

## 2025 GenerationShip Observatory

**YOUTH EMPLOYMENT: EXPECTATIONS VS REALITY**

Unstable jobs, low incomes and gender and territorial inequalities: employment is rising, but job quality is not. One third of young people are in precarious work, one in four is not economically self-sufficient, and 56% of young women earn less than €1,500 (vs. 35% of men)

Work remains a central theme in the lives of young Italians, but it is experienced and interpreted according to priorities that differ from the past. This emerges from the **“young people and work”** focus of the **2025 GenerationShip Observatory by Changes Unipol**, curated by **Kkienn Connecting People and Companies**, which analyses working conditions, expectations and critical issues affecting new generations aged 23 to 35, in a context of overall employment growth that still lacks a genuine qualitative turning point.

Between 2023 and 2025 employment increased, while Italian GDP remained almost flat. The gap is explained by growth in employment – particularly youth employment – characterised by low productivity: new jobs are concentrated in sectors such as services, tourism, transport and construction, and are often marked by part-time or temporary contracts. Employment is rising, but output and economic growth are not increasing proportionally.

The overall picture is ambivalent. On the one hand, the labour market – also thanks to employment growth in recent years – has partially improved confidence and perceived wellbeing. On the other, precariousness, low wages and strong gender inequalities persist. In this scenario, young people appear less resigned than in the past, more aware, ready to change when expectations are not met, and in search of jobs that offer quality, security and genuine prospects.

Milan, 20 January 2026

**The youth employment landscape**

In recent years, employment in Italy has reached a historic high, but this increase has not translated into a comparable rise in productivity or incomes. Precariousness remains the defining feature for under-35s. 34% of young employees have non-standard contracts, a share significantly higher than among adults (15%). Among young female employees, atypical contracts account for more than 40% of the total, compared with 28% among their male peers. Contractual fragility is reflected in incomes: 44% of young people earn less than €1,500 net per month and only 27% earn more than €2,000. Overall, one young person in four is not economically self-sufficient and must rely on family support.

The situation is particularly critical for young women. Fifty-six per cent earn less than EUR 1,500 net per month (compared with 35% of young men), and one third cannot support themselves without

external help. Young women are also more often employed in small companies (47% vs. 33% of men), environments that tend to offer fewer protections, less structured career paths and lower pay levels.

#### **Job satisfaction, security and willingness to change**

Compared with adults, young people report lower levels of job satisfaction and security and are more active in seeking alternatives. 46% of employed young people are actively seeking new employment, confirming that job searching has become a permanent condition rather than a phase limited to labour-market entry. Among adults, this share falls to 36%, reflecting a different relationship with job stability.

Young women are, on average, less satisfied and change jobs more frequently. Young men, by contrast, are more inclined to consider mobility abroad (47%). Overall, however, the share of young people considering relocation has declined – from 58% in 2023 to 41% in 2025 – suggesting that youth emigration is driven less by a lack of jobs *per se* than by the absence of work perceived as interesting, skilled and adequately paid.

#### **Job search and channels used**

After completing their studies, changing jobs is a common experience. Despite having shorter employment histories, the share of young people (61%) who have already changed jobs at least once is comparable to that of adults (62%).

When searching for work, young people make far greater use of online job listings (52%), social media (33%) and apps (21%). Word-of-mouth referrals (32%) and contact from employment agencies and specialist recruiters (24%) are also increasing. Online channels have become dominant (rising from 35% to 73%), while offline channels have declined (from 77% to 70%).

#### **Confidence in finding a job that meets expectations**

Young people are moderately confident about finding a job that aligns with their expectations. 49% express a positive assessment, but this figure conceals marked gender differences: confidence stands at 59% among young men, compared with just 38% among young women. Around the age of 30, women's confidence drops sharply before recovering later. Young people living in small towns are also disadvantaged, while the South shows confidence levels broadly in line with other regions.

#### **Challenges faced by young people in the labour market**

Confidence in the labour market remains limited: only 45% of young people report medium-to-high confidence. Low pay is identified as the most serious issue by 60% of respondents, but it is not the only concern. Young people also point to job insecurity and uncertainty (46%), a lack of meritocracy (41%), outdated management culture (23%), and difficulties in workplace relationships and competition with older colleagues (16%).

### **How young people are perceived in the labour market**

Young people see themselves as more technologically equipped (61%), more innovative (58%) and more adaptable (50%), while recognising greater solidity (35%), experience (32%) and resilience (41%) among adults. Adults largely share this perception, indicating widespread awareness of mutual strengths and weaknesses.

### **What matters most to young people at work**

Young people have redefined their priorities at work. Career advancement is no longer paramount; overall well-being now comes first. Work-life balance, health and quality of life are considered very important by over 80% of young people. Self-fulfilment follows (70-80%), while ambition and competition are less central.

### **Young people's expectations of work**

Expectations focus on a few key elements: adequate pay, work-life balance, a positive work environment, and job security. The net salary young people consider adequate is around €2,000 per month.

Regarding work-life balance, the priority is not smart working but the right to personal time: flexible working hours (56%), free weekends and public holidays (48%), and limits on out-of-hours work (42%). 34% of young people are willing to give up career advancement, and 27% a high salary, in order to improve overall balance.

An ideal work environment is collaborative, calm and intergenerational. Stability no longer coincides solely with a permanent contract: young people seek guarantees even in times of crisis.

### **Satisfaction and change**

Overall, the majority of young people are moderately satisfied with different aspects of their current jobs: 66% express positive views on job security, work-life balance (63%) and the work environment (63%). The main critical issues concern pay – which is judged insufficient – skills development and opportunities for professional growth.

When considering a job change, pay is the top priority (54%), followed by work-life balance (40%), growth opportunities (33%) and the quality of the work environment (32%). The same factors also drive retention: to persuade a young person to stay, financial recognition remains decisive. Given their starting position, adequate pay is an even more critical factor for young women.

**Vittorio Verdone, Chief Human Resources & Internal Communication Officer of the Unipol Group,** commented: *"The focus on work portrays a generation that is far from disengaged, but highly demanding. Young people are not looking for shortcuts; they are looking for fair conditions: adequate pay, security, respect for personal time, and real growth opportunities. Work remains central, but it must be sustainable and of high quality. There is also a strong desire to work for organisations whose*

*values they can identify with. When these conditions are not met, changing jobs becomes a rational choice rather than an escape. Understanding these expectations is now essential for any organisation that aims to attract and retain young talent.”*

*GenerationShip is the Unipol Group’s observatory on new generations, a socio-cultural monitoring initiative launched in 2022 and now in its fourth edition. The “Youth and Work” research was conducted using a qualitative-quantitative approach, combining focus groups and an online survey of a representative sample of young people aged 23 to 35, alongside a control sample of working adults aged 36 to 54. The study aims to explore young Italians’ attitudes towards work and to identify the drivers behind their professional choices. The research was conducted on a gross sample of 1,526 Italians aged 16 to 74. An initial screening of young people aged 23 to 35 – working or studying, unemployed or seeking their first job – resulted in a net sample of 655 cases, plus a control sample of 280 working adults aged 36 to 54.*

For further information: [2025 GenerationShip Observatory – “Youth and Work” focus](#)

#### Unipol Group

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