to all higher education qualifications (ISCED 5-8), awarded by universities or polytechnics; "Upper secondary education" refers to all intermediate level baccalaureate or vocational education and training qualifications (ISCED 3-4); "Basic education" refers to lower levels of education (ISCED 0-2).

Source: compiled by the authors based on data from Eurostat (2015)

are often completely absent. The access of lower qualified and socially disadvantaged young people to the public sphere continues to be marked by very significant gender differences.

Conclusions

As we have seen over the course of this article, education continues to be a fundamental factor, not only for the labour market integration and development of young people, but also for their opportunities for social, cultural, sporting, and community participation. In this sense, Portugal and Spain have seen significant progress in educational convergence with the values observed in the rest of the European Union. However, there is still a large percentage of young people who leave the education system without obtaining a post-compulsory secondary qualification, and that these young people today face situations of vulnerability and risk of exclusion that are more pronounced than in the past. In addition, the age variable is joined by others such as social class, gender, or territorial origin in complex intersectional articulations with specific consequences. Young people in the Iberian Peninsula tend to participate socially and be involved in cultural and creative activities, especially in informal and street contexts, revealing a search for spaces that are freer from structures and hierarchies. Even so, several studies indicate that young women are relatively absent from these activities.

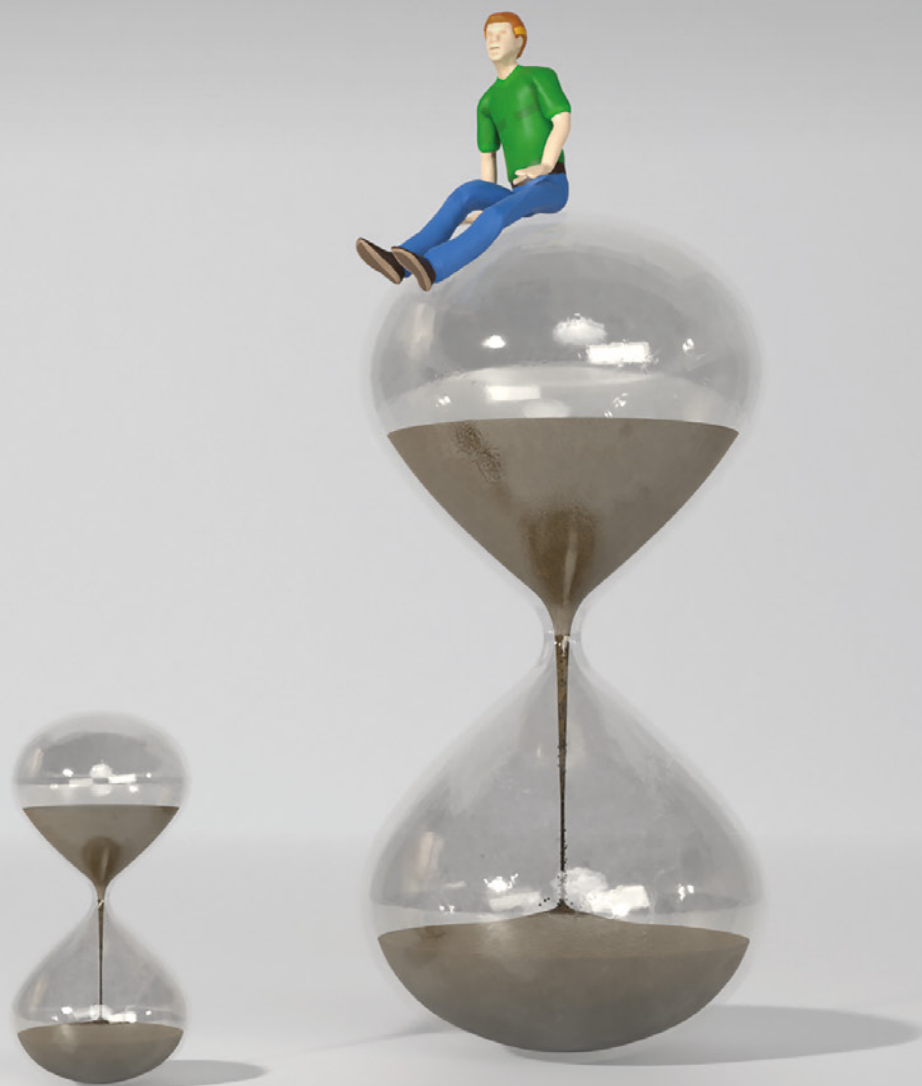
In this sense, it will be important to consolidate youth policies that articulate the different dimensions (educational, work, family, civic, sporting, artistic) in which young people often move in an unpredictable and non-linear way. Expansion of educational levels is essential for their integration, but it needs to value and open doors for young people in other spheres of social life, not keep them away. Furthermore, it is important to construct solutions in which inequalities can be mitigated, paying special attention to young people neither employed nor enrolled in formal studies, taking into account that a large percentage also suffer from a lack of resources and opportunities at the family, civic, cultural, or community level. This group must be prioritized by public policies rooted in solid quantitative and qualitative scientific knowledge, and developed through co-creation processes in which young people play a truly active role.

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Have the labour reforms reduced the temporary employment rate among young workers?

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Spain and Portugal have experienced high temporary employment rates in recent decades, a circumstance that takes a long-term toll on people's professional and personal development. In response to this problem, reforms have been implemented with a view to reducing the rate of temporary employment in both countries. The results show that, after they were adopted, a drop occurred in the temporary employment rate among the youth population in both countries (a small drop in the case of Portugal and a much larger one in Spain), apparently without any negative impact on unemployment or labour force participation rates.



The Spanish labour market has been characterised by high unemployment rates since 1970. In an effort to deal with this problem, in the mid 1980s flexibility measures were adopted, in particular widespread use of temporary contracts. These reforms gave rise to an employment model that was very sensitive to economic fluctuations and highly segmented, in which certain social groups experienced greater labour market uncertainty (Bernardi and Martínez-Pastor, 2010). Specifically, the growing dualisation in terms of stability and social protection between permanent and temporary workers added a supplementary feature of intergenerational inequality to the Spanish labour market.

The Portuguese labour market has shown similar patterns in terms of market-oriented policies and the extension of contractual flexibility since the beginning of the 1980s. It is commonly said that these labour reforms in Portugal were partial, insofar as permanent workers were not affected, while flexible work served as an adjustment variable with little or even no social protection. This has led to similar consequences as those found in Spain, with a segmented labour market characterised by increasing labour devaluation and social and economic inequality between permanent and temporary workers (Campos Lima and Caldas, 2023).

Younger workers, together with other social groups (for example, immigrants, women and low-skilled workers), have held a central position in this flexibilisation and growth of

temporary employment in both countries. Both Spain and Portugal were seriously hit by the economic recession of 2008, becoming – along with Greece – the European countries that suffered its impact on employment most severely, and young workers who held temporary jobs were the most affected by labour shedding and lack of job opportunities. The circumstances got

For many of those who entered the labour market during the Great Recession, the covid-19 crisis rubbed salt into the wounds of the previous economic shock

worse in Spain with the labour reform of 2012, which made layoffs cheaper, while in Portugal these temporary contracts acted as a cushion to help businesses to deal with fluctuations in demand, thus contributing to the increase in youth unemployment.

For many of those who entered the labour market during the Great Recession, the covid-19 crisis rubbed salt into the wounds of the previous economic shock. With the impact of the pandemic, Spain experienced a 5% rise in the unemployment rate and a reduction of around 4-5%

in the labour force participation rate, while the temporary employment rate dropped as a result of the economic standstill, which hindered the renewal or creation of temporary contracts (figures 1 and 3). Thus, the economic shock of March

people's working lives was huge, not only for young adults who were starting to work, but also for those aged under 30 who had already suffered the Great Recession (Molina and Godino, 2021; Almeida and Santos, 2020).

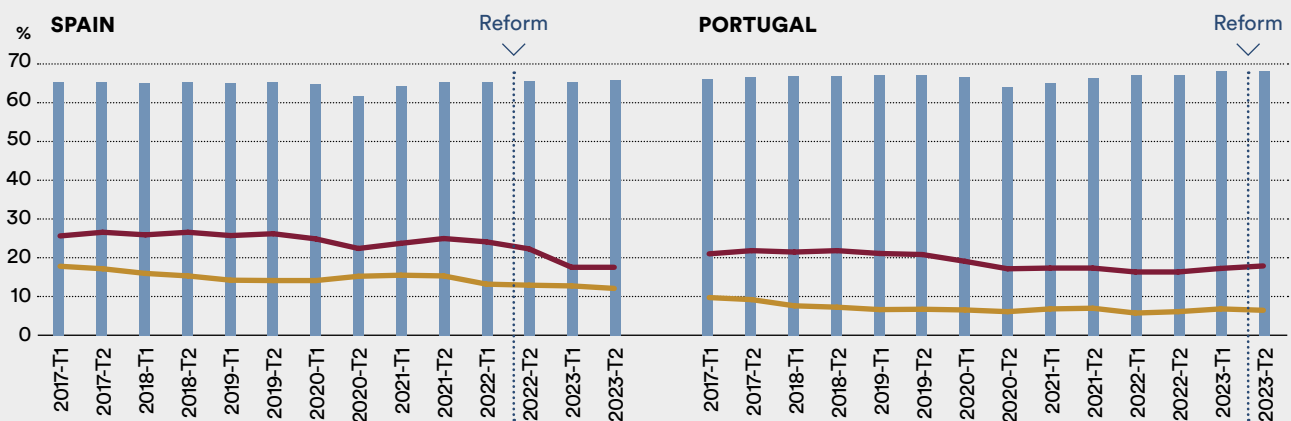
The prevalence of small enterprises and the predominance of the services sector, together with a business culture that normalises the use of temporary contracting, may be factors explaining the high turnover and low conversion of temporary contracts into permanent ones in Portugal and Spain

2020 drove a large part of the temporary workforce out of the labour market, and many of the unemployed who were looking for work gave up in the face of lack of opportunities. The situation was similar to that experienced by young people during the Great Recession, although the latter lasted longer. The succession of periods of unemployment followed by protracted stages of temporary work cannot be regarded as just a bad patch in young people's work history, but often has permanent effects on their career. Therefore, the composite effect of the two crises on young

Implementation of labour reforms against temporary contracting in Spain and Portugal

The high temporary employment rate in Spain and Portugal is not due solely to the importance of sectors with a strong seasonal component, such as tourism, but also responds to a structural pattern, as both countries have a higher temporary employment rate than the EU average in all sectors of the economy. The prevalence of small enterprises and the predominance of the services sector, together with a business culture that normalises the use of temporary contracting, may

Figure 1
Quarterly variation of the labour force participation rate, the unemployment rate and the proportion of temporary employees for the total population of Spain and Portugal in the period 2017-2023



Temporary contracting has fallen in Spain since the labour reform without affecting employment, whereas in Portugal no immediate effect is apparent

● Labour force participation
— Temporary employment
— Unemployment

Source: Labour Force Survey, Eurostat (2023).

be factors explaining the high turnover and low conversion of temporary contracts into permanent ones in both countries (Silva, Martins and Lopes, 2018). These trends have gone towards shaping strongly unequal labour markets in both countries, with a particularly vulnerable position for the youth population. Some approaches take this instability to be a defining aspect of youth employment histories today, assuming it as a circumstantial phenomenon that gradually tends to improve. However, the reality is that precarious and intermittent work histories continue beyond youth for certain groups, sometimes with the chronification of unstable employment situations.

This systematic use of temporary contracting was one of the main reasons for the labour reform introduced by the Spanish government in December 2021. The aim of the law was to reduce the temporary employment rate by abolishing “works and services contracts”, lowering the maximum duration of temporary contracts to one year, limiting the possible grounds for their use, and extending discontinuous permanent contracts for seasonal work. In April 2023, the Portuguese government also adopted the Decent Work Agenda to reduce – albeit with more timid measures – the use of temporary contracting, by limiting successive contracts, increasing compensation for the termination of

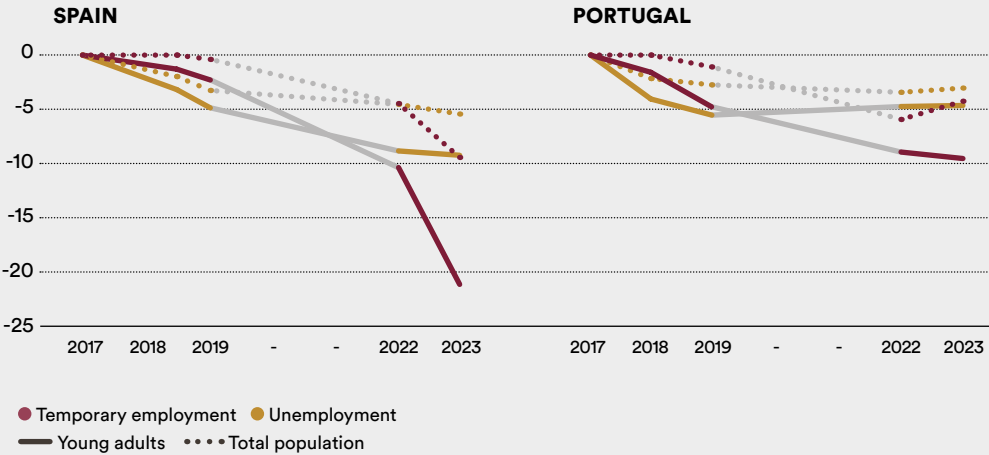
contracts of a certain duration, and lowering the maximum duration of temporary contracts from six to four years.

The labour reform may have contributed towards lowering the youth temporary employment rate in the short term in Spain, but not in Portugal

Although a more complete analysis requires observing the long-term trend, in the short term some signs of the possible effect of the adoption of the labour reforms can be seen in both countries. In this respect, the researchers explore the variation in the labour force participation rate, the unemployment rate and the proportion of employees with temporary contracts in relation to the total number of employees in both the youth population and the total population. In this analysis the figures for 2020 and 2021 are omitted in view of the composition effect that occurred in levels of stable and temporary employment due to the pandemic crisis, especially in southern European economies characterised by the predominance of seasonal activities.

In the case of Spain, although the labour reform was adopted in December 2021 it was not fully binding until April 2022, so the analysis focuses on the second quarter of each year. Thus, the figures show a reduction in the temporary

Figure 2
Variation with respect to 2017 in the proportion of temporary jobs and in the unemployment rate of the total population and of young people (aged 15 to 29)



The reduction in the temporary employment rate among young adults after the labour reform is clearly evident in Spain and almost imperceptible in Portugal

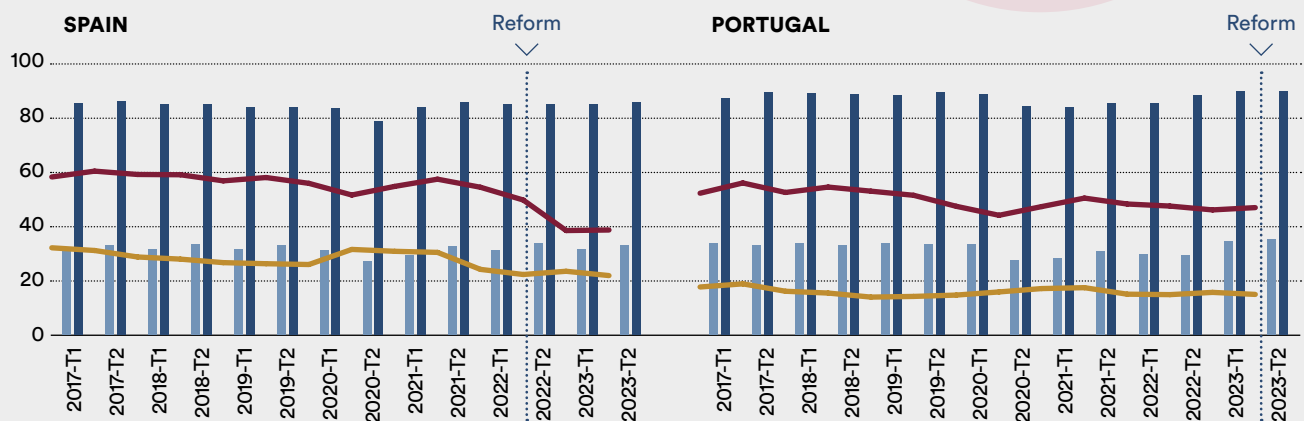
Note: the second quarter of each period is compared taking the second quarter of 2017 as the initial position with value 0. The years 2020 and 2021 are omitted due to the destructive effect of the health crisis on temporary employment.

Source: Labour Force Survey, Eurostat (2023).

employment rate of 4.5% in 2022 and a more substantial 9.5% in 2023 with respect to the second quarter of 2017 for the wage-earning population as a whole (figure 2). This has occurred together with a parallel reduction in the unemployment rate, while the labour force participation rate has remained relatively stable (figure 1), which dispels early interpretations that pointed to the possibility of people being pushed out of the labour market. These effects seem to be particularly clear in the case of the youth population: temporary contracting was 10.4% down in 2022 and 21.2% down in 2023, while unemployment fell by figures in the region of 9% in both periods (figure 1) and the labour force participation rate remained stable (figure 3). In this way, with respect to 2019, the reduction in the temporary employment rate among Spanish young adults was over 8% shortly after the adoption of the reform and almost 19% more than a year after its implementation, percentages that practically double those found in the population as a whole.

The downward trend in the temporary employment rate is less evident in the case of Portugal, although very few months are available for consultation to assess the impact of the reform. Therefore, any possible effects observed on the basis of these figures should be interpreted with caution. The first point of note is a sizeable drop (although smaller than in Spain) in the temporary employment rate in the post-pandemic period (-6% in the second quarter of 2022 and -4.3% in that of 2023 with respect to the same period of 2017). Nonetheless, it is interesting that this reduction is larger in 2022 than after the adoption of the Decent Work Agenda in April 2023 (figure 2). As in the case of Spain, these reductions are occurring parallel to less abrupt drops in the unemployment rate, while the workforce actually seems to be increasing (figure 1). One possible explanation for this would be a slower economic recovery in Portugal after the covid crisis, due to the burden of the aforementioned composition effect whereby employees with

Figure 3
Quarterly variation of the labour force participation rate, the unemployment rate and the proportion of temporary employees for the youth population of Spain and Portugal in the period 2017-2023



Temporary contracting of young adults has fallen considerably after the reform in Spain, without affecting the employment rate, whereas in Portugal no positive effect is observed

Note: Eurostat does not provide integrated data on the labour force participation rate for the 15-29 age group, so this indicator is depicted in two age brackets.

Source: Labour Force Survey, Eurostat (2023).

- Labour force participation, young adults (15-24)
- Labour force participation, young adults (25-29)
- Temporary employment, young adults (15-24)
- Unemployment, young adults (25-29)

stable jobs would account for a larger proportion of total workers than in other periods, given the expulsion of temporary workers from the labour market. The larger labour force participation rate in 2023 compared to 2022 appears to point in this direction. As regards young people, there seems to be a clear decrease in the proportion of temporary contracts in the period following the adoption of the labour reform in relation to previous periods: practically non-existent with respect to 2022 and more evident with respect to the pre-pandemic period, occurring in conjunction with decreases in the unemployment rate and increases in the labour force participation rate (figure 3). However, this reduction in temporary jobs falls short of 1% for the youth population in the quarter when the reform was adopted (April-June 2023) in relation to the previous year.

Conclusions and limitations

On the basis of the descriptive data observed, it can be stated that only in Spain has the adoption of these reforms resulted in a drop in the temporary employment rate of the youth population, without any apparent job destruction. The Spanish labour reform actually contains more structural measures directed towards changing business practices with regard to temporary contracting. Portugal, on the other hand, having implemented a softer reform aimed at discouraging the use of temporary contracts, shows practically no results in the direction of reducing the temporary employment rate among young people. The measures are similar to those adopted at earlier stages in Spain with equally meagre results, which suggests that only those institutional initiatives that seek to change the rules of the game in the labour market will succeed in making a substantial improvement to the material conditions of young workers.

The question arises as to whether the reduction in temporary contracting in Spain is affecting younger workers in general or, on the contrary, there is a differential effect. In other words, whether in fact these reforms have less impact precisely on those profiles that structurally lie around the bottom of the labour market, and are systematically affected by a higher rate of temporary employment. It is necessary, therefore, to remain alert to any possible risks that might distort the benefits achieved through the reform, such as an increase in involuntary part-time employment among young workers.

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Personal relationships of young adults with their environment

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The young adult population in southern Europe, including Spain and Portugal, has traditionally had a strong network of personal relationships, supported by a high level of sociability and the very important role played by family networks.

This article uses data from the European Social Survey in its tenth wave (2020-2022) to confirm the extent to which the sociability of young people (aged 18-34 years) in these two countries resembles, or not, that of the rest of the European Union.



The importance of personal relationships for studying the social isolation of young adults

Social isolation and undesired loneliness have been situations traditionally associated with older adults. However, young people are also among the age groups that most suffer these situations. It was not until the recent covid-19 pandemic that, for obvious reasons, the problem of social isolation among young people became a social concern and transcended into the public sphere. In reality, the phenomenon was already a worrying one before the pandemic and, of course, it has not disappeared with it either.

The evolution of Western societies in recent decades has been marked by the individualisation of relationships and the weakening of community ties. The digitalisation of society, as well as of certain activities that no longer take place in public and freely accessible spaces (e.g., leisure), has led to the privatisation and commodification of many spheres of social life, which has resulted in profound changes in the sociability of young people. Within this context, we understand sociability as the ability and possibility that people have to relate to each other. It is marked by individual characteristics of a socio-economic and socio-demographic nature, but also by the environment that surrounds people.

Sociability is key in the development of young people's life trajectory, both in terms of their relationships with friends and the material and emotional support that they receive from their network of relationships. This network of personal relationships can be defined as *social capital* and is made up of both those who are affectively close (family and friends) and others who are affectively more distant (co-workers or

The digitalisation of society has led to the privatisation and commodification of many spheres of social life

co-students). A whole set of social characteristics and structural factors exist that can reduce the possibility among the younger population of having a varied and extensive social capital. First of all, a working-class social background or an immigrant background will produce smaller, more homogeneous networks among young people. Similarly, job instability and recurrent

unemployment situations cause a significant loss of contacts. With regard to gender, the social capital of young people also reproduces the patterns observed for the population as a whole: women have less extensive networks, with less social diversity but with stronger ties, which translates into higher levels of intimacy and support in relationships.

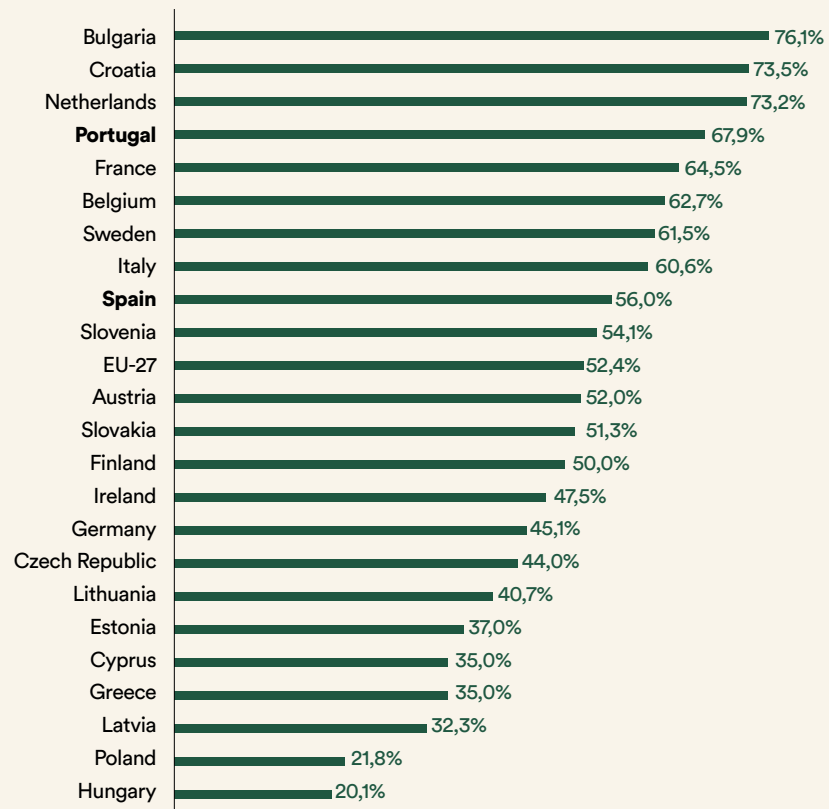
Southern European countries, such as Spain and Portugal, have often been described as *familistic*, in the sense that the family network is a more important source of resources than in other Western countries. In familistic countries, the family network would compensate for the weak welfare provision by the state and provide resources that are not institutionalised by it. Furthermore, relationships between young people and their parents tend to be more intense and frequent, often because their living together in the family home continues much longer than in other countries due to the lack of affordable alternatives that makes leaving the

parental home impossible. Young adults take refuge in the family and personal contacts as sources of support in the absence of formal and institutionalised sources of resource provision. In these countries, a poor personal relationship

A poor personal relationship with parents or a socially disadvantaged family background can deepen initial social inequalities

with parents or a socially disadvantaged family background (where the family is unable to provide the resources that the state does not) can deepen initial social inequalities. Thus, these

Figure 1
Percentage of young people who meet in their free time with friends, family, or co-workers, several times a week or every day, 2020



Young people in Portugal interact more in their free time with friends, family, or co-workers than those in Spain

Source: compiled by the authors based on the European Social Survey 2020.

unfavourable circumstances can intensify situations of social isolation, which in turn has a negative influence on young people's material and emotional well-being.

The aim of this article is, firstly, to provide a comparative analysis of patterns of sociability in general and at the family level, in order to situate the reality of Spain and Portugal within the European context. Secondly, it explores the inequalities that exist in sociability patterns among Spanish and Portuguese young adults, according to their social profile and economic and employment situation. For this purpose, data on frequency of interaction, size of networks and strength of the bond with their parents (measured by frequency of interaction and affective proximity) of young Europeans aged 18 to 34 years are analysed. The data come from the European Social Survey in its tenth wave, and were obtained between September 2020 and May 2022 depending on the country – specifically, between January and May 2022 in Spain ($n=486$) and between August 2021 and March 2022 in Portugal ($n=297$). The data for the EU as a whole ($n=10036$) include all EU-27 countries except for Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta, and Romania.

With what frequency do young people interact in their free time?

When comparing the maximum values of interaction (interacting at least several times a week with friends, family, or co-workers), important differences are observed by country across the group of young people. In the European Union, on average, 52.4% meet in their free time with friends, family, or co-workers every day or several times a week. Spain slightly exceeds this percentage, while Portugal is one of the countries where the frequency of interaction is much higher (over 65%), exceeded only by the Netherlands, Croatia, and Bulgaria.

How many people can young adults talk to about intimate and personal issues?

Despite the higher frequency of interaction by young people in Portugal, the size of their personal networks is smaller compared to Spain and the European Union as a whole. When it comes to talking about intimate and personal

Figure 2
Distribution of young adults in Spain, Portugal, and the entire EU by number of people with whom they can talk about intimate and personal issues, 2020

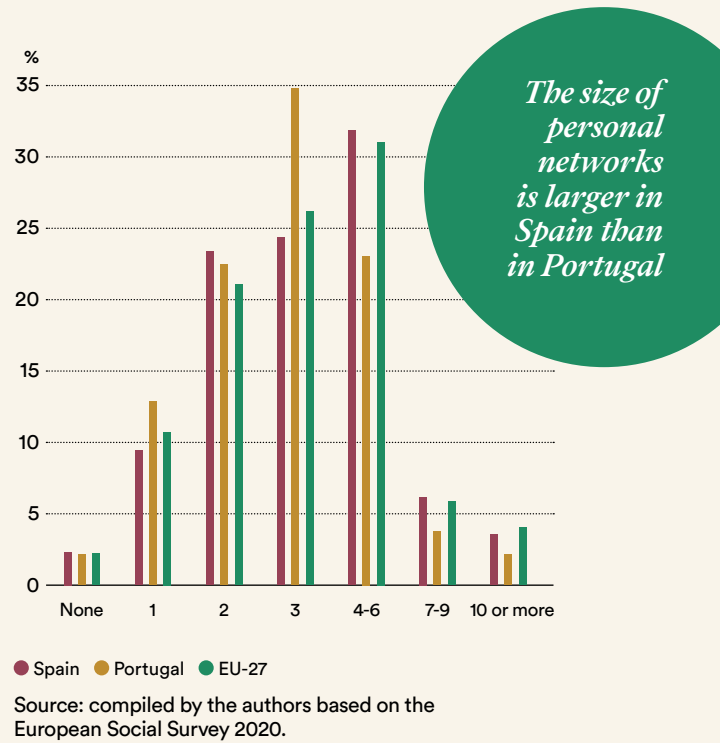
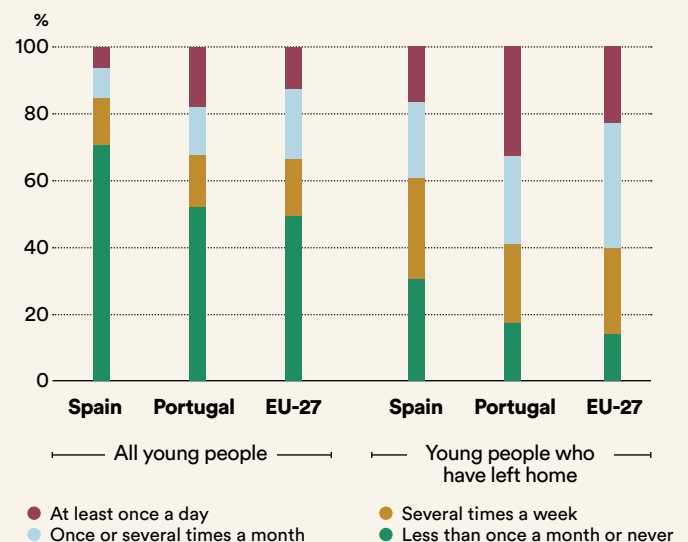


Figure 3.
Distribution of young people in Spain, Portugal, and the entire EU, by how often they speak in person with their parents, for all young people and for those no longer living in the parental household, 2020



issues, the most frequent size of young people's networks in Portugal stands at 3 people (34.4%). In the case of Spain, it is 4-6 people (30.7%), a percentage very similar to the European average. Thus, despite the fact that, in Portugal, young people interact more frequently (with friends, family, or co-workers), it is observed that in Spain this group has a higher number of close relationships or strong ties, which are the ones that tend to provide the most support, especially of an emotional nature.

How often do young people talk to their families?

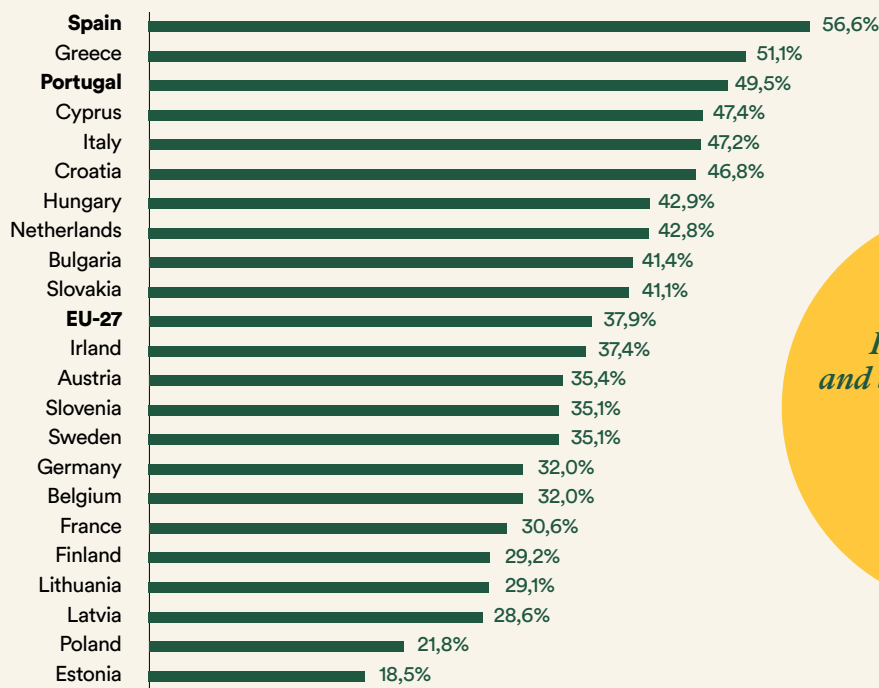
Despite the fact that both Portugal and Spain are considered *familistic* countries, it is in Spain where the intensity of intergenerational relations is strongest. When young people are asked how often they talk to their parents in person, it is observed that the rate is higher in Spain than in Portugal. Both countries exceed the frequency of the European Union as a whole, although

Portugal's values are close to the average. It can be seen, therefore, that in Spain, the weight of the family is very relevant. While 49.2% of young people in the European Union as a whole and 51.9% in Portugal interact with their par-

Both in Spain and Portugal, the frequency with which young people talk to their parents in person is higher than in the European Union as a whole

ents at least once a day, in Spain 70.6% of their peers do so. This may be largely due to the late age at which young people in Spain leave home. While, across the EU as a whole, young people

Figure 4
Percentage of young people who report feeling “totally” close to their parents from an affective point of view, by country, 2020



In both Portugal and Spain, young people feel very close to their parents

Source: compiled by the authors based on the European Social Survey 2020.

on average leave home at 26.4 years of age, in Portugal they do so at 29.7 years and in Spain at 30.3 years (according to Eurostat data, 2022). In any case, the trend towards a higher frequency of interaction between Spanish parents and their young adult children is also maintained if we focus on young people who no longer live in the parental home.

The affective closeness of young people to their parents

It is in Spain where there is the greatest affective closeness to parents. In comparative terms, the percentage of young people in Spain who say they feel extremely close to their parents in affective terms is the highest in the European Union (56.6%), while Portugal lies in third place (49.5%), behind Greece. The next positions are held by Cyprus and Italy. These high percentages of affective closeness occur in southern European countries, which shows the social and cultural anchoring of *familistic* welfare states in

the strength of the bonds between family and young adults in these countries.

Inequality characteristics and factors in young people's relationships in Spain and Portugal

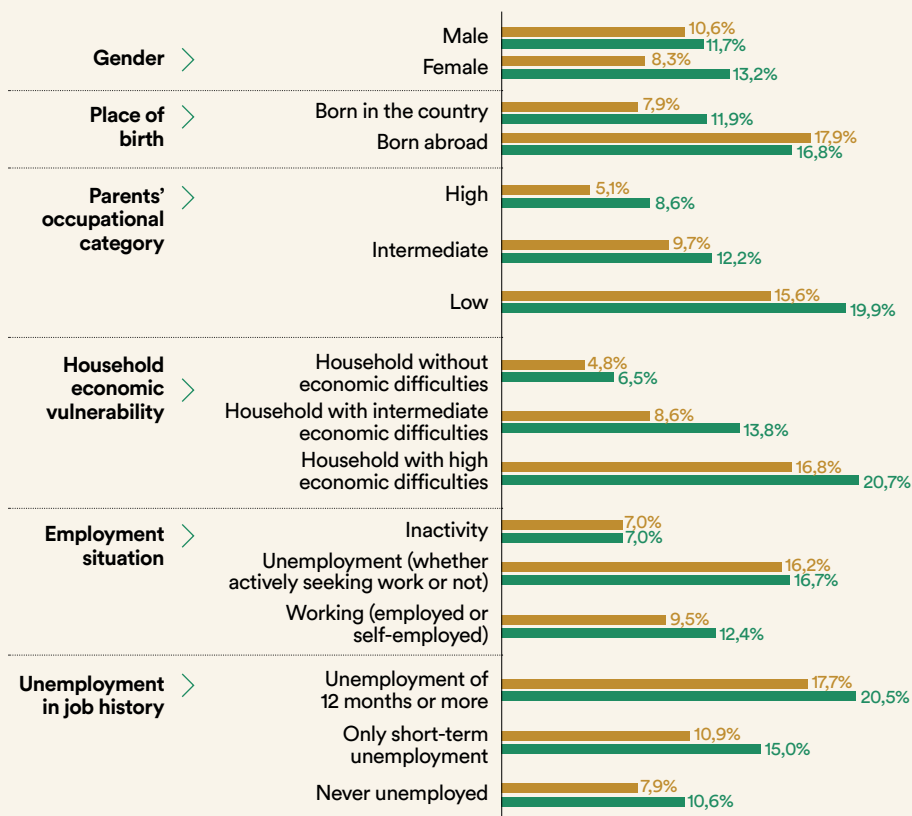
This article has used data from the European Social Survey obtained in its tenth wave, between September 2020 and May 2022, for comparative analysis of the sociability of young people between 18 and 34 years of age in Spain and Portugal, their level of social isolation, and the inequality factors that influence the different values observed. The countries analysed are those of the EU-27, with the exception of Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta, and Romania. The data obtained show similar sociability values between Spain and Portugal, although Portugal is ahead of Spain in relation to frequency of interaction while, in Spain, the size of personal networks is larger than that of those of Portugal. In relation to frequency of contact

Figure 5
Percentage of young people in Spain and Portugal and in the entire European Union in a situation of social isolation, by factors of inequality, 2020

● Spain and Portugal ● EU-27

Source: compiled by the authors based on the European Social Survey 2020

Social isolation is conditioned by place of birth, economic conditions, and employment status





What factors contribute most to young people's social isolation?

In Spain and Portugal, **9.1% and 10.9%, respectively, of the young adult population suffers from a certain degree of social isolation**, as individuals report meeting in their free time with friends, family, or co-workers once a month or less. This percentage is slightly higher for the EU as a whole, standing at 12.4% of the young adult population. Within this group, however, we also find inequalities.

Looking at the young adult population of Spain and Portugal together, it can be seen that **men suffer more isolation than women**, in contrast with the European Union as a whole. Place of birth also conditions the level of social isolation. In Spain and Portugal, the percentage of young people born outside their country of residence who suffer isolation is higher than that of people born in their country of residence. The percentage relating to this category is the only one that shows higher values in Spain and Portugal than average values in the European Union. In contrast, the percentage of those born in the country and suffering isolation is lower than the European Union average..

On the other hand, the data show that the lower the **parents' occupational** category and the greater the **household's economic vulnerability**, the higher the percentage of young people suffering isolation. In the European Union as a whole, the impact is similar to that in Spain and Portugal, but always with higher values.

Unemployment is the occupational situation in which young people show the greatest social isolation, with similar percentages for both countries and for the European Union as a whole. Among unemployed young people, those who have been in long-term unemployment suffer isolation the most. In contrast, those who have never been unemployed are the ones who suffer it least, confirming the **association between unemployment and reduced sociability**. Once more, the percentage of young people suffering isolation in these situations is higher in the European Union as a whole than in Spain and Portugal.

with parents, this is higher than the average for the European Union as a whole in both Spain and Portugal, both among young people who already left home and for the whole group, although the values for Spain are higher than the values for Portugal. The emotional closeness of young people to their parents is also greater in Mediterranean countries, with Spain in the lead. These data confirm the important role played by the family network in the sociability of young people in Spain and Portugal.

If factors related to the social isolation of young people are analysed, it is shown that it occurs to a greater extent among young people

of foreign origin (who usually have weaker personal networks), among young people with greater economic vulnerability, and among young people who are unemployed. These factors of inequality whose impact means greater isolation of young people are the same in Spain and Portugal as in the rest of the countries of the European Union. However, their negative effect is always more cushioned in Spain and Portugal (except in the case of young people of foreign origin). Subject to more in-depth analysis, it could be inferred that the lower values of isolation in the two Iberian countries are the result of greater sociability and the weight of

the family in personal relationships in both. In any case, the fact that these factors with a negative impact on sociability produce comparatively lower percentages of social isolation should not lead us to overlook the fact that the *familistic* model of resources provision that exists in Spain and Portugal causes young people to become more dependent on family support. This implies that they cannot rely on other, alternative sources of material and emotional support, and that they are ultimately in a situation of greater vulnerability, compared to the young people in other European countries where there are alternative or complementary sources of a more formalised nature.

Social isolation occurs to a greater extent among young people of foreign origin, among young people with greater economic vulnerability, and among young people who are unemployed.

Greater dependence on the family environment should be compensated with the development of actions that allow young adults – particularly those at greater risk of social isolation – to improve their level of sociability and expand their personal networks. These actions could include the promotion of spaces aimed at this group, so that young adults can interact with each other (e.g., by making public spaces available to them), the promotion of associations and participation by young adults, or the development of collective care, guidance, mentoring and dynamization services. It would also be advisable for young adults, as well as those who work with this group (including teachers, facilitators, educational and careers guidance staff), to become aware of the importance of personal networks beyond the family as a source of resources, both from the point of view of emotional support and in any other sense (material support, access to the jobs market, etc.).

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Interview with Robert Pogue Harrison

Professor of Humanities at Stanford University and author
of *Juvenescence: A Cultural History of Our Age*

“For the first time, we are living in a culture in which young people educate their grandparents in many aspects”



For years now you have been studying the concept of youth from the perspective of philosophy and cultural studies. How would you define it?

You could say that there are two types of youth: biological and cultural. All animals go through a period of biological development but, in the case of humans, an extremely important role is played by social, cultural, and economic factors. What we call *youth* in the twenty-first century has very little to do with what youth was in the Middle Ages or in Antiquity, even though our biology is virtually unchanged.

The thesis of my book *Juvenescence* is that cultural evolution has made us an increasingly youthful species, so that a person aged 30 today, for example, does not look much like a person aged 30 in the nineteenth century. In 1842, the great Realist writer Honoré de Balzac published *La femme de trente ans*, in which he argued (against the prevailing idea at that time) that a woman of that age could still feel young. Since then, things

have changed a great deal and, today, the period of cultural formation has been extended to the point that the concept of youth is increasingly fluid.

As with so many other categories, youth has become fluid... Zygmunt Bauman proposed the term *liquid modernity* to explain how many aspects of contemporary life are undergoing constant change, and how this fact means that flexibility and adaptation are required. Uncertainty and malleability fit in well with the idea of prolonging youth, which could technically be considered an evolutionary mechanism called *neoteny*, right?

Indeed, neoteny is a mechanism by virtue of which the human species manages to retain (*teny*) some characteristics of childhood (*neo*) as it grows. In other words, in some way maturity is deferred, and this allows one to develop better and learn more. This fact also means that we maintain, until adult stages of development, youthful characteristics such

as curiosity, playfulness, plasticity, or, ultimately, an adventurous spirit. A certain naivety, too. As adults, we resemble young apes more than old apes.

Could it be said, then, that neoteny is one of the main explanations for the development of human intelligence?

Exactly. We are born as unfinished beings, and we have to finish “cooking” outside of the mother’s womb. That is why human children are completely dependent for years. Compared to other animals, we are born prematurely. This fact, this childhood dependence on adults, permeates our psychology so deeply that, even when we are adults, the child inside us in some way continues to directly or indirectly seek our parents as a reference.

Do you think this infantilism is more pronounced today among young adults? When could this neotenic extension of youth be said to begin?

It forms an intrinsic part of the development of the human species, but over the last 150 years there has been a revolution in this sense. In 1904, a book was published under the title *Adolescence*, by Granville Stanley Hall, which talked about a period of conflict and existential crisis during youth, that had emerged due to two fundamental changes: the abolition of child labour and the emergence of universal education. With the social progress brought about by the Industrial Revolution, this stage suddenly appeared between childhood and maturity that has been expanding ever since, until it formed an emerging adulthood, between the ages of 20 and 30, during which it is assumed that each person can try life out and experiment with it, before stabilizing and making more serious decisions.

In today’s world there is not a great deal of pressure to be “fully” adult at 30, and this seems to be spreading further and further: at 35, at 40, etc. The same thing happens with university: people study until very late in life.

This is by no means a problem. Studying, learning, in itself is a good thing. Italo Calvino explains that Socrates, before his death, was learning to play a song on the flute. When asked why he was learning to play a song if he had only a few hours left to live before drinking the poison hemlock, Socrates replied that knowledge is an end in itself, and that knowing is like breathing. Education aims to make students hundreds, even thousands, of years older, by expanding the capabilities of their minds and giving depth to their culture. This is the neotenic paradox of education: it makes us younger by making us older. Often, this learning is acquired through *conversing with the dead*, reading the books of authors who have preceded us, thus incorporating us into the infinite tableau of human experience.



Robert Pogue Harrison (Smyrna, 1954) is Professor of Cultural Studies at Stanford University and Head of the Department of French and Italian. He has in-depth knowledge of Dante’s work, to which he dedicated his PhD at Cornell University. The idea of youth is one of his intellectual obsessions and permeates all of his work. He has compiled these reflections in a book, *Juvenescence* (2014), in which he takes a philosophical journey through the entire Western tradition in search of perennity. His *Entitled Opinions* programme is a classic of the humanities in the United States, and authors such as Richard Rorty, René Girard, Michel Serres, Orhan Pamuk, and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht have been his guests.

You live in Silicon Valley, one of the world's most technologically advanced areas, but a place where the problems of isolation and loneliness among young people are quite serious. What lies behind this situation?

Here, again, the ambiguity of the concept of youth appears. There is a reality of "being young", and a myth. This myth, especially in Silicon Valley, has led many millionaires to undertake an absurd search for the fountain of youth, as if there were a magic potion for staying young. Youth is seen as the best time of life, the happiest and most dynamic, energetic, vital time... a kind of promised land, or paradise lost. It is believed that if youth can be maintained, happiness will remain. But even though we live in a society obsessed with youth, many social factors play against young people, creating a depressing atmosphere among teenagers.

But what is the origin of their mental health problems? There are studies that point to an inappropriate use of new technologies, especially applications such as Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, etc.

The irony of connections through social media is that they often lead to isolation, and worse still, to separation from nature, which had always been a part of the youthful experience. The disconnection from the physical world caused by screens creates intoxication and makes impossible the ecstasy generated by contact with nature and the animal kingdom. The virtualisation of the real causes a certain alienation since, unfortunately, capitalism has an enormous capacity to underuse citizens by turning them into mere consumers. The same capitalism that promotes social media leads to a growing atomisation that destroys the spirit of young people. There is nothing more corrosive to the human experience than living glued to a mobile phone. It's like removing a dimension of existence: from

3D in reality to 2D on the screen. The same thing goes for narrative capacity: since everything has to be instantaneous and short-lived, the capacity to connect through elaborate and substantial stories is being lost, narratives that require patience and prolonged attention. Critics of technology and capitalism such as Douglas Rushkoff, Jaron Lanier, and Byung-Chul Han have highlighted this narrative collapse, pointing to it as one of the great social problems of our time.

Education aims to make students hundreds, even thousands, of years older, by expanding the capabilities of their minds and giving depth to their culture

Everything seems to conspire against the constant discovery of the world that should define being young. There is a certain disenchantment, in the sense that Western society is more secularised, technified, and bureaucratized than ever. The world can no longer be the "great enchanted garden" of which Max Weber spoke, due to the preponderance of science and reason, to the obtuse and growing tendency towards quantifying everything. Do you think this disenchantment also affects the new generations when it comes to love? Do you think, like Bauman, that love has also become liquid?

Well, in general I notice that there is a generational chasm between how people of my age perceive love, and how my students perceive it, for example. Currently, dating apps have a great influence when it comes to forming loving relationships, but these apps have a very dark dimension. The idea that there is a system in which you have access to the entire market of potential romantic and sexual partners at once, with just a

simple swipe of your finger, strikes me as brutal, in the sense that this basically favours the most attractive women and men. It is like a regression to an ape state of natural selection in which many people will never get to know each other, nor will they realise that they are on the same intellectual or emotional wavelength as the people with whom they interact in their community. Selecting someone through a photo on an app seems to me a very primary way to find the person you want to spend your life with, and a degradation of the love experience.

But it is also important to note that this is how most couples are being formed these days, at least in some countries, and that dating apps also allow you to live a unique and stimulating type of experience. Perhaps what we currently have is a certain incongruity between what is expected of young people, and what they can or want to do?

The irony of connections through social media is that they often lead to isolation, and to separation from nature, which had always been a part of the youthful experience

It is impossible to be young in these times and not feel inadequate. I've been teaching for 40 years, and I've never seen such a depressed youth. In the last class I gave on nihilism I had to limit the number of students because there were too many of us... Years ago I taught the same class, and we weren't even 10. This great interest in nihilism seems to me to be very symptomatic of the lethargy in which many students live, and how this has been normalised. For many, such a

lethargic state is a generational thing, and I would even say that this kind of apathy serves to connect them with each other. This may also be why there is renewed interest in Nietzsche and his exaltation of the will to power and individualism as a remedy for nihilism, but care must be taken about how reading him may affect young people with more conservative, narcissistic, or hedonistic tendencies – which is no small thing.

I suppose there are always reasons for pessimism, but the possibility that many young people have had to extend their education through scholarships, travel, or studies, is wonderful. The risk lies in not finding the moment to stop, and ending up like Cortázar's axolotl, an animal that decides to never mature and remains in a semi-larval, non-reproductive stage all its life. Is the world increasingly full of Peter Pans?

It's possible. All frogs begin life as tadpoles, but not all tadpoles become frogs. Right now, we are kind of the tadpoles of a new form of humanity. I think that despite the nihilism and lethargy, being young during Generation Y (*millennials*) or Z is a blessing, in the sense that nobody never enjoyed so much privilege and freedom. But popular wisdom says that with freedom (and power) comes responsibility too. Those of you who have been able to extend your youth, and who have somehow stretched the neoteny we were talking about, also have a responsibility to maintain and propitiate these same conditions for future generations, and contribute towards creating a better world, with less loss and emptiness. For this reason, of course, it is essential to commit oneself to society and to one's neighbours – to generate a sense of sharing with the community around us. As Kierkegaard would say, it is necessary to move from the aesthetic stage (pleasure) to the ethical stage (commitment) of life, and for this, at some point or another, one has to mature.

All this has a lot to do with re-production, with the act of retransmitting what has been received and transferring a culture, values, and, ultimately, a way of life, to those who follow us. How do you view the relationship between mothers and daughters, between fathers and sons today? From a sociological perspective, in what ways has it changed?

One of the sociological theses of my book *Juvenescence* is that, after the Second World War, the baby boomer generation brought about a great explosion of youth, a neotenic moment. This postwar boomer shockwave has spread to subsequent generations, but in some ways, boomers have retained some youthful characteristics, such as revolutionary impulses or a distrust of authority. That, in turn, has led to them having less authority over their descendants, and even trying to be their friends, which is not what they experienced.

Those of you who have been able to extend your youth also have a responsibility to maintain and propitiate these same conditions for future generations

Hence, perhaps, the expression *OK Boomer*, which became so fashionable in 2019, and which represents an important lack of communication over issues such as climate change, technology use, or life ideals. Generations Y and Z may sometimes feel lucid in a crazy world, because the boomer generation often detracts from their new ideas from its positions of power. The case of Greta Thunberg is paradigmatic, but there are many others. Furthermore, it can be demotivating to see how the lack of trust placed in young people is usually

accompanied by excessive scrutiny and suspicion. I guess that the mistrust is mutual... and that to a certain extent it is natural. So, to finish, what are the causes of this lack of communication, and what consequences may be derived from it?

In their 2005 article “The social separation of old and young: a root of ageism,” sociologists Gunhild O. Hagestad and Peter Uhlenberg discuss how segregation due to age has been institutionalised (*ageism*), and this has meant that older people have lost their role as mentors, leaving families without social integration or the transmission of knowledge and values from one generation to the next. For the first time, we are living in a mostly prefigurative culture, as Margaret Mead would say, in which young people not only learn little from older people, but the opposite, it is the young who educate their grandparents in many aspects. These generational chasms not only cause social segregation between generations, but also within the most recent generations, which makes it difficult for a mood to arise so that groups of young people can tune into the same frequency, or the same *Stimmung*, in Georg Simmel’s terms. This causes a sensation of permanent change, and the faster the world changes, the less at home those who inhabit it feel. Together, we must create an environment where we all feel comfortable, and the spirit of our time demands a long-term vision. It is time for young people, who still have a long way to go ahead of them, to act.

Pau Guinart

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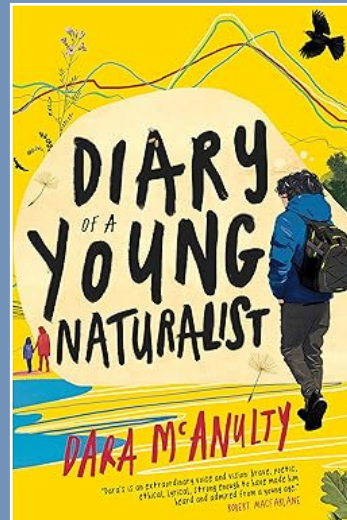
● Nature as a mirror and a teacher in a young activist's diary

Cecilia Duran,
development analyst, graduate in
Political Science and History of Art from
the University of Michigan

The 21st of March marks the beginning of spring, with dew on the grass and the robin announcing the arrival of the first primroses. This day also opens the *Diary of a Young Naturalist* by Dara McNulty, a book about the change inherent in life at every moment of the four seasons. From the leafy green countryside of Northern Ireland and from the viewpoint of a young man with autism, the reader progresses through the course of a year via chronicles that convey the reality of living with an acute affinity with nature in a world that increasingly neglects it.

Dara McNulty is one member of a family of five, of whom four are non-neurotypical: his father is the only one without autism. This is important to readers, as they are about to experience a book written from a unique perspective. “The outpourings on these pages express my connection with wildlife, try to explain the way I see the world, and describe how we weather the storms as a family”. With his heart in his hand and his voice at its most powerful, in *Diary of a Young Naturalist* McNulty invites us to see the world through the eyes of a fourteen-year-old young man with an incredible commitment to nature and conservation.

At the time of writing this book, its writer is in the process of moving from his home in County Fermanagh to a new life in County Down, on the other side of Northern Ireland. This change, together with the change inherent in adolescence, and the change which is part of the natural course of the four seasons, is the thread weaving the stories that this young author tells daily. His name means ‘oak’ in Irish, and almost premonitorily, his strength accompanies the reader on a journey that ranges through a wealth



DARA MCANULTY
*Diary of a young
naturalist*

Minneapolis: Milkweed
Editions, 2020

McAnulty manages to ensure that those who read his notes are not unmoved, feeling the need to observe and respect nature a little more than they did before

of different emotions, from tenderness, admiration, and empathy, to courage, melancholy, and impotence. With every word, the author shows us how nature is a beacon in a sea that is increasingly challenging for the coming generations.

The book journeys through the passing of a year in the form of daily fragments – of various lengths – in which the author takes the reader to the most intimate and sincere part of his thought. The content is based on three pillars. The greatest of all is nature and biodiversity, and the young man's encounters with moments of wonder and confusion and, often, outrage and concern. Through his detailed descriptions, the author turns nature

into a central and dynamic character in his narrative. For him, the environment is not only the milieu that surrounds him, but an integral part of his identity and emotional well-being. In several instances, it even becomes the means by which he manages to connect with others and feel a sense of belonging. In it, McAnulty finds inspiration and purpose, turning his reflections into activism for environmental protection.

Another key theme is youth and self-identity in the face of the world around us, and how these are inseparable from each other. McAnulty starts to see his connection with nature as a self-concept and feels the responsibility of using his age not as a limitation, but as a driving force in achieving greater involvement among young people in slowing down climate change. Through his writings, as well as his occasional participation in conferences on environmentalism and climate activism, McAnulty manages to interact directly with a young audience whose members can identify with him and his fight, and come to view him as a role model.

Finally, the book focuses on a crucial period in the author's life: the nexus between childhood and adulthood. Therefore, in addition to the physical and emotional changes that typically come with age, *Diary of a Young Naturalist* is a testimony to personal growth that, hand in hand with intimate reflections and poetic descriptions, manages to show a frank portrait of the author's experiences. Over the course of the year, readers can observe how his way of narrating events matures, through literary devices such as analogies and metaphors that are unusual for someone of his age.

For all these reasons, although it belongs to the diaries genre, this book is close to environmental literature, also known as *naturalism* and *transcendentalism*, if we look at the subject matter and focus of the narrative. These two movements envelop the book in such a way that the story of its young author is lived through his relationship with nature. McAnulty's keen observations of the natural world and his detailed descriptions of wildlife are in keeping with the spirit of naturalism, even reflecting the scientific curiosity and attention to detail characteristic of naturalist writers such as John Muir and Henry David Thoreau.

Moreover, also featuring in McAnulty's writing is the transcendentalist belief in the interconnectedness of all living things and the

importance of each person's individual experiences with nature. And the fact is that nature changes at a similar pace to humans, although it does so with seasonal rhythms and under its own terms of circularity. A myriad of similarities exists between flora and the passage of time on a woman's skin, and between fauna and a man's instincts, and vice versa. However, what really separates us is that humans are born and die

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only once, while nature does so every 365 days. We have a life, and the way we live can affect the vital development of biodiversity which, almost automatically, affects the development of our own. In the words of McAnulty: "I am not like these birds, but neither am I separate from them". Our relationship with the environment around us is unbreakable and inseparable, and therefore we must improve the way we, as humanity, interact with it.

"I keep visualising time as a length of string, with a flame burning at one end that represents the present, where we can act and be most alive. The ashes are the past, the intact string is the future. The string splits every time something happens. The dead are ashes; they still exist and never leave us. I can feel the string descending, still blazing in parts, but mostly it is crisp and brown and stretched out ahead." Through such prominent metaphors as this, McAnulty embodies the call for change and addresses, above all, young people and those who will have

the greatest influence in preventing the decline towards an uninhabitable world as a result of climate change. In other words, it is young people who have the power to keep that string from breaking.

The authenticity of McAnulty's voice is the greatest strength of this book. A still youthful tone carries upon itself the weight of his concern for the future of our world and, admirably, turns the description of something banal into a transcendental act. In his own words: "I have the heart of a naturalist, the head of a would-be scientist, and the bones of someone already wearied by the apathy and destruction wielded against the natural world". McAnulty manages to position the reader in an almost palpable world through descriptions that activate the five senses, and he draws attention not only to the present but to the past of each one. To put it another way, one can't help but remember

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the innocence one had when young, and one's deep admiration for something as simple as the flight of a butterfly or the colour of the foliage in October.

Despite the author's maturity for his young age, it is true that in his chronicles there is a prevailing tendency to touch on complex environmental issues superficially. When he describes deforestation, he does so with undeniable passion, but his voice focuses on melancholy and emotional loss rather than its systemic causes and practical solutions. Thus, it is an activism

that appeals to the emotions rather than action based on the root of the problem. In the same vein, when mentioning the loss of biodiversity, his argument is blurred in the aesthetic impact of the landscape and what this loss means visually, and while the reader empathizes with the argument, McAnulty misses the opportunity to protest against unsustainable government policies and corporate practices, or the lack of public awareness resulting in this global problem.

Despite this, there are a number of points to be remembered. To begin with, the book's very nature as a diary sets the narrative tone as a personal reflection on the part of the writer. Moreover, these are descriptions from someone who, due to his circumstances, has an extremely acute sensitivity to sensory stimuli. He describes one particular overwhelming instant thus: "Bright colours cause a kind of pain, a physical assault to the senses. Noise can be unbearable. Natural sounds are easier to process". This is why his way of narrating often delves into how what is happening around him makes him feel, and the way in which his mood and life is altered by it all. In his emotional appeal, McAnulty manages to ensure that those who read his notes are not unmoved, feeling the need to observe – and respect – nature a little more than they did before. For him, nature is both a mirror and a teacher: "I'm surrounded by five or six fly agaric mushrooms. Like them, I have burst open. I feel more resilient, more powerful. [...] I can't just love the natural world. I have to raise my voice even louder to help it. It is my duty, the duty of all of us, to support and protect nature. Our life support system, our interconnectedness, our interdependence".

Diary of a Young Naturalist is, in conclusion, a testimony to the capacity of young people to harbour a deep complicity with nature. Through everyday, personal, and heartfelt stories, McAnulty shows that the voice of each and every one of us is necessary to achieve change, and that it is a collective, empowered, and universal struggle to prevent the world from becoming what we fear most. Also following the seasons of the author's life, one is drawn towards one's own introspection, to observe how the environment reflects, and at times contradicts, one's own emotions and experiences. After finishing the book, one can't help but feel the urge to try to live in a more intentional and conscious way, venerating every moment of change as a unique moment in each person's life.

Best practices

Work4Progress by the "la Caixa" Foundation

With the aim of generating quality employment for women and young people in vulnerable situations in India, Mozambique, Peru, and Colombia, Work4Progress wants to go beyond supporting isolated projects, by promoting social innovation platforms for experimenting and systemic change.

The World Bank indicates that today we have the largest young generation in human history. However, one in four young people cannot find a job where they earn over USD 1.25 a day, which is the international threshold for extreme poverty. Furthermore, the International Labour Organization indicates that two out of every five young people are unemployed. This problem is even more serious for women, who are up to 27% less likely to find employment than men.

For this reason, and in line with the 2030 agenda, the Work4Progress (W4P) programme, launched in 2017 by the "la Caixa" Foundation, focuses on women and young people in vulnerable situations in India, Mozambique, Peru, and Colombia. The programme aims to promote innovation and quality employment for these groups, with special emphasis on sustainable technological innovation, and green jobs in rural areas.

Work4Progress wants to go beyond supporting isolated projects, by promoting social innovation platforms for collective action and learning, where innovative solutions can be scaled, especially inclusive businesses that generate employment for women and young people. A network made up of 50 partner organisations (from civil society, academia, and the public and private sectors), both from Spain and from the countries where it is working is currently involved in the programme.

Since its creation, W4P has incorporated innovation strategies into all of its components. To this end, it promotes new tools for listening to and identifying needs in the communities; for co-creating and prototyping with partners and beneficiaries; and for scaling up for the most efficient technological innovation and employment-generating initiatives.

To date, the programme has reached over 140,000 people. Of these, over 60% are women and over 46% are young people, defining and testing 166 prototypes of businesses, services, and technological innovations that have made it possible to launch over 19,000 inclusive companies and generate over 40,000 new jobs.

The programme actively seeks to create job opportunities for young people living in rural areas. The listening phase has shown, in all countries where W4P is implemented, that young people aim at finding employment beyond working in the fields.

To respond to this need, within the framework of W4P initiatives have been launched especially aimed at this young population, such as business development centres to train, incubate and accompany youth entrepreneurship; job exchanges for the incorporation of young people into the labour market in local companies; vocational training lines and work experience schemes in local companies; lines of credit specifically aimed at young people; or a network

of kiosks to support entrepreneurs run by young people, among others. All of this has enabled over 18,000 jobs to be created for young people.

The experimental impact evaluation of the W4P programme in Peru carried out by the Grade Institute has enabled observation of a positive change in narratives among young people: 43% consider that there are more economic opportunities in their community (compared to 19% in communities where the programme has not been implemented).

The Work4Progress programme has been designed following a *Think and Do Tank* methodology, according to which the affiliated organizations experiment in the field, while at the same time through progress evaluation and the collaboration of an external advisory committee, this knowledge is captured and shared with think and do tanks at the international level. Thus, in addition to fieldwork, it promotes spaces for the generation of knowledge such as events, publications and the W4P Virtual Lab, the online space where all the organisations involved converge.

The "la Caixa" Foundation promotes alliances with other donor organisations to incorporate more funds into the programme with the ultimate goal of achieving a greater impact. Examples of these are the alliances with SBI Foundation in India, or with Fundación Grupo Social in Colombia. Since 2017, the W4P programme has managed to add 37% of co-financing to the funds provided by the "la Caixa" Foundation.

It is currently working on an impact investment strategy with the aim of developing innovative financing instruments, beyond non-reimbursable funds and in collaboration with local actors. The aim is to expand and accelerate economic and employment creation initiatives, especially inclusive businesses for women and young people that demonstrate greater potential for impact and sustainability.

Acknowledgements

The programme has received several accolades so far, such as its presentation at the **Paris Peace Forum 2023** and at the **Impact Week** organised by the European Venture Philanthropy Association (Turin, 2023). It has also been positively assessed in reports such as the **Cotec Report** on Innovation (2020) and Taking the pulse of the European Foundation Sector, by the ESADE Center for Social Impact, in 2022. For its part, W4P India won the **Development Catalysts 2022** award for its systemic impact.

Previously, W4P had received the **SDG Good Practices** award in 2021 and the Iberdrola Award for Energy Cooperation (2019); the **United Nations Development Programme** had adopted it as a good practice (2019) and the World Bank had included it in its portfolio of "**Solutions for Youth Employment**" (2019). These examples illustrate the benefits that the programme has produced in a range of contexts and from diverse perspectives.



"la Caixa" Foundation