

## **Contrasting destinies of Generation Z – the challenge of equality of chances**

Generation Z or GenZ generation or even Zoomers (as opposed to the Baby Boom generation or Boomers born between 1945 and 1965) refers in demography to individuals born between the late 1990s and 2010. Its characteristics are to be born and to have grown with all the digital means of communication - Internet, social networks... They are also the users of artificial intelligence, the latest digital revolution that arouses both enthusiasm and fear. The Zoomers have very different profiles – young people unemployed or assigned to low-paid jobs with no prospect of advancement on the one hand; qualified students, many of whom emigrate to find a job that meets their expectations on the other hand.

Social networks have given an unprecedented scale to the protests of young people, belonging to Generation Z. They expressed themselves on the ground through demonstrations in several countries - in the Philippines, Indonesia, Madagascar, or Morocco... They are also the spokespersons of all young people who cannot express themselves for fear of reprisals (fierce repression by dictatorships) or because they live in countries at war - Afghanistan, Iran, North Korea, Haiti, Sudan, ... The poorer a country is, the more shocking inequalities are. The situation of young people is the best indicator of a country's economic, social and political health. The more precarious and unequal it is, the more uncertain the national future is. Even in European countries where the share of young people is increasingly a minority.

The main reason for youth anger is related to inequalities within the population between privileged elites and the rest of the population. It results in indigent public services. Public money has been diverted to benefit private interests. In the Philippines, young people protested in September 2025 against massive corruption in public works (1). In Madagascar, the slogan was: "we want to live, not survive!" The young people denounced the recurring cuts in water and electricity, attributed to corrupt leaders, on a vast territory ravaged by poverty. (2) Indonesia was shaken by a violent social movement in August 2025. Demonstrations denounced the high cost of living, and the youth unemployment rate. (3) In Morocco, the protests began at the end of September 2025 after the death of young mothers during their childbirth in underequipped maternity hospitals. At the same time, significant amounts are allocated for the organization of the African Cup of Nations and the 2030 World Cup. The stadiums are there, but where are the hospitals?" chanted the young protesters in the streets of Rabat in Marrakech (4).

The reasons for protesting for young Filipinos, Indonesians, Malagasy or Moroccans are directly related to their future. Unemployment is the primary reason but it is not the only one. According to figures published by the World Bank (5), which is based on statistics from the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2024), 6.6% of young people are unemployed in the Philippines; 13.1% in Indonesia; 5.4% in Madagascar and 22.1% in Morocco. Young people are often forced to accept low-paid jobs that do not allow them to escape poverty. Several indicators must be considered to assess the situation of youth - the level of education, the unemployment rate, and the political and economic situation of their country. The situation is worse in South Africa with 60.9% of young people unemployed or in Djibouti with 76.3%....

where young people are victims of gangs and human trafficking. Prisoners in their own country, they don't even have the hope to emigrate.

Foreign students in Europe are in a very favorable situation compared to young people, often poorly qualified or out of school, who are easy prey for smugglers and mafias, on increasingly dangerous migratory paths - the Sahel and its jihadist threats, Libya and its human trafficking, the Mediterranean and its makeshift boats.... In 2023, 1.76 million foreign students are engaged in higher education in Europe (Eurostat, June 2025). If 43% came from another European country, 25% arrived from Asia and 17% from Africa (6). China (including Hong Kong) is the most common country of origin with 5.6% of the total. The other non-European countries that appeared several times in the ranking are India and EU neighboring countries – Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Russia and Ukraine. In these four countries the troubled geopolitics is an explanation.

The three countries hosting the most foreign students are Germany (24.1% of the total), France (15.7%) and the Netherlands (9.6%). In 13 European countries (including the Netherlands), foreign students represent at least 10% of higher education (tertiary education) enrollment. The countries hosting the fewest foreign students are Italy (4.8%), Spain (4.3%), Croatia (3.7%) and Greece (3.0%). The disciplines most in demand by foreign students (ISCED F 2013 classification) are: management, administration, law (21.99%), engineering, industry, construction (18.1%), health and social services (13.9%), arts and humanities (11.8%), social sciences, journalism and information (10.2%).

The economic dynamism that attracts foreign investment and allows a country's growth depends on a skilled workforce, flexible and able to adapt to increasingly rapid technological changes. It is not by chance that Germany, France and the Netherlands attract the most foreign students. In aging societies, they allow to bring the talents and skills that our labour markets need. National students are not numerous enough. Faced with the challenges of artificial intelligence, generation Z is best placed to meet the challenges posed by this new digital era. Thousands of trades will be replaced. For the French newspaper specializing in Higher Education "L'Etudiant", the major criterion of the ranking of engineering schools is the international dimension (7). It is an integral part of engineering curricula. It enriches students' intercultural and linguistic skills and prepares them to evolve in a globalized world. This internationalization translates into: exchange programs with foreign universities, international internships, the presence of international students or even courses taught in English.

Diversity of skills is essential. Europe has acquired a whole arsenal of skills reference systems constantly enriched by European projects (Erasmus+ programme). Digital diversity is crucial in the world 3.0 that started with artificial intelligence. It can be an instrument of social justice if it helps to reduce inequalities between students who will know how to use it for life and all the other young people from Generation Z who did not have the same opportunities at the beginning (in the South as in the North). AI – a challenge for equality of chances ?

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- (2) France Info, 30 September 2025- [https://www.franceinfo.fr/replay-radio/d-un-monde-a-l-autre/madagascar-nepal-philippines-un-vent-de-revolte-contre-les-inegalites-porte-par-une-jeunesse-connectee\\_7494820.html](https://www.franceinfo.fr/replay-radio/d-un-monde-a-l-autre/madagascar-nepal-philippines-un-vent-de-revolte-contre-les-inegalites-porte-par-une-jeunesse-connectee_7494820.html)
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- (6) Banque mondiale- youth unemployment – share of the population aged 15 to 24 without a job - <https://donnees.banquemondiale.org/indicateur/SL.UEM.1524.ZS>
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