



EUROPEAN  
YEAR OF  
YOUTH



# The StartNet Youth Manifesto

Our **IDEAS**

to **revolutionise**

**the school-to-work**

transition



STIFTUNG  
MERCATOR





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## WHAT IS STARTNET YOUTH AND WHY A MANIFESTO?

The StartNet Youth community is made up of young women and men, aged between 14 and 26, dynamic, charismatic and with a strong **WILL TO CONTRIBUTE** and make everyday changes to improve the world. It represents a small community of young people in Southern Italy (Puglia, Basilicata, and Campania Regions) who share values such as civic engagement, active citizenship, solidarity, and collaboration as **CATALYSTS FOR CHANGE**. They take part in a process of dialogue and participation in working groups to propose **CONCRETE ACTIONS FOR ORIENTATION FOR THE SCHOOL TO WORK TRANSITION**. The aim of this **MANIFESTO** is to make young people's voices heard on these issues, but also to make them the agents promoting the proposals presented in this document. As StartNet, we want young men and women to become part of our network and to engage with all stakeholders.

### CONTEXT

The crisis generated by the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the situation of young people in Italy, who were already lagging behind compared to the rest of the EU – they were the worst in terms of inequality, in particular in the Southern regions.

In Italy, the 2021 ISTAT Report<sup>1</sup> stated that in 2020, **13.1% OF 18-24 YEAR OLDS LEFT SCHOOL EARLY** having attained at most the lower secondary school certificate (compared with 10.1% for the EU27). Between April and June 2020, 8% of enrolled students (of a total of 600,000 students) in primary and secondary school were not able to participate in online-lessons, with the highest levels in the South (9%). The share of those excluded was higher in primary school (12%), lower in lower secondary school (5%) and upper secondary school (6%).

According to the 2021 ASVIS report<sup>2</sup>, between 2019 and 2020 the percentage of people having attended vocational training in the last four weeks decreased (from 8.1% to 7.2%). The most serious effects of the crisis can be seen in the students' skills. The 2021 Invalsi tests (assessing school levels in Mathematics, Italian and English languages) that were carried out on students at the end of secondary school show that 44% do not reach the minimum level in Italian language (in 2019 it was 35%) and 51% in Math.

In 2020<sup>3</sup> **2.1 MILLION YOUNG PEOPLE AGED BETWEEN 15 AND 29** were not in employment, education, or training (so-called NEETs), equal to 23.3% of young people in that age range in Italy (up from 22.1% in 2019) and about a fifth of the total number of European NEETs. So yes, we are the country in the EU with the highest percentage of young NEETs.

**IN DECEMBER 2020, ACCORDING TO THE LATEST ISTAT DATA, YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT WAS APPROACHING 30% FOR UNDER-25s.**

<sup>1</sup> ISTAT, "Annual Report Summary – 2021"

<sup>2</sup> ASVIS, "L'Italia e gli Obiettivi di Sviluppo Sostenibile", [Italy and the Sustainable Development Goals] 2021

<sup>3</sup> ISTAT, "Annual Report Summary – 2021"

## WHY YOUTH INVOLVEMENT ON SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION ISSUES IS IMPORTANT

Listening to and supporting the participation of young people is essential for different reasons that are all related and equally important.

**FIRST, TO INVOLVE YOUNG PEOPLE WHEN CREATING ACTIONS THAT TARGET THEM MEANS DESIGNING MEASURES THAT ARE MORE ACCURATE:** different projects have shown that without the participation of the target group these projects are destined to fail. When designing youth actions, very often too much focus is given to expert knowledge and skills, which is essential but not enough. Experiencing the everyday difficulties of feeling lost, not knowing what the future holds and not being aware of your own skills demoralises young people. At the same time, this feeling, together with fresh and real experiences constitute a very fertile ground for concrete proposals based on actual needs of young adults.

**THIS INVOLVEMENT CREATES CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND RESPONSIBILITY.** It builds on trust between young people and the adults who have established a “safe” space for expression and dialogue, nurturing a virtuous circle of further positive actions towards peers and society. Young people have the right to have a say in what affects them. This right is enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>4</sup>.

**THE CHALLENGE FOR STARTNET YOUTH: TO CREATE AN INTERGENERATIONAL PACT BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE AND EXPERTS,** connecting the above reasons with a common thread, to show that it is an asset to come together at different ages and that we can learn from one another. A burst of enthusiasm, motivation, and social innovation.

## METHODOLOGY

In October 2021, the StartNet backbone office in Italy started **A PROCESS OF ENGAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE YOUTH BODY, STARTNET YOUTH.** The young people followed a step-by-step process alternating between theory, community, and workshops, based on collective impact and design thinking methodologies. The process led to the creation and co-drafting of the Manifesto: a plea presented to stakeholders for a more structured and youth friendly transition from school to work. The aim of the Manifesto is to propose actions for the transition education to work and to focus on the topics chosen by young people, i.e., how to improve the various orientation tools, including the PCTO, internships hours for secondary schools that are mandatory in Italy (in Italian Percorsi per le Competenze Trasversali e l’Orientamento – **PATHWAYS FOR CROSS-CUTTING SKILLS AND ORIENTATION**).

The process that led to the drafting of the Manifesto:

- The first stage was the **“TRANSFORMATIVE WEEKEND”** (8-10 October 2021) carried out together with Ashoka Italy, the Vincenzo Casillo Foundation and Agenzia Nazionale Giovani (the Italian National Youth Agency) as part of the GENC (Generation Changemaker)

<sup>4</sup> “UN Convention on the Rights of the Child - CRC”, ratified by Italy on 27th May 1991 with Law N°176, Art. 12-13.



project. It was an opportunity to meet, network and develop **CHANGEMAKER SKILLS**<sup>5</sup>.

- The second stage was a series of **ONLINE ROUND TABLES** on the topic of the school-to-work transition. After a careful assessment of the status quo, needs and surrounding circumstances, the young adults, together with facilitators, chose to tackle the issue of orientation and career guidance. They identified 5 themes and corresponding stakeholders: working with institutions, improving communication with parents and teachers, developing programmes with communities and companies, empowering students and youth, and the 2030 Agenda.
- The third stage was a **COMMUNITY EVENT** (19-21 November 2021) carried out together with DigithOn, an Apulian-based digital startup specialised in hackathons. It was a moment of joint work dedicated to the continuation of the round tables for the Manifesto. The work groups adopted a **CYCLE MANAGEMENT** methodology to put forward possible solutions. The young participants **PRESENTED THEIR PROPOSALS** and discussed together with network partners representing **THE MAJOR STAKEHOLDERS** such as schools, business

<sup>5</sup> “Changemaker” is a term coined by the founder of Ashoka, Bill Drayton, and used for people who have the ability to act for the common good, able to identify opportunities and solutions to community problems, creating change and social impact. For more information: <https://www.ashoka.org/en-us>.

- and the non-profit sector, on the second day of the event
- **THE FOURTH STAGE** involved the final drafting of the manifesto and its dissemination by the youth organization.

### ***WHO WROTE THE MANIFESTO AND HOW TO READ IT***

The following specific proposals for the topic of orientation, divided into sub-topics, were **DEVELOPED, AND WRITTEN BY YOUNG PEOPLE BELONGING TO THE NETWORK**. Each chapter is divided into 3-4 parts: a brief introduction, the problem from a youth perspective, the proposed solutions and how to implement them.

The Manifesto begins with some of the **AGENDA 2030** objectives and how to implement them, starting with the institutional-regulatory study of the PCTOs and opportunities for improvement, moving on to the communities that revolve around the world of education: teachers, families, businesses; reflecting on how best to involve them in the path of orientation.

The document can be considered as unique because of the connection between the various ideas put forward, which are often interconnected, but focus on a widespread problem. This does not exclude the reading and subsequent experimentation of proposals designed for each individual issue, which is why a summary can be found at the end of the document.



# THE STARTNET YOUTH MANIFESTO

## IN A PAGE

### OUR 9 PROPOSALS FOR THE SCHOOL TO WORK TRANSITION

#### WORKING ON THE FUTURE OF YOUNG PEOPLE: AGENDA 2030

- 1 provide a **PLACEMENT OFFICE** that is more connected and involved with the world of work, providing more coherent PCTOs with job vacancies in the area.
- 2 provide a **CERTIFIED PSYCHOLOGIST** in schools and a **SCHOOL COUNSELLOR WHO CAN HOLD DROP-IN SESSIONS WITH STUDENTS** for any questions they may have regarding their future, and who can organise more sessions and events on opportunities.
- 3 provide **STUDY AND/OR WORK GRANTS** from businesses so as to develop the skills required to enter these businesses, creating a virtuous mechanism of corporate social responsibility
- 4 more **MOBILITY PROJECTS** that include a **PROJECT EXPERT** in schools who can help find and/or spend European funds in the best conceivable way.

#### GUIDELINES ON THE PATHWAYS FOR CROSS-CUTTING SKILLS AND ORIENTATION: WHAT TO IMPROVE?

- 5 greater **COLLABORATION WITH UNIVERSITIES** to promote orientation and internships adhering to the aptitudes and talents of male and female students.

#### WHICH MODELS FOR OUR YOUTH? THE ROLE OF TEACHERS, FAMILIES, AND POSITIVE ENVIRONMENTS

- 6 **TEACHER TRAINING PROJECTS** on alternative teaching methods, soft skills, empathetic communication, and multiple intelligences.
- 7 **NETWORKS OF INSPIRATIONAL ROLE MODELS** for students, teachers, and parents, with inspiring professionals and examples of the diversity of careers and life paths.

#### BUSINESSES AND COMMUNITY: MENTORS AS “DOOR OPENERS”

- 8 introducing a **MENTOR** who acts as an **ORIENTATION** figure for the student towards work-based experiences and PCTOs, as a **LISTENING** ear and as someone able to accompany and analyse these experiences, in order to collect the skills resulting from the experience. The mentor is a **DIFFERENT FIGURE FROM THE COMPANY OR SCHOOL TUTOR** and can be a **YOUNG** person doing a **UNIVERSITY INTERNSHIP** or doing **VOLUNTARY CIVIC SERVICE**.

#### HOW WE, THE YOUTH, CAN HAVE AN IMPACT ON THE SCHOOL-WORK TRANSITION

- 9 **CONSULTE PROVINCIALI DEGLI STUDENTI – REGIONAL STUDENT COUNCILS (CPS)** as hubs for young stakeholders of change that reach out to young men and women who can lead participation and collaboration. By using a “bottom-up” approach they can generate a virtuous mechanism of co-working together with the various stakeholders involved with the CPSs, such as the Regional School Administration, public services, local policy makers, businesses, parents, teachers).



## OUR APPEAL

With the flagship values of this Manifesto of engaged **CITIZENSHIP**, **SOLIDARITY**, **INCLUSION**, and **CARE**, the **STARTNET YOUTH COMMUNITY** submits its proposals to experts and stakeholders from the world of education, labour, business, and the non-profit sector.

The role of our community is to facilitate

**THE TRANSITION OF YOUNG PEOPLE TOWARDS WORK AND EMPLOYMENT, BUT ALSO TOWARDS THE WORLD OF TRAINING AND UNIVERSITY.**

Today, in Italy, setting this objective means wanting and imagining a change in the school system,

**A PROCESS OF INNOVATION**

involving students and teachers, but also all the dynamic realities that can be part of a renewal process that consider (but which also serve as a stimulus to) the dynamism of our regional, environmental, and historical context.

To do this, however, before we even think about the economic resources, we need institutions, young people, teachers, school directors, businesses from all sectors and cultural bodies to identify with this vision and to align themselves with our proposals.

**GET IN TOUCH, GET INVOLVED.**

Let's do this together!

This is an appeal for collaboration and seeking out solutions to build the present and a better future for many young people.



visit [WWW.START-NET.ORG](http://WWW.START-NET.ORG)

