

Precariousness forever?

Young people at risk of an
existential crisis

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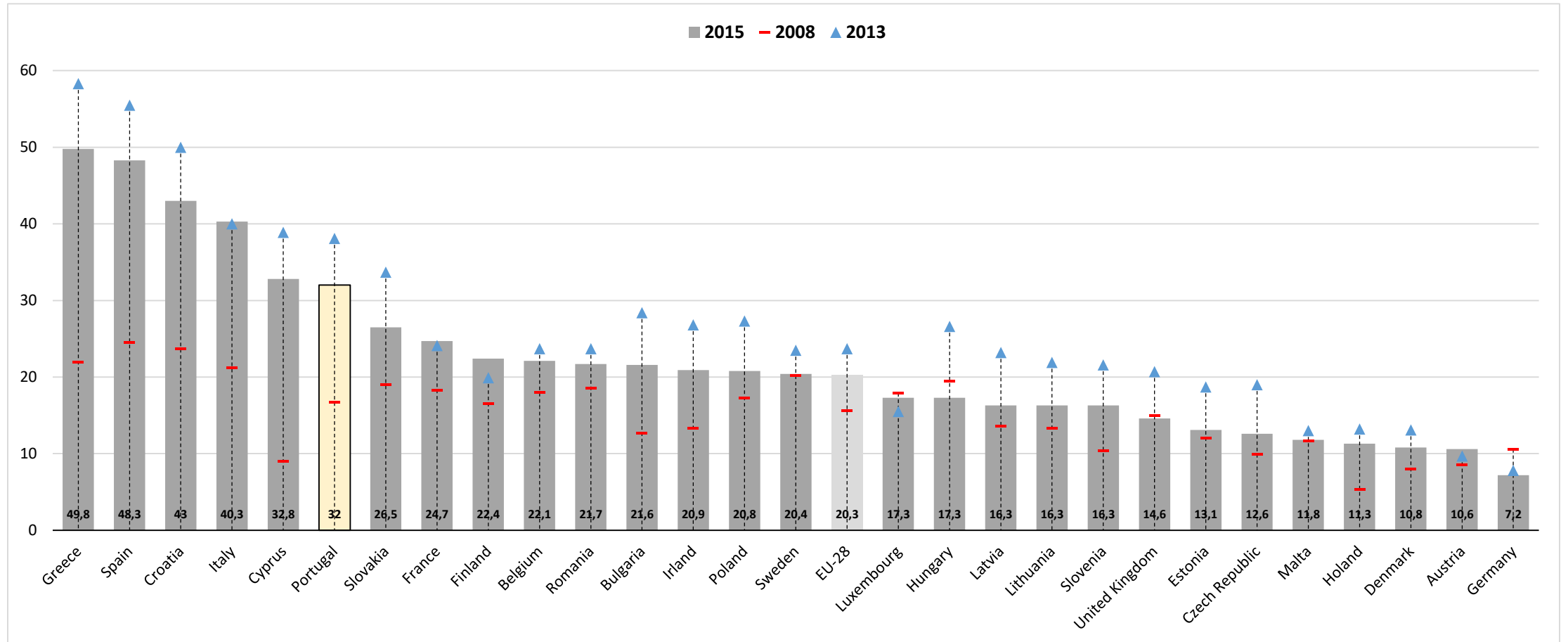
- **Presentation's topics:**

- Statistics of youth employment, unemployment and non-standard work.
- Precariousness as a way of life
- Labour experience, low income and semi-autonomy
- Future as a never ending uncertainty

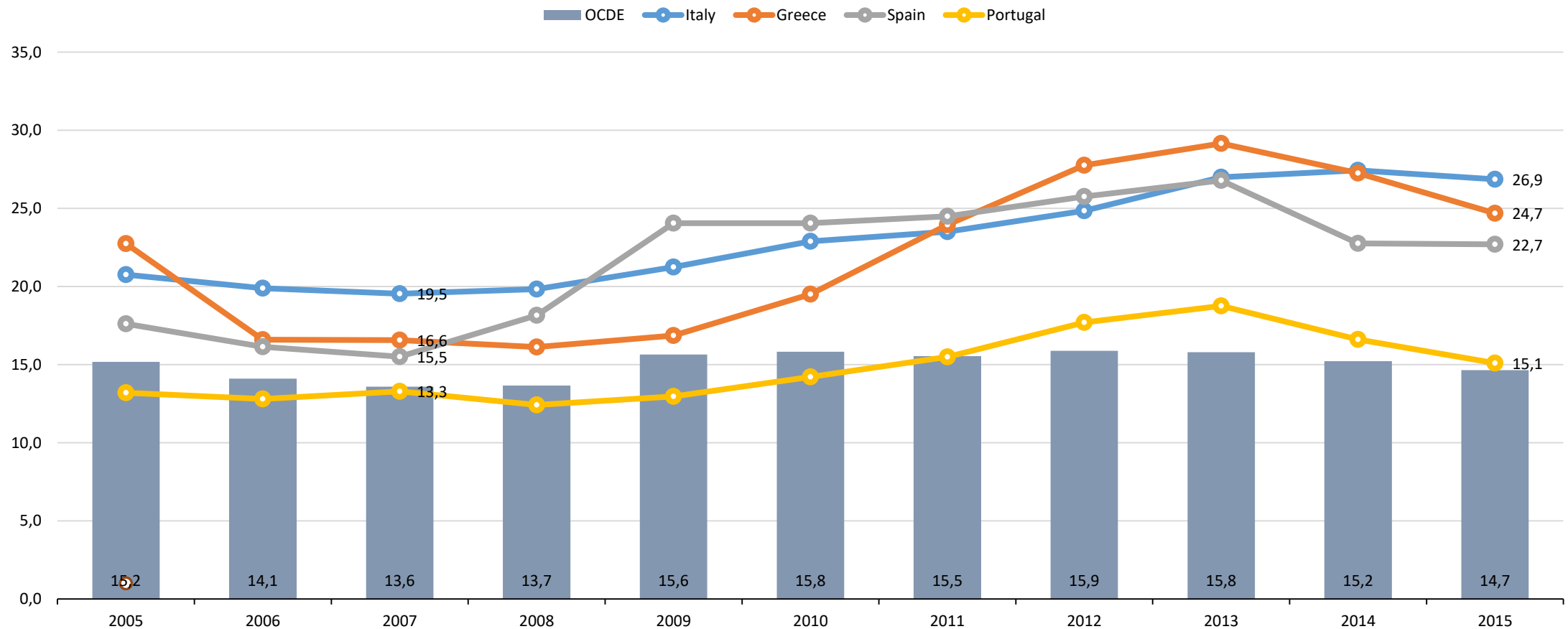
- **The research is based on qualitative information:**

- 24 interviews were conducted to young precarious workers with degrees in different scientific areas, living in Lisbon Metropolitan Area (aged until 30 years old).
- The research is now developing a content analysis using MaxQda
- The presentation will use some provisional results.

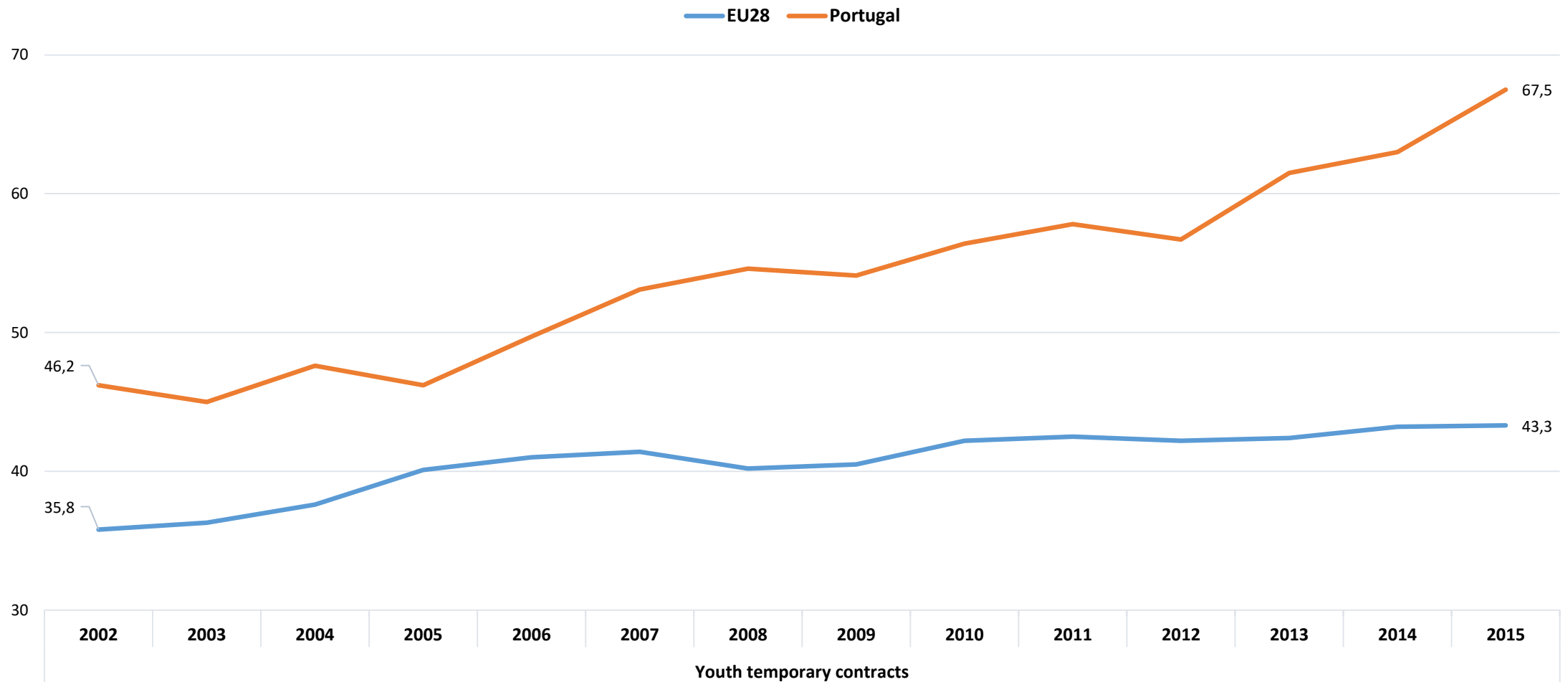
Youth Unemployment rate in the EU



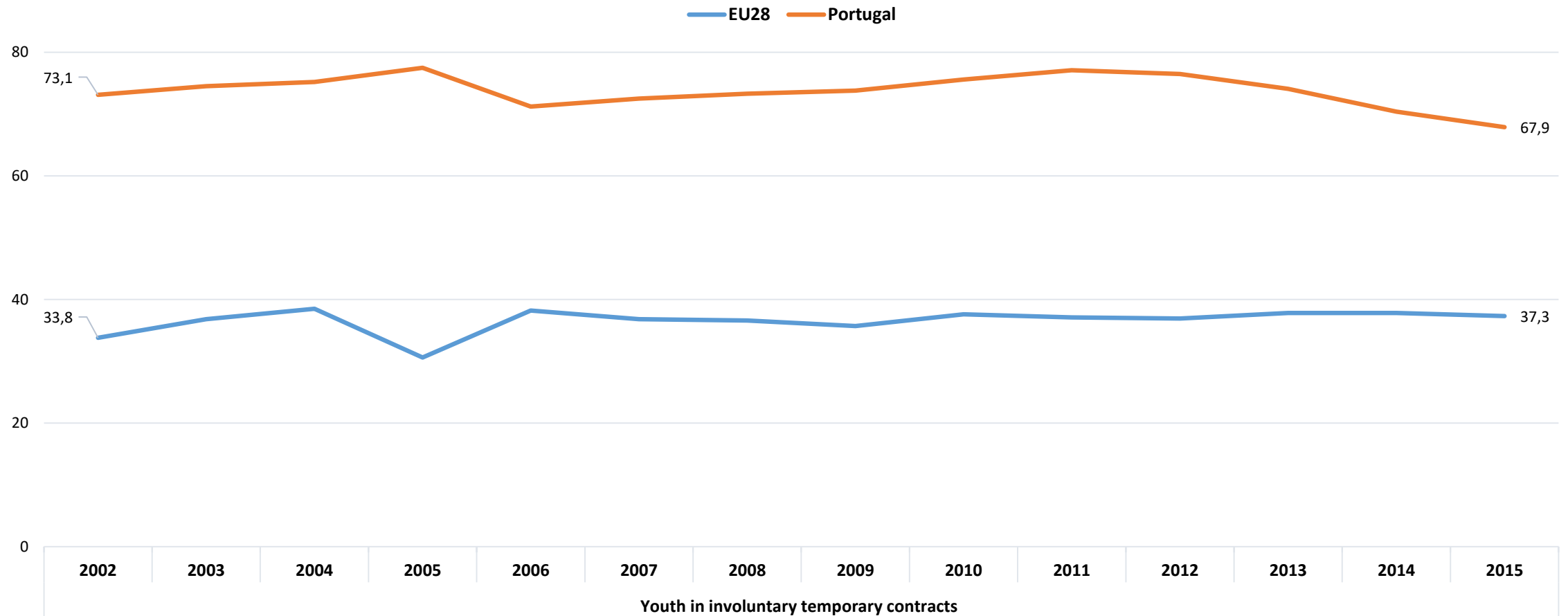
NEET -Young who are "Not in Education, Employment, or Training" (southern European countries and OECD)



Youth temporary contracts in Portugal an EU



Youth in involuntary temporary contracts in Portugal and EU



Note: Involuntary temporary contracts corresponds to the percentage of respondents that couldn't find permanent job.

Precariousness as a way of life

- Precariousness has been a very difficult issue to grasp, both conceptually and statistically. From the conceptual side, the difficulty emerges from the diverse nature of the problem: precariousness relates to contractual impermanence and insecurity, as with involuntary part-timers, and with low wages, but also with internships...
- A precarious condition generally includes the entrapment of young people in all or some of these positions in respect to occupational status. However, the vulnerable condition of precariousness may also contaminate other dimensions of living apart from the professional insertion, particularly in the case of low wages earned and the incapacity to make ends meet, or contractual insecurity that prevents making life plans or considering long-term possibilities.

Labour experience, low income and semi-autonomy

- The labour experience and relationship determines many of the most alienating aspects that characterize the condition of precariousness and the annihilation of the self.
- The precariousness perpetuates itself independently of the nature of the work or of the activity that is developed. One of the main factors that is used to justify the accommodation to a precarious and low paid work has to do with the need to guarantee some minimum regular income, that allows the maintenance a of vulnerable economic autonomy.
- For this reason being precarious represents, in most cases, being relatively dependent on others (a state of semi-autonomy).

(1)

“I always thought I’d have my autonomy and my independence by now, I also feel very ashamed, very guilty for being unemployed. Looking for a job is something very humiliating – at least I speak for myself – it’s quite embarrassing not having a job, maybe it is my fault? Maybe it’s our society’s fault? What is happening? And then of course, I feel like a burden to my parents in a moment when this shouldn’t happen, and on top of that, we’re not rich (...). [In the future] I’d like to leave my parents’ house, have my own space, pay my bills...that was the goal – and it still is! (...)

A friend of mine told me once: “look, we arrived late to everything” – and I think this is the slogan of a generation, this generation at least. Maybe if we were a bit older, before the crisis burst, and having our higher education, things would have worked out much better. And now, is like “Man power! Temporary employment agencies! Crisis! Precarious contracts! Competitiveness in the labour market - many candidates for a single offer!”. All this moves us away from our dreams of having a decent life. My parents’ generation fought – and we are speaking of middle class – and we [him and his brother] are the first to have a college degree – there was that hope of “you’re going to live better than...” and now we’re confronted with the opposite situation. There was some expectation on us, we had our own expectations and we arrived late to them” **Fernando, 30 yrs old, Math tutor, self-employed status (“recibos verdes”), Master degree in civil engineering**

Future as a never ending uncertainty

- The future is a horizon that tends to be closed and where part of the interviewed cannot foresee a path or any alternatives through which they can change the present.
- Most of them presents a distressing difficulty in delineating a minimum projection in respect of their future.
- The realisation of any projection is viewed as a risk, to the extent that the future will fundamentally be the result of discontinuities that escape individual control.

(2)

«(...) I'm delaying buying a car due to my work situation... having children, having a car, having a house...I think we're all putting off all that. At 23 years old my father was already married to my mother, they had a house...and I'm living in a shared apartment with colleagues from my company, it's not my home. Thus, I feel that people are delaying their own personal decisions due to work conditions. (...) I believe it isn't easy to postpone having children for those that have no job, or when the income isn't enough, or to postpone having a house, because of working conditions. I understand that can be frustrating (...)». **Ricardo, 23 yrs old, administrative, fixed-term contract of 6 months, bachelor degree in Sociology, master in Work Sciences**

(3)

«(...) I really think this is a jungle. I started doing therapy and my therapist was saying to me: “when I was your age, when I was 23, my concern was to read critical theory in coffees with friends... I wasn’t thinking much about the future, I didn’t know what I was going to do, but I knew I’d do something”. But now there’s a giant uncertainty. Above all, the future is a brutal uncertainty and this is unsustainable, also psychologically because of this feeling of helplessness ... precariousness has, beyond the most obvious aspect, which is the financial instability, has this component that it’s the effect it has psychologically, which is a result from such lack of not knowing how the future is going to be like, it’s very complicated». **Alice, 23 yrs, IAFP internship, Bachelor in Sociology, Master of Science in Communication**

...and emigration (4)

- Another possibility/opportunity that emerges with some frequency is emigration.

«I don't know...that's a question people ask me "and what about your future, how is going to be your career?" and I'm like "oh my god... I don't know!". I'm still wondering if I'm in the right study area, much less thinking about my career, you know? (...) In the short term I see myself working abroad...yes, but just to start! I see so many opportunities outside the country (...) If I think I'm going to have a job? Yes. I think I'll be lucky somehow. [And in the long term?] I see myself living in Lisbon, in what company or sector, I don't know. I'm still discovering many things. [And in terms of contract situations, do you see yourself in a solid situation?] No! I see myself jumping from one job to the other. Not because – In my mind – because they don't want me there, but because I want to leave (laughs). I'm thinking about experiencing many things». **Amália, 21 yrs, Internship, Bachelor in Business**

Is there any alternative? (5)

«[Do you think precariousness will exist forever?] I hope not! You know what I think? We should end with “work”, I think the point is to reform work, the idea of work. Nowadays “work” occupies the centre of our lives. Maybe the point is to start thinking that work doesn’t need to have this large dimension in our lives (...) we need new ways of organization, new ways of living, beyond of this centrality that work occupies, there are new ways of living! We never worked so much as nowadays, and there never was – and this is paradoxical – so much unemployment like today. There are several conclusions that we can draw from this: is that there isn’t indeed enough work for everyone, maybe it is necessary to reduce the work schedules, to divide the “thing” for more people, to rethink the very logic of work».

Alice, 23 yrs, IEFP internship, Bachelor in Sociology, Master of Science in Communication

In addition...

- The need to develop an alternative policy agenda against the different forms of labour precariousness as a way to prevent the escalation of a generalized existential crisis.
- Simultaneously it is important to think on new redistributive policies that are being discuss in several international forums such as basic income, living wage, etc.

Some references from studies developed by the Inequality Observatory

- CARMO, Renato Miguel do, António Firmino da COSTA (Orgs.) (2015), *Desigualdades em Questão: Análises e Problemáticas*, Lisboa, Mundos Sociais.
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- CARMO, Renato Miguel, CANTANTE, Frederico, and ALVES, Nuno (2014), «Time projections: Youth and precarious employment», *Time & Society*, 23(3), pp. 337–357.
- ALVES, Nuno de Almeida, Frederico CANTANTE, Inês BAPTISTA, e Renato Miguel do CARMO (2011), *Jovens em Transições Precárias: Trabalho, Quotidiano e Futuro*, Lisboa, Editora Mundos Sociais.

• Thank you!