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Qualitative analysis of their individual trajectories

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### **Objectives of the in-depth qualitative analysis**

An important element of the YOUNEX project is an attempt to grasp a way of perceiving the unemployment and exclusion situation by central figures of carried out analyses. How do young unemployed people from Geneva, Cologne, Turin, Lyon, Karlstad and Kielce assess their living situation? Do they feel excluded? How do they define the problems arising from the situation of unemployment and how do they try to solve them? We tried to find answers to these questions through the WP4 qualitative survey. The main task of the WP4 survey was to look at the situation of the unemployment from the perspective of young long-term unemployed people. Recruitment of participants in the survey was founded on the database built for the needs of the WP3 project. We came back to the same respondents. However this time talks were not aimed at filling in a standard questionnaire, but at conducting in-depth interviews. Thus, WP4 was aimed at increasing the knowledge of social and political exclusion based on the WP3 quantitative survey. Taking a different, qualitative research perspective, we want to critically look at the results obtained on the basis of statistical analyses conducted within the framework of the WP3 project.

Our goal was to provide each of the research teams with an opportunity to include in their surveys some specific and unique aspects of the situation of young unemployed people in the city in which interviews were carried out. The teams were provided with considerable autonomy, with flexibility to make changes both at a stage of data collection and analysis and their interpretation. At the same time the WP4 project was aimed at creating a picture of the unemployment situation for the purposes of comparative works. For this reason analyses carried out by all research teams were focused around four common, key research issues.

First research area concerned the way in which the long-term unemployed young people defined the problems associated with unemployment. Interviews centred around such areas as: financial issues, family and social relationships, expectations of aid institutions. We asked our interviewees about their dreams and life plans as well as the emotions aroused by the situation of prolonging joblessness. We were interested whether unemployment had also any positive aspects for them.

The second research area was related to the problem of social exclusion. Our objective was to grasp the impact of the unemployment situation on the family relations of participants in the survey. Interviews also focused on the relationships of young unemployed people with friends, acquaintances, neighbours and representatives of local community. We were interested whether the strong social networks helped the unemployed people to overcome life's difficulties, or whether - on the contrary - the long-term joblessness excluded them from social relationships.

Another research issue related to political exclusion. We were interested in the level of confidence in politics and politicians. We paid much attention to issues of political participation. Whether and how the respondents are willing to engage in political activity? Through our survey we tried to find an answer to a question whether young unemployed people saw in the political sphere their chances to improve their living conditions.

An important objective of the survey was also to identify strategies to cope with problems arising from the situation of the long-term unemployment. How the coping strategies were defined? At the stage of data interpretation we did not limit ourselves only to a narrow understanding of a concept of strategy, i.e. rational activities carried out to achieve goals at minimum cost. We adopted a broader perspective of looking at the "coping" phenomenon. In this approach, the coping strategies were considered as all cognitive and behavioural efforts to meet certain external and internal requirements, assessed by an interviewee as connected with a sense of discomfort or exceeding his or her own resources. Thus we were interested in any mechanisms used to solve or mitigate problems irrespective of whether and to what extent the interviewee took informed decisions.

The main task of the WP4 part of research was to grasp opinions, dreams and fears of the young long-term unemployed residents of Geneva, Cologne, Turin, Lyon, Karlstad and Kielce. Both choices of the research: method of individual in-depth interview (IDI) and theoretical perspective of the grounded theory was subordinated to this objective.

### **The Grounded Theory Method (GTM)**

The Grounded Theory Method covers systematic, inductive, comparative approach to the research process, which - as the authors of this method assumed - is aimed at creating a theory. Thus, for Barney Glazer and Anselm Strauss it was first of all a "constant comparative method" (Glazer, Strauss 1967).

If construction of a new theory is an objective of the research undertaking, the findings should be presented as possibly coherent and logical set of interrelated concepts (theoretical scheme). They are generated on the basis of raw data, which means that the researcher reduces data from multiple cases to concepts, while laying down the relational scope between them, which can be used in response to the question: *what is going on?* The theory is confirmed, as already mentioned, by means of permanent comparison with raw data. However, its presentation to participants in the survey is also a potential solution. Although theoretical explanations not always must fit their personal situations, the general assumptions should be clear to them.

Although it is currently the dominant approach in the field of qualitative research in social sciences, at the time of its occurrence it undermined a lot of methodological principles, such as: separation of theory and research, separation of the data collection process from their analysis, considering the qualitative research as being merely of a preparatory and preliminary nature if compared to the more rigorous quantitative research and considering qualitative methods as impressionistic and unsystematic, which can be a source of interesting but merely descriptive case studies (Bryant, Charmaz 2007).

Nowadays there are many ways to practice the grounded theory, the two main associated with the names of its creators: Glaze (who currently deals with the so called classic grounded theory) and Strauss, whose later works, in particular those written jointly with Juliet Corbin, created the basis for the constructivist paradigm, which currently is the most popular in the area of the grounded theory.

The latter approach was adopted in the described project and theoretical and methodological basis was taken from two publications: *Basics of Qualitative Research. Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* by Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1998)

and *Constructing Grounded Theory. A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis* by Kathy Charmaz (2006). Two main arguments decided on the choice of this theoretical perspective:

1. The first is approach to data. Within the framework of Barney Glazer's approach (the classic grounded theory) this element is limited to two statements: on the one hand social sphere is an area of "discovering" data, on the other hand - "everything is data" (Glazer 1992). And constructivists, such as Kathy Charmaz, emphasise an active aspect of research conducted in this paradigm, interaction between social reality and researchers. In effect they point out the process of generating data by the latter (Cf. Charmaz 1993, Charmaz 2006). It is important to be aware of one's own limitations and accept the fact that researchers who analyse the same social context can not only interpret differently the same data but also receive different data while working in the same area. This is essential for the YOUNEX project, which was implemented in six different institutional and cultural contexts.
2. The second argument is largely pragmatic. Glazer assumed that within the framework of the grounded theory the researcher independently copes with the analysed issue. And the constructivist approach takes into account the fact that the growing number of qualitative surveys are carried out in a collective manner, which is reflected in the recommended research procedures.

The value of this approach lies not only in its ability to generate a theory, but also to embed this theory in a strong empirical basis. In the first step it is usually the substantive grounded theory, which relates to specific issues. If its application is possible in a wider range of contexts, it can be moved to the conceptual level, which is the way to develop the formal grounded theory.

However, it should be strongly emphasised that theory building is not, and even should not be, the objective of each research. At this stage of working with the material gathered, individual national teams of YOUNEX project also did not formulate their task in this way. Authors of this approach also do not expect that researches who refer to this methodology will automatically apply all its procedures. Researchers referring to GTM are rather flexible, they typically retain a pragmatic approach, combining different techniques available so that their research has a greater chance of accuracy.

Due to the necessity of coordinating research efforts of six national teams in the survey whose results are presented in this report, it was decided to introduce some common solutions:

- retaining a rule of conducting surveys till their theoretical saturation, it was decided that each team would carry out at least 20 in-depth interviews;
- a common tool structure was adopted (in-depth interview guide), covering both the mandatory thematic areas and compulsory questions, which should appear in the interview;
- it was decided that group of interviewees of the WP3 survey who agreed to be re-contacted should be the primary source of respondents for the WP4, and if it appeared not possible (due to refusal to participate in further survey or change of status from unemployed to employed person) the purposive sampling was acceptable (e.g. by government departments and job placement agencies or by means of a snowball sampling method).

On the other hand, the researchers were able to modify the tool in the course of the research. They could ignore the questions referred to as "optional" and add new questions, responding in this way to new, unexpected, surprising or incomprehensible situations. Referring to the common theoretical and conceptual framework, the national teams were fully independent in analysing the gathered material, and the uniform structure of the national reports was purely formal. In consequence there emerged differences in the nature of conclusions drawn by different teams in the national reports and in the convention in which they are presented.

The purpose of data analysis within the framework of GTM is to explore phenomena at the level of raw data and the relationships between them, and then to arrange them in a theoretical explanatory scheme. In the YOUNEX project, which had a much broader scope, the grounded theory method was adopted within the framework of one of work packages (WP4) . While the researchers involved in WP4 (in in-depth qualitative analysis) also participated in other work packages of the YOUNEX project, when starting their work within WP4, they did not take a priori any theoretical explanations or did not verify them in the course of their previously developed hypotheses.<sup>1</sup> Research conducted in the GTM spirit allowed individual teams to identify phenomena that were crucial for local groups of the long-term unemployed young people (aged 18-34 years), which in turn led to a better understanding of the situation of young unemployed people and coping strategies used by them.

Under this approach, data collection and interpretation are interwoven. In this way, analysis of data gathered at the beginning of the research project affects further stages of data collection (e.g. by modifying tools, asking interviewees more smart and more relevant questions), and through this also the further stages of analysis of the information gathered. This approach allows for substantiation of hypotheses and concepts at a time when they are developed.

The main part of this report are national studies that relate in substance to such concepts as: data microanalysis, open coding, axial coding, selective coding, theoretical saturation, memo-writing, theoretical sampling or line-by-line analysis. All of them are very important, but attention of this report will be focused on the coding process which forms an essential part of the analyses referring to GTM. It is significant that although these types of coding significantly differ from each other in terms of the objective pursued, it may not necessarily be the steps of the analytical process subsequent in chronological order.

#### Data microanalysis

It allows one to conceptualise and classify collected data. Coding categories picked by the researchers in its course in conjunction with the outline of the links between them are a starting point for building the explaining schedule. This process requires the abstraction of data, their reduction and references to other data, which constitutes the essential difference between theoretical coding and a pure description of the data. This is possible thanks to the line-by-line analysis, which forces researchers to go beyond pure data description and can be applied both to individual words, sentences and whole paragraphs. It is not necessary for

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<sup>1</sup> This does not however mean that researchers did not resort to the existing literature (although in individual national reports it is used in varying degrees), which is a relatively common, though no longer true opinion about the grounded theory method referring to the early GTM versions from the period of its formation in qualitative research at the turn of 1960's and 1970's.

all materials. It is used commonly in the initial phase of work with the material, but researchers can refer to it every time when there are new pieces that surprise, deviate from their existing knowledge, when there are new categories or old ones have not been sufficiently analysed. It is the process relying to a large extent on the researcher's creativity, which is why it cannot be restricted by rigid guidelines. Hence, the possibility of alternation of microanalysis with the open and axial coding discussed below.

An important feature of this phase of analysis is that it provides the knowledge needed to modify the tools prior to subsequent interviews.

#### Open coding

It is supposed to lead to fragmentation of data and their further analysis in order to compare them in terms of similarities and differences. Recurring events, objects, activities or interactions that are found to be significantly similar, are then grouped into more abstract conceptual categories. At the initial stages of analysis the boundary between categories and subcategories is not clear, but more clearly delineated over time.

#### Axial coding

The main objective of axial coding is to re-combine data, which were divided in its earlier stages. During the axial coding process, categories are combined with subcategories in a way that can explain the analysed phenomenon as accurately and completely as possible. In other words, the aim is here to systematically develop not only the categories, but also the relationships between them. This is the stage at which the foundations for future theoretical frameworks are formed. The way to do this is to ask questions: *Why? Where? How? With what result?*, which move the researchers closer to finding answers to questions about the relationships between categories.

#### Selective coding

While within the framework of axial coding categories are systematically developed and then combined with subcategories, the selective coding is the process of their integration and improvement. It is recommended that the target categories are based around the core explanatory concept, recognised as the most relevant from the standpoint of problems posed in the research. The core concept may emerge from the previously existing categories. Identification of such a concept, its choice from among many categories deemed essential, although it can be difficult, but it is extremely important, because it allows researchers to connect the identified categories and concepts and to establish links between them. It is a process extended in time, which begins at the start of the work on the problem posed, and ends at the moment of development of the text.

### **Organisation and course of interviews**

Due to the adoption of grounded theory perspective, which - not allowing for any *a priori* assumption - requires a lot of effort from researchers at every stage of research, the YOUNEX team has established a special way of Work Package 4. organisation. The Work Package leader, the Polish team, took care of the course of work in accordance with the grounded theory method, and of the continuous exchange of information and thoughts between the groups of researchers at the level of individual countries.

After discussion and obtaining consensus regarding the WP4 objectives, its rooting in the total YOUNEX project and relationships with other Work Packages, the adopted theory was discussed in detail, noting the way of its establishment, its assumptions and the way of conducting research in line with the established theory. Then works on the in-depth interview guide started, whose first pilot version was tested in each country.

After the pilot stage, the teams exchanged comments about the conduct of interviews and relevance of questions. Due to the nature of the grounded theory method, it was established that suggestions arising from the experience of all countries should be introduced to commonly used in-depth interview guide, and in case of differences between the teams, each of them had the right to make minor changes and additions to its version of the tool. This follows from the assumptions of the grounded theory method, according to which the researcher takes into account up to date information from the experiences of the research process and already collected material. As the experience in relation to the situation of young unemployed people in six countries could not be identical, there should be allowed a possibility of some differences in construction of the tool and of the introduction of the coding categories in the analysis of the material.

The teams have agreed that after five interviews carried out in each country, representatives of individual countries would meet to discuss the thoughts arising in the interviews, potential difficulties in carrying out surveys, suggestions for overcoming existing barriers and further procedure. The workshop dedicated to this issue was held in April 2010 in Warsaw. The Polish team, as a leader of the Work Package, conducted ten interviews before the workshop, subjecting them to microanalysis and creating a list of coding categories. For the needs of the workshop there was selected an area associated with the economic situation of the unemployed respondents, and with the strategies of coping with the frequent financial problems. The selected quotes from interviews were presented (with a brief description of the situation of respondents), with an explanation, on their example, of the microanalysis method and of the way the first coding categories were created. There were discussed the key splitting axes that emerge from attempts at grouping adopted categories. It was considered which coping strategies could be perceived thanks to the conducted analysis. And, once again, the discussion covered the elements which should be included in national reports to be prepared after collecting and analysing the material.

In the subsequent months of the project implementation, the national teams recruited interviewees, conducted research, engaged in transcription of interviews, to analyse the collected material in accordance with the grounded theory method. At each stage the teams could contact each other to clarify any doubts and difficulties.

The Polish team was the first which conducted research and prepared the WP4 report. Other teams were provided with the study paper before the meeting of the consortium in Geneva in April 2011. At this meeting, the Polish report and the progress of works in other teams were discussed. It was assumed that national reports should be written according to the same schedule, to enable preparation of the final report of the Work Package in the most coherent and transparent way.

The organisation and conduct of the research in six participating countries are presented in subsequent chapters of this report.

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## National Report Switzerland

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*Jasmine Lorenzini*

### Introduction

This report is based on face-to-face interviews with young long-term unemployed living in Geneva. Young long-term unemployed are persons aged 18 to 34 years old who have been looking for a job for one year or more. The in-depth interviews included questions about employment involvement, unemployment situation, financial situation, relationship to the unemployment office, family and social life, as well as political life, well-being and plans for the future. We tried to understand what meanings they gave to their specific employment situation and how they were dealing with this specific situation.

We conducted 22 interviews with young long-term unemployed, throughout the years 2010 and 2011, starting in spring 2010 and finishing during the winter 2010-2011. We have done the interviews with persons who responded to our survey and accepted to be contacted again for a face-to-face interview. Although we had a list of approximately 200 persons who accepted to be contacted again, it was not always easy to recruit people for the interviews. We had to make many phone calls to recruit the 22 respondents. Among our list, some were not unemployed anymore, others were not willing to dedicate any more time to our research or were busy doing internships or other working or training obligations. Moreover, five respondents who first accepted to meet us, but were not present at the set appointment and did not answer the phone afterwards. Among the 22 interviews 2 did not correspond to our criteria, one had only been unemployed for four months and the other was disabled and working within a social employment program for disabled persons. Hence we had to discard them and from now on we will only mention the 20 interviews we used for the analysis.

The 20 interviewees we conducted included men and women, Swiss and foreigners, as well as 'younger' and 'older' youth who have been unemployed for a year or more. We used quotas for two of these dimensions (sex and age) and present the distribution of the 20 respondents according to these categories in table 1.

**Table 1: Interviewees Age and Sex**

	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>
<i>18 to 23 years old</i>	Theo, 18 years old Norbert, 22 years old	Juliette, 20 years old
<i>24 to 29 years old</i>	Jude, 27 years old Sam, 28 years old	Nadia, 25 years old Sonia, 27 years old Adeline, 27 years old
<i>30 to 35 years old</i>	Ray, 30 years old James, 32 years old Romuald, 32 years old Louis, 34 years old Xenon, 34 years old Sebastian, 35 years old	Seni, 30 years old Kamelia, 31 years old Joana, 32 years old Virginia, 32 years old Karin, 33 years old Ana, 35 years old

As shown in table 1, we have fewer respondents in the younger categories. In fact it was more difficult to find and recruit them for the interviews the very young unemployed, especially the 18 to 23 years old, but also to some extent the 24 to 29 years old. Also because long-term unemployed younger than 20 are very rare in our sample and in the population they represent. In fact a large share of the 18 to 24 years old among the population in Geneva is still undergoing studies and will enter the labor market later on, at an older age. Hence we have three age categories, one with very few respondents looking at the younger cohort and two that include the majority of our respondents from 24 to 29 with 5 respondents and those aged 30 to 35 years old with 12 respondents. Half of all of them being men and the other half being women. Some are married others are single, some have children others not, some have high education levels, others have left school early, and some are Swiss while other are foreigners – either second generation or immigrants<sup>2</sup>.

This report is a descriptive analysis presenting the richness of the material and the central concepts that emerged through qualitative analysis that borrowed some analytic procedures to grounded theory research design. More specifically for the analysis we combined approaches developed for grounded analysis by Charmaz (2006) and Corbin and Strauss (2008). We started with a micro-coding of the first five interviews which implies a line-by-line analysis of the interview transcript. This permitted us to see the main topics emerge from the field material and to compute a list of the codes that would be used for the analysis of the 20 interviews<sup>3</sup>. Based on this list of codes presented in Annex I, we coded all the interviews one by one while at the same time writing memos that helped us understand how the interviewees experienced their unemployment and how the different concepts mobilized were combined. These memos served as the basis for the common analysis of the 20 interviews, we confronted them in order to see the mechanisms which we were trying to understand.

In the following sections of this report, we present the problems faced by young long-term unemployed in Geneva. These problems include elements directly linked to their search for a job, but also the consequences of not having a job on their personal well-being, social and political integration. These three dimensions are central in this descriptive analysis and we discuss them in details in the following parts. In the last section we highlight the coping strategies they mobilize to deal with their current situation. Before moving on to the descriptive analysis, in the next section we propose and discuss a typology of young long-term unemployed in Geneva.

### **Types of unemployment situation in Geneva**

We started with the construction of a typology of young long-term unemployed in Geneva, the typology is based on two axes that appear as important during the analysis of the interviews. This typology is useful to understand the heterogeneity of unemployment situations among young long-term unemployed.

On the horizontal axe we have the level of education one has achieved in which we included broad categories: basic education; diplomas; apprenticeship; university degree. In the lower levels of education, we have included basic education with persons who have only finished compulsory education and have acquired no other training, as well as diploma by which we

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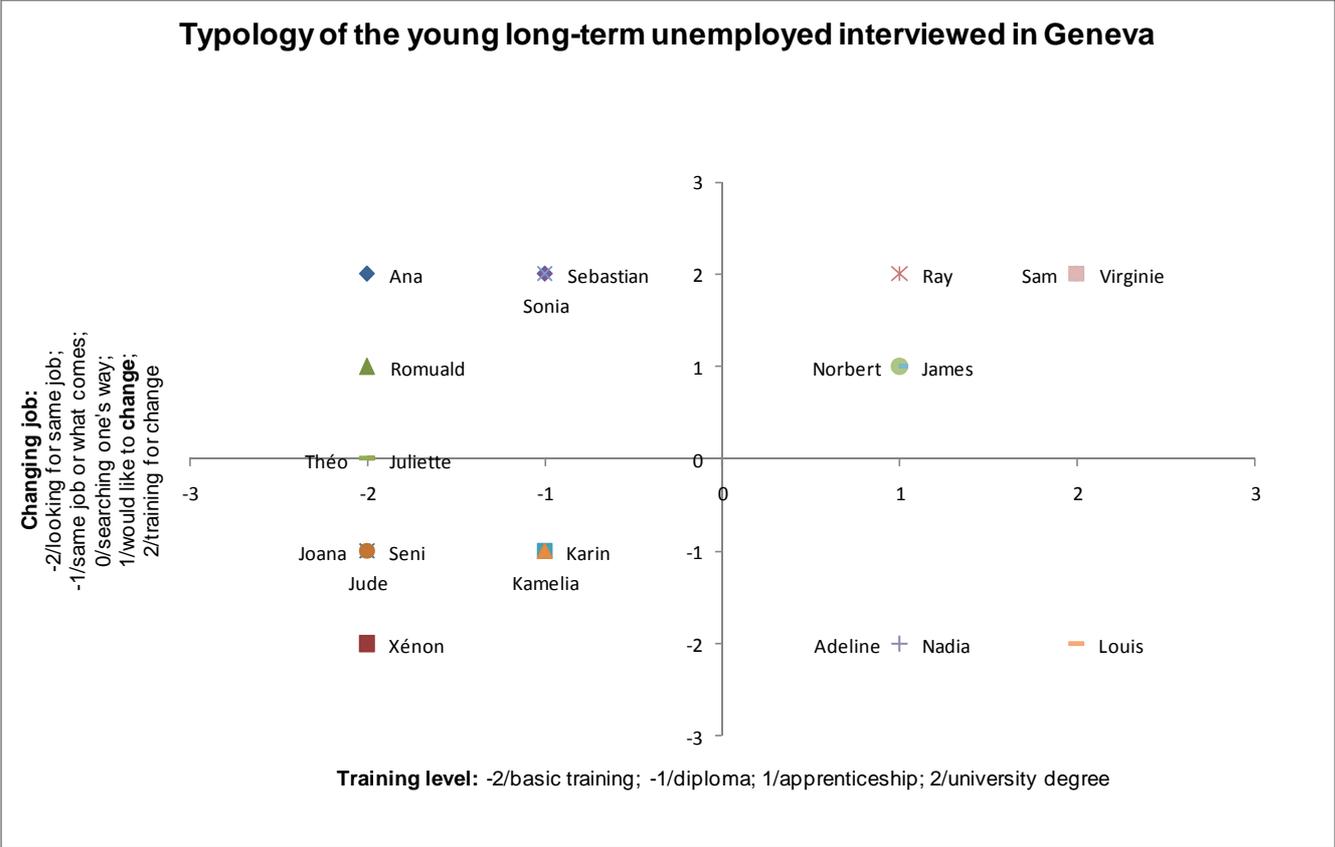
<sup>2</sup> See Annex I.

<sup>3</sup> See Annex II.

mean all kinds of training pursuit after mandatory school that offer a professional title which is not recognized as either applied universities or apprenticeships. Those titles are delivered by private schools or corporations and are not recognized as Federal Certificate of Capacity delivered after an apprenticeship. In the higher levels of education, we have included apprenticeship as a nationally recognized and valued form of training (very common in Switzerland) and the higher education acquired through university degrees (which could also include applied universities, but we have no respondent in this case).

While on the vertical axe we worked on the question of career path and the search for a job in the same field as either previous job or training or the reorientation of one’s career. This axes includes 5 categories: those who look for a job in the same sector; those who are open to any job; those who do not really know what they want to do and are looking for their way as middle point in the vertical axe and on the other end of it those who are either willing to change career orientation, but have not started to do so and those who have already engaged in a new training or in a reorientation of their career.

We will see more precise examples of these two axes and the individual situations we find in each of the four squares of the typology in the following sections.



We have positioned the 20 young long-term unemployed in our typology in order to give us a visual positioning of the interviewees with regards to training level and career orientation. This helps us understand the various situations we can find among the long-term unemployed we interviewed. Furthermore this will also be important later on while interpreting the consequences of long-term unemployment on their personal lives.

Moving to the typology, in the upper part of the typology we see those who are willing to change career orientation, with a difference between those who have engaged in a new training and are trying to build their professional career in a new field and those who are still trying to find the means to start this re-orientation. Below on the 0 line we have those youngsters who did not find an apprenticeship and who are trying to find their way. They only have basic training and no or almost no professional experience. We call them *youth without an apprenticeship* Theo and Juliette have finished compulsory school and did not find any apprenticeship. They are trying to find their way and have a difficult time in what we call the first transition (from school to training, the second transition being from training to employment). Below in the bottom left corner, we have all those who have either basic diplomas or only basic training, but some working experience and who would like to find either a job in their field or whatever opportunity is offered to them. Finally, in the right bottom part we see unemployed who have training and would like to keep working in their field.

Then moving from left to right we can see that our interviews were mainly conducted with young long-term unemployed who only have basic training or some diploma from private school that have lower value on the Swiss labour market than for instance an apprenticeship or university degree. Some have acquired qualifications but have had a not straight forwards path due to various (personal) reasons. We think it is interesting to stress also some of these elements. Nevertheless we also have interviewed young long-term unemployed who have higher education or who have an apprenticeship.

Moreover we have one specific group among our interviewees which we would like to highlight. This group does not stand out as such in the above typology, but it is important to stress it exists. This group we call *single mothers* Adeline, Joana, and Kamelia have children and are living on their own and raising their children, this implies specific difficulties related to finding a job.

Another important dimension, not shown in the typology, is the nationality of the respondents. In Geneva the percentage of foreigners among this age category is around 50%, this is due to the citizenship model that is based on a *jus sanguinis* attribution of the Swiss nationality. Hence the share of persons who are not Swiss is higher than in other countries and having 50% of the unemployed who are foreigners corresponds to their share within the broader population. Nevertheless those young long-term unemployed who are not Swiss face specific difficulties in relation to how they master French and the training and previous employment they have<sup>4</sup>.

### **Analysis of the material collected in the field**

In this part of the report we present the results of our analysis of the 20 interviews we conducted with long-term unemployment. We start with the understandings of employment and unemployment of our interviewees and then we move on to the problems they face related to their unemployment. In particular we have three dimensions: job search, social exclusion and political exclusion. We conclude with a presentation of the coping strategies they developed to deal with long-term unemployment.

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<sup>4</sup> More information about the respondents' nationality and curricula are presented in Annex I.

### ***Definitions of employment and unemployment***

We start with a definition of what unemployment means for the young long-term unemployed that we interviewed. In particular how they perceive the differences between having a job and its absence. What it means for them to be employed and unemployed? This is an important starting point before we analyze the consequences of long-term unemployment, it given an idea of what the interviewees see as missing at the moment in their lives. But also how they qualify the specific situation they are living – the lack of a paid job. These definitions vary between unemployed, not all of them have the same definition but some core elements emerge.

Most of the long-term unemployed we interviewed already have had a job, only the youngest, Theo and Juliette, never had one. But they all have an idea about what it means to have a job. Having a job is considered as very important by the young unemployed as we can see in the comments they made about what a job represents for them: *“do like everybody, have a job, a life”* (Theo, 18 years old); *“having a day like everyone else”* (Norbert, 22 years old); *“[work] represents, um, well, life, normality, a normal life”* (Sonia, 27 years old). These quotes show the importance of having a job. Employment is a central element in life in our society, it is considered as an element defining both normality in the interviewees' words, or we could say conformity with dominant trends in society. In fact even more than having a regular day, like everyone else, more than being normal *“having a job means we exist”* (Xenon, 34 years old), having a job is an essential element to be a member of our society as Juliette says *“here, if we want to be somebody, we have to have a job”*.

Hence the absence of a job entails many other lacks, apart from employment and earnings, that can be psychological or social. In fact, the analysis of the interview shows that a job represents both a goal in itself, but also aspirations towards elements related to having a job such as the normality, the social contacts with colleagues or with clients depending on the job one is doing, the contribution to society, the good health, and the financial independence that can sustain a social life. Employment and the personal and social benefits related to it are understood as a whole:

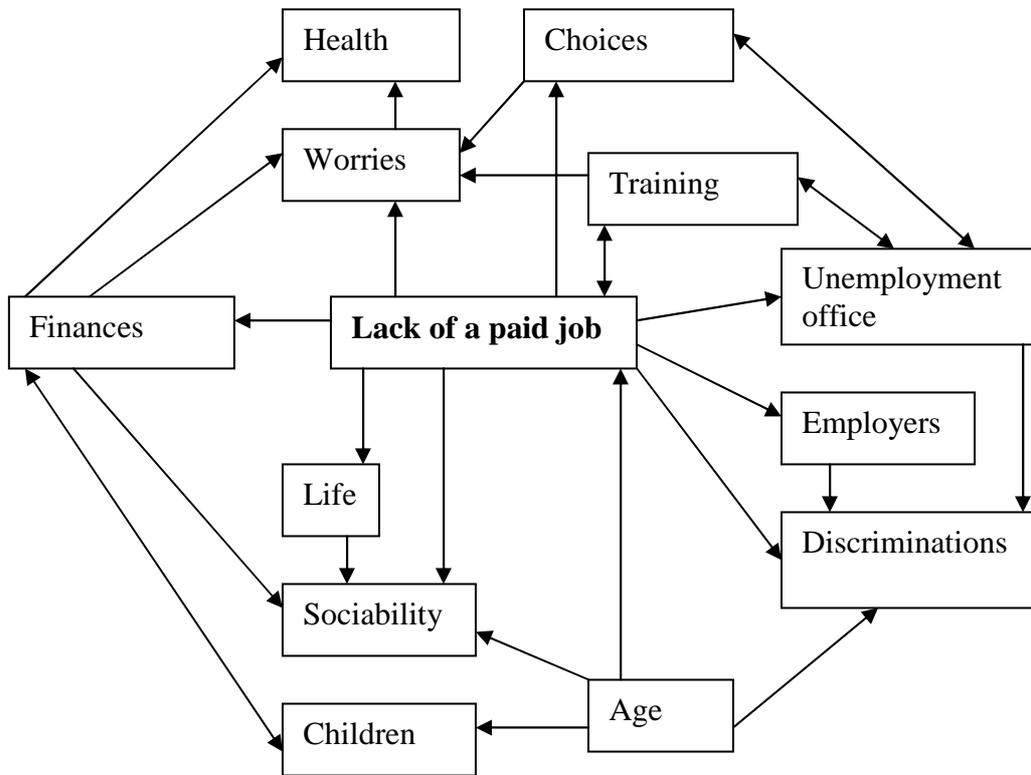
*“Work is health, work is good for your spirits, being able to work every morning, get up, do something, it is very important, it is enhance for a person, at least it's the case for me”*

(Kamelia, 31 years old).

Summing up we can quote Adeline who says: *“My dream is to have a job”* which shows the fulfillment and overall importance of having access to a job. Now that we know a little about what is missing in their lives, we will turn to the specific problems they face in relation to the lack of employment. We will present the different types of problems young unemployed face in their everyday life such as finding a job, social exclusion and political exclusion, and then we will turn to coping strategies.

### ***Definition of unemployment related problems***

In this part of the report we will list and explain the problems related to unemployment that emerged in the analysis of the interviews we conducted in Geneva. We found three dimensions: employment related problems; social life related problems and personal problems. Below we present a mapping of the difficulties that helps visualize the relations between these different components of unemployment experience.



**Figure 1: Lack of a paid job and related concepts**

Among the unemployment related problems, we have four topics we will present in details. All four are interrelated as we understand them: employability, unemployment office, unemployment office counsellors, and discouragement. These problems are all directly related to the lack of a paid job and the search for one. Concerning the other two dimensions they are side-effects related to the lack of a paid job. On the one hand, we are concerned with the social consequences of unemployment and, on the other hand, with the political consequences of long-term unemployment. For the social dimension we analyze the elements that can be related to social integration or social exclusion, in particular young long-term unemployed financial situations and the worries that can go along, their moral well-being, the discriminations they face, and their social life. Finally, on the political dimension we work on the definitions young long-term unemployed give, on their political attitudes and behaviours, and the specificities related to their age.

***Unemployment and job search***

In this section we present the elements related to the interviewees job search, in particular how they evaluate their chances of finding a job based on their profile or what we call their employability. Additionally we present their perceptions of the public institutions dealing with unemployment and assisting them in their job search, the unemployment office and the persons working there, mainly the unemployment office counsellors to whom they are

confronted. Finally we conclude with an important element related to the duration of their job search discouragement.

### Employability

*Employability* is a key term in the European language about unemployment, perceived as the key to all problems, although the young long-term unemployed we interviewed do not use this term as such they have means to evaluate their *employability* and to identify some gaps in their curricula, as well as potential solutions that we discuss at the end in the coping strategies section. For now we focus on the question of: **how do they explain to themselves their fruitless job search?**

As we have seen in the typology the long-term unemployed we interviewed have very different profiles with regards to both training and previous working experience. We cannot generalize an ideal-type of the young long-term unemployed in Geneva. Therefore the perceived causes for not finding a job cannot be the same for all the long-term unemployed we interviewed. Hence we will present overall analysis and also specificities of some profiles of young unemployed.

We should first say that mostly they blame themselves for not having a job. Seldom do they talk about the responsibility of either employers or politicians. Sometimes they talk about the crisis and overall difficulties to find jobs in certain sectors, but this is not linked to collective responsibilities. The major cause of their unemployment is their lack of training or the lack of experience. On this second aspect, they confront the employers with their requirements of experience that are difficult to acquire if one is not given the chance to work. Hence the solutions they see are mainly linked to themselves and often include improving one's curricula either through training or through new job experiences, in particular internships.

Some specific groups of young unemployed face more difficulties in their job search due to their low *employability*. Among the persons we interviewed we find two groups in particular that face specific difficulties in finding a job: *single mothers* and *untrained youth*. *Single mothers* face problems related to the necessity to have a day care available at any time in order to be considered employable by the unemployment office. This is not the sole problem; moreover they need to find day care solutions that are affordable and to overcome the prejudices that employers sometimes have towards young single mothers. Regarding the group of *untrained youth*, they have difficulties in finding a job due to their lack of diploma and working experience. They are trying to find an apprenticeship to make the first transition from compulsory school to higher training, but they do not find an employer, an opportunity to start an apprenticeship. Hence they are forced to do internship and to try to acquire a little experience that would help them find an apprenticeship.

Moreover young unemployed perception of their *employability* is linked to the following sections, their perception of the unemployment office support or the lack of it, the capacity of the counsellors to help them concretely in their job search and the discouragement related to the perceived inability to find a job.

### Unemployment office

The unemployed we interviewed receive(d) assistance throughout their job search provided by the unemployment office. The satisfaction concerning the help or support offered varies considerably among the unemployed. We analyzed the interviews trying to understand: **How they perceive the unemployment office? And on the one hand, what kind of help or**

## **support they received and on the other hand what are the limitations to it or what was missing?**

Concerning the unemployment office the main problem perceived by the unemployed is the tension between personal counselling and strict application of the law. The unemployed are in contact with the unemployment office through their counsellor, normally the same throughout their unemployment, and they depend on him or her to have access to training and employment measure. In the next section we discuss in details the help provided by the counsellors and the limits to it. Here we will more generally talk about the unemployment office.

On the positive dimension of the unemployment office, the unemployed mention the courses related to preparing a curricula or a job interview. Although these courses are sometimes boring or too long, they see them as useful for their job search. Also regarding other courses, they are pleased when they can have extra training in languages or in specific dimensions of their job (administrative courses or computer courses for instance). But the unemployed are also quite frustrated when they do not have access to those courses because they do not understand the reason or the motivations for the refusal. These courses are also important because they give the unemployed active and help them have a daily structure, have a life style close to those who are working. Moreover they offer opportunities to have social contacts that they miss being unemployed.

While regarding the negative aspects of the unemployment office, one of the main element is the institution did not adapt to the current situation on the labour market – in particular to the increasing number of unemployed.

*“Mmh... well, I arrived at the wrong time, I think, when there was all the... the people that registered and so... they had not increase the... the number of counsellors, bottom line me I think that... in a year, or little less than a year, I have seen them um... five time”*

(James, 32 years old).

As was the case for James some of the interviewees mentioned that they did not see their counsellors very often and hence had to repeat every time their presentation for the counsellor to know who he or she was talking to. Hence the 15 minutes of the appointment are not very useful and the counsellor is only there to check for the rendering of job search sheets. Below we continue with the analysis of the relationship between the unemployed and their counsellors.

### Unemployment office counsellors

The support or help of the unemployment office is provided by the unemployment counsellor who is the person of reference for the unemployed throughout their job search. The counsellors deal with their case and they are access point for the unemployed to courses and training offered by the unemployment office. They are also those in charge of sanction the unemployed when the requirements are not fulfilled by the unemployed. In this section we address the question of **what are their relationships to their counsellors. Where they satisfied with it? What was missing?**

The unemployed have a vision of their counsellor built not only on their personal experience, but also on exchanges they had with other unemployed about their counsellors and all of them agree that it depends on who your counsellor is. Some say *“I have the chance to have*

a very good counsellor” (Virginia, 32 years old), while others are more critical about their counsellor. All agree to say that it is a question of chance and who you end up with, there are good and bad counsellors so to say. But it all depends on what you define as a good or a bad counsellor. We present some elements related to the unemployed-counsellor relationship below.

Firstly, it depends on how involved the counsellor is in the unemployed specific case. In fact the main critics are related to the limited time dedicated to each unemployed and so to understanding the specific needs related to improving one’s curricula and finding a job. The counsellors either do not have the time or the capacity to do counselling. The unemployed expect the counsellors to be able to help them find solutions to their problem, the lack of a paid job. But sometimes they are deceived and believe they have to do everything by themselves, they do not perceive the help or support provided by the counsellor. For instance Ray who had to change job due to his health says about the unemployment office counsellors:

*“Well, them, not much; it’s me who brought the ideas, who had um, who had um the idea to, to go in this direction... to do this truck license”.*

Moreover, the unemployed give much importance to the counsellor’s capacity to listen to them and they expect him or her to do that and so to be able to evaluate their own situation and their needs. From the unemployed perspective this permits to provide support based on a good understanding of their case and the kind of help they need in terms of either orientation or additional training. But often the unemployed are deceived, as Xenon says: *“the counsellors are trained as managers; they are not trained to do the more ‘social’ work”* and the unemployed expect to find a human being in front of them, not just a case manager.

*“I understood that it depends on the humanity of the person in front of you. Because it’s true that... that... the law is equal for all, but, there are cases and cases...”*

(Seni, 30 years old).

Another source of discontent is the attribution of courses that help improve one’s skills and employability. The major problem is that the unemployed do not understand why some courses they asked have been refused and they compare their situation to others and think it was unfair they did not get those courses. This translates into resentment with the way the counsellors deal with them and also to a feeling of abandonment. Nadia was very upset with the way her counsellor handled her case for she never received the courses she had asked (cf. an English course), she felt she needed that additional skill to find a job and was turned down from job due to her poor level of English. Hence talking about her counsellor she says:

*“One does not help, I mean, in the sense that I don’t feel helped at all”*

(Nadia, 25 years old).

### Discouragement

One of the main consequences of the duration of the job search, a year or more, is a form of discouragement. In this section we address the question **what happens after the unemployed searched for a job for a year or more?**

At the beginning of the job search the unemployed were motivated, positive about their chances to find a job and more proactive. They invested time and energy in finding a job,

sending out many applications for jobs. But the more negative answers they receive, the more discouraged they are about their chances to find one.

*“Since I received only negative answers, I tell myself, well, is it really worth doing so many efforts... well...”*

(Ana, 35 years old).

The assessment is even worse when the unemployed think they did all they could to find a job, for instance they invested in additional training trying to meet up with requirements on the labor market, but still nobody is giving them a chance.

Though the unemployed have worked on their curricula, acquired new skills, or even diplomas, but they still do not have a job. Therefore they have the impression that nothing is changing *“and the day is gone, and there is still nothing”* (Nadia, 25 years old) and they stop believing in the possibility that things will ever change

*“At the moment, I don’t cope with it, I suffer from it. I coped at the beginning, but now I suffer from it. As I said, I have no more inspiration, I have difficulties applying for jobs, really, because, I ... um... I have no hope anymore.”*

(Seni, 30 years old).

Facing so many deceptions is tiring and depressing, it leaves hopeless and employment becomes something unreachable

*“and so now ... it seems... it’s... it’s... as if... I don’t know... I will never reach that”*

(Adeline, 27 years old).

These elements show the centrality of employment, although they may have other activities or they may have obtained a diploma that they are proud of, when it does not open on employment, they feel they are not moving as Kamelia says: *“I am always at the same point, I have not evolved”*.

### ***Unemployment and social exclusion***

In this next section on social exclusion we include a discussion of financial difficulties and worries, of moral well-being and discriminations. These three elements are important in order to understand **how the process of social exclusion takes place**. We come back to this question after presenting the four main dimensions included in this section.

#### **Financial difficulties and worries**

Although the unemployment benefits replace between 70 and 80% of the previous wages, young long-term unemployed face financial difficulties – either due to the length of their unemployment and the use of all their savings during this period of unemployment or due to a reference wage that was already low and so a decrease of 20 to 30% in earnings is a drastic reduction. Hence they have to cope with a limited amount of money to pay for their basic needs such as housing and food, but also some bills as insurances and telecommunications. They have little extra money for their hobbies or other social activities. The question we address below is the following: **what is seen as especially difficult for them?** We will also make the link to the next section analyzing **how it affects them psychologically**.

*“Well the negative, it’s your situation, it’s um, you have no job, you’re not able to find one, you have no money, that’s it, you know; anyway, in the end, it’s the money yeah, it’s clear cut, yeah.”*

(Xenon, 34 years old)

A low income means one needs to calculate every expense and try to find solutions to reduce them: finding cheaper food, avoiding social activities such as going out with friends for drinks, giving up hobbies or finding alternatives. Some of the interviewees say you have to be creative to come up with solutions:

*“You have to be creative and you have to adapt”*

(Xenon, 34 years old)

*“Ah well, you have to be very creative, you know, because I, I have just... just enough to live”*

(Ana, 35 years old).

Among the ideas proposed to cope with little money we find: changing dietary habits; investing time in free activities; inviting friends at home rather than going out; avoiding malls and shops. Some elements make the financial situation more difficult to bear, for instance having children not only the amount of money needed increases, but also because children have demands to acquire material goods like their friends.

Although they always have to think about their financial restriction and spend as little money as possible, they are quite clear that they do not miss anything vital. For the younger unemployed we interviewed they are still living with their parents and have basic needs covered by the family realm (housing and food at least). More generally, all of them have housing and food, and most of them also have people to whom they can turn to in case they need some financial help, if they need to borrow money to finish the month or to pay unexpected expenses. We come back to this issue in the last part of the analysis on coping.

One important consequence of the reduced income is the limited budget for social activities – either hobbies or social contacts. Some say they have dropped their hobbies because they cannot afford them anymore, others have chosen activities that demand a limited amount of money, and others still invest in just one activity they enjoy and that they maintain. Hence depending on the choices one makes, he or she has more or less regular contacts with friends and some become quite solitary. This reduction in social activities is not only due to the lack of money, but also to the psychological breakdown resulting from unemployment: the lack of motivation and of energy to do things. The quote below illustrates the interrelations between these various aspects:

*“Well nothing at all anymore (laughing); no it’s true, before, I used to do Yoga for instance; I had to stop because I could not pay the courses anymore, so, hence, um, nothing at all anymore, even, I used to read a lot; since I have been unemployed, I don’t feel like reading anymore, I’m tired; well, it changes quite a lot, yeah, I would have the time... to read (laugh), I almost don’t read anymore.”*

(Sonia, 27 years old)

On the personal side, the lack of money and the financial difficulties cause a problem of independence. The unemployed rely on their families, and sometimes on close friends, to

help them pay for their living and this is difficult to bear as Seni often repeats in her interview: “*they pay for my life*”. This includes not only basic needs, but also social activities. Even if friends are willing to offer drinks and invite them, the young unemployed feel ashamed and are not able to enjoy their night out if they are invited. Hence they prefer to stay home or do other activities that are free.

In addition to the reduced social life it entails and to the dependence it can cause, the unemployed suffer from psychological consequences of their financial difficulties. The financial worries are the mental burden entailed by the lack of money to pay for one’s expenses.

*“I mean, it’s a baffling problem, yeah. Sometimes you cannot sleep at night.”*

(Romuald, 32 years old).

The worries, anxiety and stress caused by the lack of money. We analyze this psychological dimension in details below.

### Psychological well-being

Young long-term unemployed are affected in their psychological health by the experience of unemployment and long-lasting job search. The quest for a job becomes an insurmountable problem and a burden. Insuperable for they have used all their resources, tried all the strategies they could think about and still do not find a job. Burden-like since it is something that is always with them, that defines them to certain extends and that they cannot dismiss. Hence in this section we question **what are the psychological consequences of long-term unemployment?**

There are many different elements to it, for instance the loss of motivation and willingness to do things. The unemployed stay home and are, little by little, disconnected from the broader social world. Their time schedule is unique – they do not work during the day and in the evening they have limited resources to go out and spend the evening with friends. For instance seeing one’s children going to school and staying home, having nothing to do is perceived as a failure or the empty parking lot during the day. These symbolic elements bring the unemployed back to his or her condition of inactivity and being left home.

*“It is not easy to accept... yeah... yeah it’s a burden... it’s too heavy for me to carry every morning when I get up, and I see the children leave, and me, I stay home, fff.”*

(Kamelia, 31 years old)

*“Yes, it’s harder [to stay home]; ah la la, because one feels so harmful; one looks at the neighbourhood; the parking lot is empty; one feels one is... one is useless.”*

(Adeline, 27 years old)

Hence they suffer from an overall lack of motivation, which turns in a real incapacity to do things. Even physically one becomes tired and has difficulties in doing long-lasting activities. Some of the unemployed get up early in the morning either because they have family obligations, they have children and get them ready for school, or because they try to have routines set in the morning to go out and start the day. While others sleep in late and loose time this way:

*"[main activity]... at the moment, I think, it must be sleeping. But, otherwise... I sleep very little."*

(James, 32 years old)

Moreover this isolation and de-motivation are linked to a loss of self-confidence and to a reduced self-esteem. The employment carries also social value for the person who is engaged in it; the activities one is engaged in are valorising.

*"When one is unemployed, and that one did not have activities for a, quite a long time, and the activities, it's something valorising... and um, so, one is a little, or at least for me, I was in a spiral of, yeah... of... loss of self-confidence, of yeah downgrading."*

(Louis, 34 years old)

Plus the fact that it is difficult to think about something else, to change one's mind. We come back to this issue when talking about coping strategies. For now, we only want to mention what Juliette told us: "*ça me prend la tête*" which meant for her that she was constantly thinking about her unemployment and losing self-confidence and self-esteem, telling herself she is worth nothing.

### *Discriminations and Stigmatization*

In relation to social life it appears important to talk also about the image that unemployed have in society as well as the personal image of unemployment the unemployed themselves construct. Here we address the question of **what are the (negative) social images held about the unemployed and by whom?** This element is also important in understanding why the unemployed would not want to go out and reduce their social life or social activities.

*"As soon as one becomes unemployed, one feels that, it's as if, somehow, one does not want to work, it's our personal failure, it's because you have done something wrong, it's because of this... and um... and that, really it's a burden to live with it..."*

(Seni, 30 years old)

*"So um, rapidly one can be seen as someone who is a millstone, a bit um, who is not searching, who is doing nothing; I don't recognize myself in this image, but I can understand that some people have it."*

(Virginia, 32 years old)

The negative image of unemployed exists in society, although it is reduced by the increase in the unemployment rate and the fact that everybody knows someone who is unemployed. Nevertheless these stereotypes about the unemployed – they are not making enough efforts to find a job, if they want they can or they are taking advantage of the system exist. Sometimes this idea are even held by family members, in particular the parents who never experienced unemployment and entered the labour market in a period of *full employment* have troubles understanding what their children face.

*"Yes, from my parents, at the beginning when I was... it took them a very long time to understand, um, that it was not a question of willingness, you see, there is always this cliché and most of all for persons who have lived the full employment, the glorious years".*

(Louis, 34 years old)

*“Well, in fact my mother for instance, she is... well she knows it’s the crisis and everything, but she, she is not in it, because for them, they have found, um, it was easier for them to find a job.”*

(Juliette, 20 years old)

But mostly this negative conception of being unemployed is perceived indirectly – the unemployed do not face persons who hold negative stereotypes about them and make remarks. Rather they hear comments reported on the unemployed in general by friends or other persons and also in the media. Radio, newspaper or television sometimes make reports on unemployed and the images they carry are quite negative and do not correspond to their lived experience of unemployment. The same is true for public institutions, politicians and political parties who sometimes make discourses or base their ideas about unemployment on negative a priori. Especially so in the case of youth as Sonia states: *“it’s true that many persons would say, oh but yeah, they have, they are young, they just have to work”*.

The unemployed themselves perceive their situation as one of freeloader, but not totally. It is quite ambiguous; it stands half way between a right and something they are taking advantage off. In particular for those who are trying to reorient their career or who have ambitions to find employment in a specific field and are not yet ready to accept just any job, under bad conditions or something they do not want to do. They can feel guilty about that as we can see the excerpt below:

*“[What do you mean when you say: “I have the impression to take advantage of the system”?] I think it’s a luxury that I... well, it is quite paradoxical, because on the one hand I... am looking forward to leave this situation and I, I search, but I only search for things I am interested in. [...] maybe it’s true that I could have decided to look elsewhere and stop telling myself I want the luxury to do something I enjoy, and so um, take what come, and so no longer be unemployed.”*

(Virginia, 32 years old)

It is quite difficult to assume their situation of unemployed personally and socially sometimes. Sometimes the solution is not to mention their situations to persons who are not friends or relatives. When they have other activities they omit to say they are unemployed at the moment and only talk about the employment measure or intermediary earning they are in at the moment.

### Social life

The experience of a long period of unemployment also has consequences of one’s social life. Here we ask **what is the impact of unemployment on the young unemployed social lives?** In the descriptive analysis below we see that social life is connected to two other elements of unemployment: the financial difficulties and the reduced overall motivation to do things. A third element also affects social activities, the experience of shame and the attempt not to show that one is idle.

First on the financial dimension, having no job implies having a reduction of income and, as we have presented above, sometimes this reduction can be quite drastic since some of the

young unemployed already had low wages when they became unemployed. Hence they have money for basic needs – housing, food, insurance, and main bills - but they do not have much left for other expenses such as hobbies or social activities. Going out with friends can be very limited in order to avoid depending on others to pay for one's consumptions. It is a shameful experience to have to be invited all the time and a main reason for reducing social activities. Hence shame can also be a disincentive for going out.

*“Yeah, no, me, I go out, now um, in fact, I have my best friend’s birthday on Friday; I go, I have no motivation at all to go; really, it’s...; but I will go just to change what’s on my mind, all that, but I don’t feel like going you know... because we’ll go out, we’ll waste money, because you have to have a drink; me, I don’t have the means; I won’t ask her to pay for my drink... so um... I go because you know, but... but yeah, it’s not easy.”*

(Nadia, 25 years old)

The financial dimension is combined with the motivational one, the capacity to remain active and to maintain activities. As we have seen above the unemployment experience is taking all the energy one has and refrains from engaging in activities – either social or individual hobbies. Sometimes the unemployed say they force themselves to go out, to see friends, but then these social activities appear as a burden. Almost something one has to do. Not only to please friends, but also because they are conscious that they should not let themselves fall in a downwards spiral of self closure.

But some have good strategies to maintain social contacts or to remain active. For instance Joana “It’s true that now, I, I watch out before... I cannot afford to do that; going out all the time, not to go to a restaurant because it’s a bit just; that’s why I prefer to have dinner at home with friends who say ‘ok, why not, we’ll do something’ and everybody buys some, buys things to do a nice meal” or Jude “well, I mainly go to see my friends, I do a lot of biking mainly, and a bit all over Geneva to see a bit of everyone, depending on the types of job I have friends who finish to work at different times, starting at three in the afternoon until six in the evening; so I zigzag between them to see them all and to do my share of sports, and then, I go, I go manly to eat at my Dad’s in the evening to see him”. They see friends and family according to their availability. Otherwise they remain in touch through telephone and Internet and find ways to have activities that do not demand big investment in terms of money. Some search for cheaper or free activities, while other decide to invest in only one activity which they enjoy.

### Social exclusion

As a result of the different elements we addressed in this section, we present the process of social exclusion and ask whether or not the young long-term unemployed suffer from social exclusion. **How does social exclusion happen?**

*“I cannot go out like before, even for a drink or something like that, or to eat something out um; so, bottom line, it cuts still and all a lot the social contact, yeah, in general.”*

(Sonia, 27 years old)

In general we can say that unemployment leads to a reduction of social activities and social contacts. It varies greatly from one unemployed to the other since all of them have very different lives, housing situations, networks of friends, family structures, and financial

situations that can be more or less difficult. Nevertheless all of them had to reduce their social lives and find ways to cope with little money and energy to engage in social activities. We come back to the importance of having support in the coping strategies below. Moreover in that section we also address the question of personal self motivation and the importance of it.

About the process of social exclusion we can say that it is at the same time individual and social, both dimension interact and cut the unemployed from his (former) social life. Two mechanisms take place: one related to the overall lack of motivation that is more at the individual level and the other linking the individual and the social dimensions, the shame of being unemployed. With regards to the lack motivation we have seen above that the long-term unemployment reduces energy, leads to sleeping in long hours, avoiding the day time when everyone is busy and trying to remain active while having little money to invest in leisure activities. Moreover, on the individual dimension, they face reduced self-esteem and confidence, they even try to avoid saying they are unemployed or showing they are inactive because it is hard for them to assume this status so it limits social contacts. Adeline says:

*“well, friends um, I have some but, nothing more; it’s not the kind I would hang around with all day long um; it’s also the fact, not, not to want to let appear that one is um, that one is, that one is a lay about, well, that one is doing nothing; it’s, it’s hard; it’s difficult to bear.”*

### ***Unemployment and political exclusion***

In this part of the report we work on political exclusion addressing both attitudes and behaviours. We work on two sets of political attitudes, political interest and political trust. Regarding the political activities we include a broad range of activities, moving from the more institutional and conventional form of participation, voting, to other forms of political participation. Furthermore we include the perceptions youth have about the political realm, in particular how they define politics, and we start with this section.

#### ***Definitions of politics***

In this first part on political exclusion we analyze **how youth define politics?** It is important to know what we are talking about when we interview them about their political inclusion or exclusion. Before asking them what is their opinion about politicians and political institutions or whether they are active or not in anyways in politics, we asked them what their definition of politics was and we find interesting information about their perceptions of the political realm in their answers.

Many interviewees say they are not interested in politics, stating at the same time that it will be difficult to talk about it. But then we told them it was not about factual knowledge, rather about their opinions on politics so they started to talk about politics. And some definitions are based on this lack of interest and knowledge as for instance with Juliette: *“Politics, um (silence) I don’t know. I’m not that interested in politics.”* or as Kamelia says: *“it’s something that I never understood”*.

Those who engage in a definition of politics give already a feeling about their perception of politics and the definitions range from neutral ones to positive or idealistic definitions and to very negative definitions of what politics are. We start with the more neutral ones, then present the positive ones, and finish with the negative ones. The neutral definitions express

the idea that politics is something vague that includes many different elements such as the citizens, voting, the law, but also plenty of ideas and debates about different things.

*“For me politics is people who debate... on plenty of things”*

(Karin, 33 years old).

Moving on to those who have a positive vision of politics it includes the idea of living together. It's still something huge that includes different elements, but in this case it's related to trying to find a way to live together, to balance different interest, to use resources according to different needs. It is perceived as either a social structure, an institution or as an ideal, an optimum.

*“It's a kind of structure, a social structure in fact, for me it's more that, you know, it structures the ideologies of one and all.”*

(Ana, 35 years old)

*“Well politics, it's the... so, in the sense um, it's the, the, yeah, the fact to live with others, you know, in fact, the community, the... the mean to be able um... to live together, coexist, and to be able to do things together.”*

(Louis, 34 years old)

*“It's the tool that um ideally permits... to all um, despite our differences, to be able to find a common project, and um to have... how do you say... that everyone be satisfied, more or less, at his own level, in a fair way.”*

(Sebastian, 35 years old)

Finally, on the negative definitions of politics some simply say *“it's a dirty word”* (Ray, 30 years old) or *“it's a big mess”* (Nadia, 25 years old) and others list the negative elements *“two words... power um and um, yeah, power, money and, and... a lot of fraud”* (Seni, 30 years old). The negative definitions are related to the perception of the political realm as one of corruption, fraud, show of, and making only one's own interests advance, not running for the public good. *“It's an institution of former... friends from college or university who make their own small businesses, as in school”* (James, 32 years old); *“a mafia”* (Norbert, 22 years old).

The definitions that young unemployed give about politics are based on their personal experiences, the contacts they might have had with politicians or the political realm, and their knowledge about how it works. These perceptions of politics are both influenced and influence in turn their political attitudes and political activities that we analyze below.

### Political attitudes

The political attitudes on which we focus for this first step analysis of political exclusion are political interest on the one hand and political trust on the other hand. In the section on trust we include how they perceive politicians and how they judge their actions. So the questions we ask are: **are young unemployed interested in politics and do they trust politicians?**

Political interest is linked to political knowledge and the understanding one has of the political realm – institutions and political actors. It's difficult to find interest in politics for those who do not understand very well what is going on. The political realm can be perceived as very complex, but also as something repulsive by some of the interviewees. They say *“I don't like politics”* (Joana, 32 years old) as if this sentence explains everything from the lack of interest,

to the absence of political talks and activities. Politics can be perceived as useless; hence one understands that in this case there is no interest in it.

*"I am not too interested in politics; I vote but um... I am not interested in that that much; I find it um... it's not very useful."*

(Juliette, 20 years old)

The lack of political knowledge can be related to school or to personal history. Some unemployed mention that in school they did not acquire the tools necessary to understand politics and to have basic knowledge about it. *"The civic courses [in school], it's a disaster"* (Nadia, 25 years old). The lack of basic knowledge makes it more difficult to follow politics and be interested in it.

A part from knowledge, the information available about politics is also considered important. It's mainly considered as something positive to be informed and to be interested in politics, reading or watching the news. But not all of them do it on a regular basis; they are not all up to date (in their own words) with what is going on. Moreover some youth are quite critical about the media and the information they have access to. And others feel overwhelmed by information, not knowing whom to trust or how to decide what is true and false: *"I don't know anymore who is telling the truth and not"* (Kamelia, 31 years old). The abundance of information is both a chance and a challenge; sometimes it's difficult to process all the information available.

Political interest is also supported by one's social environment, in particular whether the unemployed talk or not about politics among their families and friends. This increases political interest in order to be able to exchange ideas. In fact, basic political knowledge and interest is perceived as part of the general culture one should have. Moreover it permits to express one's personal opinions. In the case of foreigners, they also mention the lack of basic knowledge to understand *"I don't know their laws, their mentalities"* (Joana, 32 years old) or they explain their lack of interest because *"it's not my country"* (Kamelia, 31 years old).

Furthermore some unemployed mention that they are annoyed by politics; it makes them nervous also because it's only words and promises, nothing concrete: *"It's only bla bla bla, nothing is true; no, but I mean it, nothing is true"* (Karin, 33 years old) or because it's too far away from reality, from real problems, *"they propose stupid things because they don't want to address the really important stuff"* (Jude, 27 years old).

In the paragraph above, we see that political interest can also be linked to the perception young unemployed have of the politicians and to whether they trust them or not. These are the next issues we address in this section. Politicians are perceived as persons with both power and responsibilities. Sometimes they are blamed for their incapacity to solve problems, for their selfish motivations, but sometimes they are also praised for their engagement and courage. The image the unemployed have of politicians is far from uniform and this perception of politicians is important since it influences the trust young unemployed place in them and also, to some extent, their interest in politics.

Those who share a positive image of politicians constructed this conception on different elements, in particular the fact that they are engaged in defending their ideas. Those who have a positive image of politicians also recognize that it takes courage and commitment to engage in politics. They value the work that is behind their engagement and some are aware

that they would not be ready to do that (as in the quote below from Virginia's interview). Moreover they mention that politicians have to solve problems on an everyday basis and that they have to be responsible for the problems that appear – they can be exposed to criticism. The capacity to respond to these demands attached to the role of politicians purports respect from some of the young unemployed.

*"I think it's brave... um, because it's a lot of work, and, because one is really on the first line and take all the criticism when something is not working; I think that I, this myself, I will never do it, me; I don't feel this um citizen or divine mission to be willing to make things change; I think you need that [...] yeah, I believe I respect the people who, who engage in that."*

(Virginia, 32 years old)

*"Well I think it's people who talk a lot, who earn a lot of money, who try to make their ideas pass and.... yeah, to make things change; after, the message is not always very well passed on, or the ideas are not always good, but that's it, it's people who try to make things change."*

(Sonia, 27 years old)

Regarding those who have a negative image of politicians, it is linked to their overall negative conception of politics. They see the political realm as corrupted and so the people who engage in it are also corrupted. For some only the bad ones engage in that world: *"well, first of all to be a politician one has to be... there are not often nice persons who do, who do that, politics"* (Juliette, 20 years old), while for others it's the only way to get there: *"all liars, that's all, that's all I can say; yeah but it's not their fault, you know; well in any case if you want to get there, it you have to bluff"* (Adeline, 27 years old). More generally what is often reproached to the politicians is their opportunism, the fact that they run for themselves and not to defend causes or ideals.

*"They [politicians] forget that their job it's that, you know, they are paid to make things advance and not to make only themselves advance."*

(Sebastian, 35 years old)

*"It's people who, who want to sing their own praises; it's persons who have a certain ego, and so, I think, that need to, to show off, and to be elected; and then, that satisfies part of their, yeah, their ego; so um, well, it's true that um, there are some, some who do only that, precisely; so, they don't do much, so um, that, it's true it's annoying; it's a bit the caricature of the politicians"*

(Louis, 34 years old)

Finally do young unemployed trust politicians? The question splits the group between those who overall say they trust them. A second group composed of those who do not trust politicians, some even answer to the question of whether they trust politicians: *"not at all!"* (Joana, 32 years old and Sebastian, 35 years old). This is linked in particular to the gap that young unemployed perceive between their promises and their acts. Politicians are deceiving and this is not a good way to build trust. And finally, we also have a third group with some interviewees who say they trust them but with not a lot of conviction or with a feeling that they have no other choice but to trust them.

Q. Personally do you trust them [politicians]?

A. Yes, I have to, me (laughing) I have no choice... I am obliged to trust them..."

(Romuald, 32 years old).

### Political activities

After addressing the questions of what is politics for the young long-term unemployed we interviewed and presenting their political attitudes, we move on to the analysis of their political activities. We included in our analysis three types of political activities that are more or less demanding and more or less institutional. The first one is talking about politics with family and friends, the second is the most common form of political participation – voting, and the last includes all other forms of political participation (signing petitions, doing protest activities, boycotting or boycotting are the main ones). Hence we ask **to what extent are young unemployed politically active? How do they perform political activities? And why do they do (or do not) those political activities?**

The first form of political activities that we describe is talking about politics. This basic way of being active in politics is related not only to political interest, but also to the persons around the young unemployed and to their own political interest and motivation to talk about politics. The most common practice is to talk about politics with family or else with close friends. It really depends on the social environment of the person, for instance Louis who is a journalist, when they meet with colleagues he mentions that the topic often comes up in the discussion. These political discussions are more frequent before or after voting takes place. Before the discussion are related to having more information and exchanging ideas about the issue at stake and after it is more about commenting the results.

*"I often talk about politics [...] with my partners' friends, ya often, it's super cool, because we do not agree; everyone brings his or her arguments, and all; so it's nice; and it's true that sometimes, well on tells oneself: 'ah ya, maybe he's right indeed um'; so um, yeah, it's interesting, I like to talk about that'.*

(Nadia, 25 years old)

But not all of the respondents have social surroundings that share the habit of talking about politics. For some the absence of political talks is related to a lack of interest, for instance when asked to explain why she does not talk about politics, Joana simply says *"I don't like"* and her friends to not come up with the topic for they know she is not interested in the topic, while others avoid political discussions because it can be a source of tension when people do not share the same ideas.

*"For me... it's a topic that I avoid because it's true, even with friends, that one can have... divergence... it's not necessarily the topic... religion and politics, for me, you should sort of avoid."*

(Sonia, 27 years old)

*"Oh no, with my friends, no, no (laughing); we would rather avoid that. [why?] Because... it's, it's a, it's a topic that, that creates disagreements as well... because we do not all think the same and*

*sometimes there um can be some comments that should not have been made you know. So that is why, we try to avoid.”*

(Juliette, 20 years old)

As we have said above talking about politics is more frequent around voting time, before or after. In this next section we will present young unemployed voting behaviours and the meaning and importance they attach to voting. We will first present behaviours and then move on to the meanings voting has. Voting behaviour is often overstated by respondents in survey and in face-to-face interviews because there is a question of social desirability linked to the answer. Apart from the foreigners who do not have the right to vote all the respondents say they vote on a more or less regular basis. Some vote every time, using also blank votes when they are not very interested in the topic or when they were not able to make up their mind, while others admit that sometimes they forget to vote and do not vote or that they have 'loosened' their voting participation.

*“Well, fff, sometimes, it's time, in fact um, sometimes, um, I forget to, I forget to send the, simply the, the vote by correspondence; and so um, on Sunday morning, um forget about voting.”*

(Louis, 34 years old)

*“Lately, um, not much, a part from the minarets [last important vote] ; but otherwise, um no, um recently, no; I have eased off a little (laughing)”*

(Sam, 27 years old)

Other reasons for not voting are related to the complexity of the object of the vote, either the presentation of the object is not clear or the formulation of the propositions is ambiguous. “[Do you vote on every object?] Yep, unless... it's things that I really don't understand” (Sebastian, 35 years old). Moreover the unemployed sometimes have the impression that the topic is either not important or that it does not directly affect them or concerns them. “When it's something interesting, and all, um I vote; otherwise, no (laughing)” (Jude, 27 years old). These are some reasons for not taking part. Some of the foreigners, who have the right to vote at the local level, also have a discourse that goes in the same direction. They do not vote because it is not their country and they do not feel they should take part in the process of decision taking, they leave that to the Swiss who are more concerned. “In Switzerland, it's not my country; it's, it's the Swiss people who have to decide” (Kamelia, 31 years old).

Moving on in the analysis of the voting behaviours we learn why young unemployed believe it is important to vote, what is the value of voting, its importance and its utility. One of the salient answers is that voting is a way to express one's opinion and it is considered a chance to be able to do so and to be heard by those who govern. Sebastian says: “Well, it's to make one's voice heard” and Sonia: “They ask our opinion, and we should give it” or Adeline “It gives us a semblance of, of, of liberty of, of self, to be able to decide really how we see the future”.

Moreover some considers it is also a way for the politicians to have an insight on what the population thinks. “To have a general opinion, more like a statistic; it's a general opinion, an opinion um, um, even if it's general, it remains precise” (Norbert, 22 years old) and this is all the more important because political elites are sometimes perceived as cut off from reality: “they are disconnected from reality” (Sebastian, 35 years old). Finally voting is perceived as something that can make things change. “It's important to encourage youth to, to vote; it's,

*it's important, you know ; that's how we may be able, if there is a certain turn, to change things" (Ray, 30 years old) or something that should be in the benefits of those who vote: "yeah, I, I go to the poll because it, I think it can bring me something" (Xenon, 34 years old).*

We conclude this part on political activities with the analysis of other forms of political participation in which the young unemployed may engage. We start with signing a petition, then present motivations to do boycotting or boycotting, and then we analyze participation in protest activities, taking part in demonstrations. As a concluding section we analyze the reasons for not taking part in any of these additional forms of political participation.

Signing a petition is a very common political act among the young unemployed we interview, most of them have signed a petition and some do it on a regular basis. They find this form of political action is convenient because: *"it does not cost a thing" (Sonia, 27 years old) and "I do it, because first, it's easy to do, and second, um, um, I have examples, I know examples of petitions that have worked" (Sam, 27 years old). Moreover the respondents think it is important in order to attract the rulers and the other citizens attention on certain topics, to raise awareness around certain issues, and also to open the democratic debate.*

*"I like to support the initiatives of persons who deposit petitions; um, um, I find it interesting; also, it helps, precisely, it helps the, the, the debate; and also, sometimes, we have seen, things um, simply with petitions, we have seen things happen; so um, me, I sign petitions, yeah, gladly in fact."*

(Louis, 34 years old)

*"Well precisely, it's, because that, that enables um... to put something in the public arena maybe that we, one, that one has not paid attention to, because one does not feel directly concerned, and so, well, it's not just because we aren't directly concerned that we should not support it or... again, the idea to trigger a debate."*

(Sebastian, 35 years old)

The next form of political participation is less common and is also more demanding if one really engages in it. We turn to boycotting (not buying certain products for political reasons) and boycotting (buying specific products also for political reasons) The young unemployed we interviewed do or did it on a regular basis around certain products: for example some boycott(ed) an oil company, while others won't buy clothes made under conditions of child labour. Others act more through boycotting, buying local products, supporting the Swiss economy or even the neighbourhood small shops, or else buying only fair trade products. About boycotting Sam says

*"I know it's insignificant, because we are not many doing that; um... but... well, I don't know, it's... I, I, anyway it's still something that is an active behaviour, and that contributes, even if modestly, and, and if I know that, well, I buy in a certain way, and I, I know other people do that; we're not many, I think; um, but, it has an impact anyway".*

Finally, we asked the young long-term unemployed whether they sometimes take part in demonstration. This form of political participation is very rare among the interviewees. For those who have done it something that comes natural, they go with friends or convince friends to go because they have seen a leaflet or heard about a protest taking place. They

know the impact is limited, but once again the idea is to be heard. Especially to express publicly one's disagreement with a specific issue – for instance on how the government is handling a certain topic. But some unemployed have a negative image about demonstration, it's perceived as something that is only negative, only based on disagreement, and they do not see anything constructive related to it.

Among those who are not active in any of these forms of political participation, we find different explanations for their lack of participation. Some say they would be willing to engage in signing petitions or in protest for instance, but they never had the opportunity to do it. *"I would be ready to do it, but I never had the occasion"* (Karin, 33 years old). Others have a limited perception of their capacity to make things change and so they do not imagine engaging in political activities. *"Yes, no, I don't like, it's not something that attracts me really; and, I don't know what I could bring in... in addition."* (Joana, 32 years old). And finally, some say they are not active in politics, but somewhere else in the interviews they mentioned activities that can be considered as political activities. For instance, Seni who never voted and says she is not active in any way in politics earlier had told us that on a regular basis she posts comments on politicians, criticizing their actions, on an Internet social networks.

### Politics and unemployment

In this last part we discuss the idea of political exclusion in relation to the experience and status of unemployment. We have now presented descriptive analysis of young unemployed political attitudes and activities that enable us to work more specifically on the question **are young long-term unemployed politically excluded?**

Being focused on finding a job keeps from getting involved in politics. Much attention is given to personal problems and little energy is left for political engagements. As we have seen in the social dimension, trying to find a job is time and especially energy consuming. Moreover it's difficult to keep the question of unemployment out of one's mind. Hence for some it also has an impact on political integration, some young long-term unemployed keep away from politics.

*"Yeah, it can happen but... it's not, it's not especially interesting for me, you know, because (pause); politics... you need... politics, it's for... um politics, I think if you engage in politics, it's when your life goes well, when one is, you know; one has, one has the time to do that... but well, when one has, when one is at the bottom of the ladder, financially, it's not, it's not especially interesting for us, you know."*

(Xenon, 34 years old)

*"Because um... I think I was more concerned on um my job search and so, I think, me, well, after having done that all day long, well, I was more willing to take some fresh air, to do something else than to tell myself: "well, well, oh I will spend my evening watching the news; [...] Let's focus on um, on what I am doing at the moment, and after, well, I do my leisure activities and all that, and I think that when I will have an active life again, more or less normal, well, I'll have more time to, to dedicate to that, and motivation also."*

(Ray, 30 years old)

Nevertheless unemployment can also be a period during which some of the young unemployed follow the political debates and the decisions that are taken because they want to know if something will be changing concerning their personal situation. In that case they are especially interested in unemployment law and changes that are adopted in relation to the institutions dealing with unemployment.

*“um, unemployment, um maybe, yeah, as well, because due to the fact of being unemployed, one wants to know, one wants to know if something has changed, if um, fff, there is, there is, well, the new law, if it will suit us, if it’s adapted to our needs.”*

(Adeline, 27 years old)

Based on the analysis we have done, we cannot conclude whether young long-term unemployed are politically excluded. Among the youngsters we interviewed some are more or less integrated with regards to politics. But their political integration is linked to their migratory background and also to the social environment in which they live – as we have seen above their friends and family differ in terms of political interest and on the amount of political conversation they have. These are important elements supporting political integration and they cannot be related to unemployment, they are more generally linked to the social status of the young unemployed themselves and of their families and friends.

### **Coping strategies**

Some coping strategies have appeared earlier in the presentation of the problems related to unemployment. In this section we will stress the most important elements, in particular those related to support received by family and friends. While at the same time showing the ambiguity that can stem from social support, receiving help in its various forms is not as easy as one can imagine. Help entails reciprocity and it can turn into a burden when one is in the position of receiving and not able to give back.

#### Daily structure

One important way to cope with unemployment is to have a structure in the day and in the week, a way to organize the amount of time they have. A time qualified as time for doing nothing. Their perception of time is influenced by their experience of unemployment. They either perceive time as flying or perceive it as useless. Sometimes simply because they are no longer interested in some of their former hobbies, Sophie for instance mentions that she used to love reading, but now she would have plenty of time to read and has no motivation to do so.

Maintaining a daily structure is seen as an important element permitting to cope with unemployment. The strategy is not only to have a regular daily structure, but more generally to have activities during the day or during the week that feel in the time. The interviewees mention some example of activities that help maintaining daily structures through routines such as going out for a coffee and reading the newspaper *“I go out and have a coffee at my parents’ restaurant, I mean, yeah, well, I know it’s a bit like the old lady who go out to read their newspaper”* (Karin, 33 years old). The coffee routine is quite common, it helps not only to maintain a daily structure, but also enables to have social contacts, to see other persons and eventually to look for job announcements.

*“Rather than buying the newspaper for the job announcement, to go in a café, and to take advantage of... and um yeah, I go more than before, now, even alone sometimes in a small café near my house, just to go out, look at the newspapers, to keep contacts also with um, well, you know, sometimes, it’s also something that helps in the morning, when you have no appointment, to get up and tell oneself um, yeah, I get up, I go out; so it’s true that it’s a routine, I don’t know, but something quite regular, that regulates the day, and then, yep, sometimes, when one really does not want to do anything, to force oneself to get up to go for a coffee, even if it’s just that, that puts in the traditional regulation of people who work, because sometimes it’s true that we are a bit out of step.”*

(Virginia, 32 years old)

*“I go out for a coffee, I read the newspapers ; so um, it’s clear that one needs to see people, moving you know ; so me I go in a shopping mall um, shopping mall where you have a bit of bustle, so that one, you should not feel too isolated either, there you go, you have to see people; then um, maybe you also need to um, for instance, I don’t know, discuss with um a waitress.”*

(Xenon, 34 years old)

There are also other free time activities that help fill in the day, for instance doing sports, playing an instrument, reading, getting informed about specific issues, and thinking about what one wants or would like to do. These coping mechanisms related to the daily structure are used by the unemployed in order to maintain set activities during the day or week that structure time and that impede to think too much about one’s situation. In particular unemployed mention that it is a way to stop thinking about unemployment in a circular and unproductive manner that can only lead to discouragement, self depreciation and depression.

In this regards the courses offered by the unemployment office are also useful, apart from the skills and knowledge they permit to acquire, they also serve as a way to keep active and maintain both a daily structure and social contacts. The interviewees link the questions of time and daily structure to the questions of motivation, they make a connection between remaining active and being in a positive psychological state. Motivations to do different things among which social activities or hobbies, but also time dedicated to job search. In principle the job search should take a large part of the day and be a means to occupy one self, but the idea that there will be no new job offers, no new opportunities and the anticipation of more refusal and turning down of curricula and motivation letters stops from searching every day the internet and the newspaper for employment opportunities. Discouragement, as we have seen above, is part of the experience of long-term unemployment, it appears and is related to an overall lack of motivation that affects also other activities.

### Family support

During the interviews we asked the long-term unemployed to talk about their relationship to their parents, including what they share with them and what kind of help or support do they receive from family members. In this part, we present the descriptive analysis addressing the question of **what forms of support are provided by the family?**

Family members, mother, father, brothers and sisters, are there to provide help and support, especially with regards to the young unemployed financial difficulties. But their capacity to help also depends on their own financial situation. Some of the unemployed still live with their parents, in particular the youngest ones, and therefore benefit from housing and food. Those who leave alone go to their parents' home to share meals or sometimes the parents shop for them, they buy their groceries. This form of support is quite common and is a way to avoid receiving money directly. Nevertheless the young unemployed sometimes need to borrow money to their families in order to make ends meet. The parents also help sometimes when some investment in training is needed; some of the family members helped financially their relatives in order for them to start a new training.

The unemployed are not isolated to the point that they would have no one to turn to in case they need something and neither are their families in a realm of poverty that would prevent them from having the means to help their children. But sometimes, for different reasons, the unemployed feel ashamed to ask for help or fear it will change the relationships they have to their relatives. With this regards age is also important and the question of independence. Receiving money leads to a situation of dependence that can be difficult to bear as we can see in the quote below.

*"I am fed up with this situation; I am fed up that my mother um pays for everything for me; I am fed up that when I want cigarettes, she buys me a box and I am fed up to fight with her about that. I told her: 'the day I don't have money, then, I won't smoke'. It's like that and that's it and it's true that either directly or indirectly we benefit or we take advantage and um, on the long run, it's, it's heavy, very heavy because I have always been educated like that, that means that I must be able to pay for what I want with the money that I gained through hard work, that is always more pleasant than when Mom and Dad are behind giving money like that..."*

(Norbert, 22 years old)

Family members are also there to talk about one's situation and to share worries or to help with the job search. But family members can be quite foreign to the unemployment problematic – there can be a generational gap, they have entered the labor market in a different economic situation and most of them never experienced unemployment so it's quite difficult for them to understand what their children are going through<sup>5</sup>. Regarding brothers and sisters, they sometimes have their own problems. The young unemployed either exchange experiences with them when they are both unemployed, or they avoid adding problems to the one's their relatives already have. In this case when they spend time together is mostly time to take their minds off things. There are different ways to support one another depending much on the personal life of each one.

Sometimes the parents do not have the means to help their children; either they do not know what the labor market requirements are or they simply do not have the education level or language skills, in the case of migrants, needed to help their children search for a job. Moreover parents are anxious about their children's future: *"for them it's always creating anxiety as long as I don't have a job"* (Jude, 27 years old). This anxiety, but also problems of miscommunication or misunderstandings can lead to tensions within the familial realm –

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<sup>5</sup> See quote page 33-34 for an excerpt taken from Louis' interview.

getting on each other's nerve – *“it gets on my mother nerves that I don't find anything.”* (Theo, 18 years old) *“yeah, in fact, this quite bothers, bothers my mother, she sees that I don't find a job, and she wants me to become independent.”* (Juliette, 20 years old).

### Friend support

In this section we analyze the role played by friends for the young long-term unemployed. In particular we work on the question of **what kind of support is provided by friends throughout the unemployment experience?** Friends support is an important form of support that can be complementary to that received by family members. It takes different forms and helps dealing with other aspects of unemployment.

*“They have um... always been there when I needed and um, I find, it's important you know, in situations like that, if one knows that there are friends to whom you can say everything um, tell your problems and all that, and that they, one feels there is no judgment. I think it's important in periods like this one. Well, I tell myself um... um... if a person, she, she lives alone, she is unemployed and um that... that she sees no one... and that a... um the person is able to... to tell what is happening to her and all that. After a while, its... I won't say dangerous, but the person mopes, she does not know where, where she's at, and this, this leads to depression and then, I think, in those moments, it's not good to stay alone; one should be able to talk about it, because it helps feeling much better; and to have another vision um on life um, and um, and then the other can give advices, maybe help also.”*

(Ray, 30 years old)

In this quote from Ray's interview we see the importance of not being left alone and of having someone to turn to in those moments of depression, of psychological breakdown that one might face during unemployment. Ray highlights both the importance of having someone who will not judge the unemployed and who will provide advices or help, but most of all to lend an attentive ear to the unemployed. Hence we see the importance of simply talking to someone, the value of being able to share one's problems. Although we should make clear that talking about one's problems related to unemployment does not mean solving them, but it is important not to hold on to them and to have the opportunity to share them with others and put them in perspective. *“Well, we know the problem is still there, but um, yes it helps to talk about it”* (Juliette, 20 years old).

Friends are also important in order to have someone one can talk to outside of the family realm. Jude says that your friends know you in a different way and also some of them might have experienced unemployment so they understand what the situation is like. When friends know about unemployment they can exchange about their personal experience, talk about the unemployment office, the measures they received and also about their counsellors. Sometimes they also exchange tips about how to write letters, where to look for job announcements, write letters together or pass on information about job opportunities.

Friends also try to provide reassurance to the unemployed, saying better times will come. But this can become annoying:

*“no I prefer not to talk, I prefer not to talk, because people do, people, they tell you: ‘you know, it will work out fine, it will work out’; they always repeat the same thing, but it’s, it’s annoying to hear ‘it will work out.’”*

(Kamelia, 31 years old).

There are many reasons for the unemployed to avoid talking about their situation, even with friends. Either because they rather think about something else when they are with friends or because there is nothing new to say or because they don't want to be “the one who always complains and mopes” or because they do not like to expose their inner life.

As for parents, the help friends can provide is limited. They do not always have the means to help. As we have seen above, they are not always able to find the right words to reassure the young unemployed and to provide moral support. Much of the psychological consequences have to be carried alone, although friends can help to some extent. Or else when the unemployed have financial problems or are unable to find a job, friends cannot help with that. But as Romuald says: *“friends are always there for a good laugh”*. In fact, most importantly friends are there to think about something else – cheering up the young unemployed, providing occasion to change what's on one's mind, having dinners or nights out, inviting for a drink.

Moreover these different forms of help are not always easy to accept and can lead to psychological conflicts for the unemployed. It is difficult for them to be, for a long time, in the position of help receiver and not being able to pay back. It creates a feeling of dependency and shame. Even though friends are happy to help with small things, like offering a drink, this is not always perceived as a solution for the young unemployed. Rather they would avoid going out than having the same friends paying over and over again for their consumptions. In the end, they do not even enjoy their time out, time out they are not able to self-finance.

*“Because when I go out with friends, since they would like to, you know, it's not a big deal, we invite you, we have the means, we have money and all, but I get sick, but very uncomfortable, but very bad, but really too bad; I'm not willing to go with them anymore, to, to continue because it's not me, myself; I am not myself; I, I am telling myself ‘shit, she'll be paying again, oh shit, what a shame’; I am there, there, mo, moping myself, and then, it's not a good evening out.”*

(Kamelia, 31 years old)

Other limitations to friends' help can be linked to a lack of knowledge concerning how the Swiss system works. This is especially the case for those who have not lived in Geneva for a long time. Although in most of the cases friends are very helpful with regards to circulating the information about job opportunities and supporting one's application for a job. Sometimes the unemployed do not want to ask for help in order not to embarrass their friends; some people are not willing to support somebody's application for a job or to pass on a curriculum.

### Partner support

A part from family and friends support can be provided by the partners of the young unemployed. In this last section on social support as a mean of coping with unemployment we focus on the partner and ask **how are the partners involved in the long-term unemployment experience and how they support the young unemployed?**

Partners are a very close person, sometimes living with the unemployed, and they share the problems with the unemployed – both the financial and the moral burden of being unemployed for a year or more also affects them. The partner can help in preparing motivation letters and the curricula for an application; they can also support the unemployed in their career re-orientation or in finding a job. In fact it's very important that the partner agrees with the plan to start a new training or to invest in a new career plan. *"I thought I was right in doing that, I was not going the wrong direction, what was important is that my girlfriend find it a good idea."* (Sebastian, 35 years old) But most of all they share the financial difficulties and help dealing with that through an increase in the money invested for the household. Hence after a long period of unemployment they are also affected psychologically and distressed by the unemployment.

*"So, in fact, my partner, yes, he supports me because he helps writing the letters, sending the documents; he tells me: 'yeah, I have seen this', he is also searching, and all; but him, he's starting to be a bit... to tell himself: 'shit, um, why you don't find a job?' So even him, psychologically, well, we're in it together, I mean, we live together, financially we live, um, I mean, we are together, so um, as much it disturbs me not to have money as much it disturbs him as well [...] because in any case, me, it's me who, it's him who pays everything you know."*

(Nadia, 25 years old)

Nevertheless the young unemployed do not talk much about their partners and the role they play in their lives as unemployed. Some did not mention till the end of the interview that they have a partner and this was quite surprising. Neither did they mention how their partner is helping, nor how the partner is affected by their unemployment. More emphasis is put on family or friends in general, maybe it was more difficult to talk about this very private dimension of their lives. There is still another situation, those who are divorced or separated from their former partner and have children with him or her. These unemployed in addition to the unemployment benefits or the social aid and state allocation for children, they receive a pension from the former partner. But this does not represent enough money to cover for the children expenses and it is difficult to cope with the situation.

### Self-help / self-motivation

We have presented above the role played by the family, friends, and partner with regards to coping with unemployment. Young unemployed are not alone in this difficult situation. Nevertheless the consequences and the burden of unemployment relay mainly on themselves and they also need to mobilize individual resources in order to cope with it. In this section we ask **what the young unemployed do individually to cope with their situation?**

Personal resources are very important while coping with unemployment, in particular the individual's capacity to (re-)motivate oneself constantly and not to be overwhelmed by negative feelings about both one's situation and oneself. As we have described above long-term unemployment has negative consequences on the psychological state of young unemployed. They are affected in their psyche by the lack of a job, the reduced social contacts, the odd daily structure, the inactivity and the difficulties they face for finding another job. They lose self confidence, self esteem and a feeling of mastery over one's own life.

Hence inner resources are important to cope with these issues, they cannot only rely on others to help (re-) valorise them.

One of the most important forms of self-help that we find in the interviews is the positive thinking and self reassurance. In particular the unemployed talk to themselves and confirm their choices, their abilities and try to make positive assessment of themselves. For instance, they tell themselves not to worry that it will work out: "*I tell myself: 'it's not that dramatic, it will work out fine', I will finally find a job*" (Ray, 30 years old) or they try to motivate themselves a new and to keep active "*it's difficult, you know, because every time I have to tell myself: 'you're doing that and maybe soon it will be easier to find a better job'.*" (Ana, 35 years old) and they also tell themselves they did the best they could: "*I often repeat to myself that um: 'I try to do the maximum.'*" (Virginia, 32 years old). And at the same time the unemployed mentions it is important to take one problem at a time and not let one be overwhelmed by all his or her problems.

Additionally the unemployed try to think about the positive sides of unemployment and to take advantage of this forced inactivity to think about one's wishes, to build project, to find out what drives the person and what he or she would like to do in his or her life. The unemployed mention you have to be creative to handle your problems, to deal with unemployment, to cope with your situation. Each of them have their own means to do that, some invest in training, some find a new orientation for their career, some try to re-built their self-esteem and to improve their skills for the job interviews.

*"I don't think about it that much, in the end. I rather try to ... to... to make sure I know what I want to do, rather than to... to do... that unemployment and others and all... that it becomes something that stops me from doing something else."*

James, 32 years old

Finally the young unemployed also try to find a personal equilibrium and try to compensate some of the negative dimensions of unemployment that affect their lives through positive elements. For instance investing in hobbies and free time activities that are not too expensive, that they can afford, and that help them think about something else and engage in activities that they enjoy. The young unemployed mention it is important to allow themselves little pleasures sometimes, it can either be a rest – a break in the job search or sleeping in late one morning – or some activity that they enjoy – going to the restaurant for instance. "*From time to time, um, I allow myself a little treat, not often but I tell myself... that, it's true, that, that is doing me good*" (Ray, 30 years old). This is important not to feel constrained all the time.

### Job search strategies and career reorientations

Finally we dedicate the last section on coping to the strategies the young unemployed develop to search for a job and to increase their chances of finding one, or what we have called *employability* at the beginning of the analysis. Hence addressing the question of **how do young unemployed search for a job and what do they do to find one?**

The main ways to search for a job include going through the job announcements in the newspaper, on Internet or through the unemployment office. The unemployed have motivation letters and curricula ready that they try to improve and adapt to the employment offer. They also make phone calls, visit directly the enterprises, especially when it's a small

business, or enrol in temporary agencies and on-line database. Furthermore they make spontaneous offer to work in an enterprise. This is a time consuming, but important mean to find a job, sending letters to the existing enterprises in the field in which they have worked already. The young unemployed have to comply with the obligations set by the unemployment office in terms of number of application done during the month. Often they try to do more, although there are months in which it's more difficult, either because the motivation is falling or because there are no announcement for employment in their sector.

One additional important strategy is to ask friends and relatives to inform them about job opportunities where they work. *"But sometimes I say: 'oh but if you hear something, well, you can tell me about a job, and all that', yes, that yes"* (Joana, 32 years old). Sometimes they ask to pass on a curriculum and motivation letter. They say word of mouth is very important to know about the employment opportunities that are never announced publicly. They also think it's important to have someone who can sustain your application. Hence we see the importance of social contacts and of an extended network. Depending on the field in which one is searching for a job, it is very important to invest time and energy to build a network that can inform about jobs.

*"It's good to know people who work there and all that; so it's true that... let's say that network, networking, works very well, you know, so um, it's useful."*

(Louis, 34 years old)

*"Um... now I have had to um... change a little... I do more um... I search much more... more contacts, as we call them, so um... I look for connections."*

(Romuald, 32 years old)

Moreover, as we have seen above, one positive element of being unemployed is the opportunity to think about one really wants to do and to invest in a new training, enter a new path, and find new professional motivations. So the young unemployed invest in additional training, either through the courses proposed by the unemployment office or through courses that they pay with their own funds. New training is taken as an option either when they have no or only basic training or when they want to enter a new field of employment. For instance Ana who has no diploma decided to invest in training in order to find a job *"because for me the solution wasn't to find a job straight away, maybe it was... to give myself the opportunity to find a better one in the long run, you know"*. The young unemployed also try to gain working experience through internships or small jobs. Often they lack this experience and so are not given the chance to acquire some.

## **Summary**

Throughout the analysis of the interviews conducted with young long-term unemployed, we have taken the reader in a journey to know who these youngsters are and how they live with the absence of a job. We have learned more about employment issues for instance what employment represents for jobless youth, as well as about the social and the political integration of the young unemployed, their well-being and the coping strategies they use to face the difficulties they encounter. In this conclusion we will briefly come back on the most important findings from each dimension of the report.

First it appears as important to stress the high value that youngsters attach to work and employment. Contrary to some social and political discourses on young, and more generally on all, unemployed, the persons we interviewed prize work and the chance of those who have a paid job. They wish they could have one as well, for they see it as a means of conforming to dominant norms in society and as a way of contributing their share in society. This finding is important in relation to public policies addressed at reducing unemployment in general and youth unemployment in particular; taking into account the fact that the main problem is not the fact that "*youngsters do not want to work*" may avoid some misconception of both the problems and the solution proposed to solve them.

Moreover on this question of employment, youngsters are aware that having a job is a means of social integration. Being employed offers opportunities to have contacts with others, to share a daily structure with most of the people, and to have earnings that enable to afford going out, having hobbies and leisure time activities. This awareness of the side value of employment increases their willingness to have a job. Nevertheless, after a lasting unemployment (a year or more), young unemployed face discouragement. They have the idea that they will never find a job and there are periods during which it is difficult to comply with the job search for they believe they have tried everything and nothing works.

This discouragement affects their psychological well-being, as well as the financial difficulties related to their unemployment. Regarding discouragement and job search, they affect especially the self-confidence of the individual and the motivation to remain active in their job search, but more generally in their everyday life. The many refusals or down turning of their applications leads them into thinking that they are worthless. The lack of self-confidence, the feelings of worthlessness and the inactivity can lead to depressive moods. Moreover the limited amounts of money they have to cope with their everyday expenses create worries and anxiety. Additionally they have even less money to maintain social activities that could help them to keep a positive moral state. Finally, the social images of unemployed are mainly negative. They are associated with lack of motivation to work for instance or with people who are taking advantage of the system. Hence they also have to cope with the idea that unemployment is a personal failure and not a social problem.

Another point worth mentioning in relation to the job search, young unemployed are followed by an unemployment counselor at the unemployment office. They are on the whole happy to receive such a service and they value the opportunities it offers. But they are sometimes disappointed with the service they receive. In fact, most agree to say that "it depends on the counselor you have" and you can be either lucky or not. Meaning that either the counselor will take time to listen and understand the unemployed situation and help him or her through the allocation of active measures or the counselor will be unable to help. In this second case it is linked by the young unemployed to the fact that counselors have to follow too many unemployed and to the rigidity of the system, its incapacity to treat specific situations. Sometimes the problems can also be linked to the lack of transparency; young unemployed do not understand why some active measures were refused to them. Globally the problems young unemployed perceive in the unemployment office are linked to their counselor, this is not surprising for most of their contacts is with him or her, and what appears as a question to address is the power of this unemployment counselor and the dependency the young unemployed have towards them for receiving support either through counseling or active measures.

Finally to conclude on a positive note, we stress the importance of social activities, family members, friends, and partners in supporting the young long-term unemployed through the difficulties they face. The family members can help with regards to the material situation of the youngsters, they let money, they buy food, they help with everyday expenses to reduce to the financial strain of the youngsters. Whereas friends help on a more moral level, they offer opportunities to go out, talk to someone or to maintain social activities. These are especially important for they help youngsters go out of their daily routine that includes few activities and think about something else than unemployment. Finally the partner is there to help with both moral and material issues, sharing the problems of the young unemployed.

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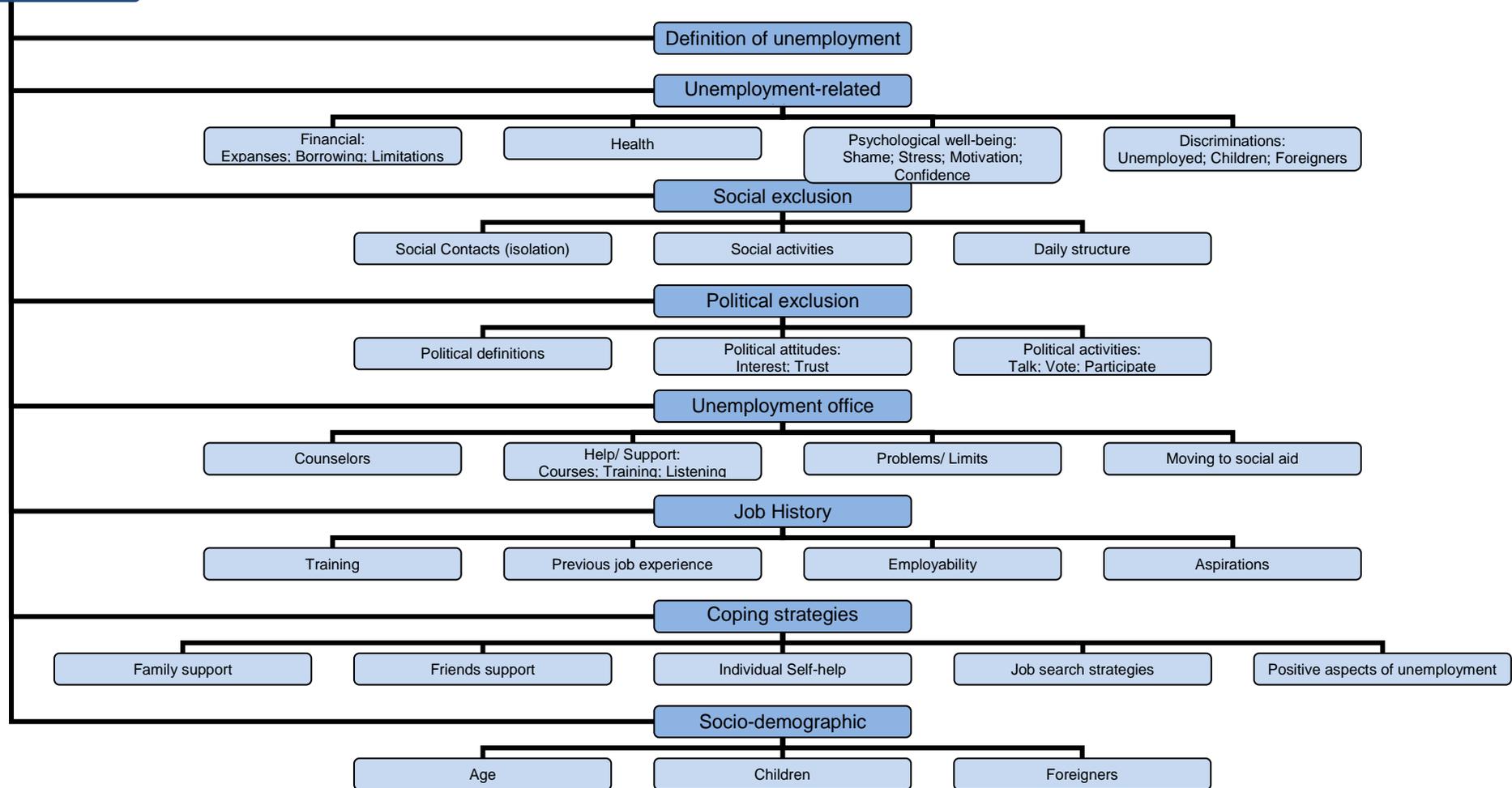
Annex I: Interviewees' profiles

Name	Sex	Age	Education level	Occupation according to training	Last occupation	Civil state	Household members	Brothers and Sisters	Nationality	Place of birth	Arrival in Switzerland
Theo	M	18	Compulsory school	Looking for an apprenticeship (cook or joinery)		Single	Mother Brother Sister	2	Thai	Thailand	9 years old
Norbert	M	22	Apprenticeship	Salesman in car industry		Single	Mother	2	French	Bourges, France	14 years old
Jude	M	27	Compulsory school	Unfinished apprenticeship in joinery	Searching work in jewelry field	Single		4	Swiss	Geneva, CH	
Sam	M	28	Bachelor degree (pedagogy)			Single		1		Geneva, CH	
Ray	M	30	Apprenticeship	Horticulturist	Retraining as a truck driver	Single	Partner	2	Swiss	Colombia	1.5 years old (Adopted)
James	M	32	Apprenticeship	Electronics engineer	Winder electrician	Single		1	Swiss	Lausanne, CH	
Romuald	M	32	University degree (Economics, unfinished)		Executive	Single	Partner	2	Haitian	Haiti	18 years old
Louis	M	34	University diploma (in Arts)		Journalist	Single		1	Swiss	Geneva, CH	
Xenon	M	34	Compulsory school		Computer helpdesk	Single		2	Swiss	Geneva, CH	
Sebastian	M	35	Elementary vocational training	Projectionist	Security field / Retraining as ambulance driver	In a relationship	Partner	2	Swiss	Colombia	6 months (Adopted)
Juliette	F	20	Compulsory school	Looking for an apprenticeship (in jewelry)	Internship as jewelry setting	Single	Mother	1	Swiss	Haiti	6 years old (Adopted)
Nadia	F	25	Vocational baccalaureate	Commercial employee	Internship coordinator 44	In a relationship with 2 children	Partner/ children	2 1	Portuguese	Geneva, CH	

Sonia	F	27	Compulsory school	Professional therapist	Part-time therapist	Single		1	Swiss	Geneva, CH	
Adeline	F	27	Higher vocational training (Hostelry, unfinished) → apprenticeship.		Gouvernante (housekeeper in hotels)	Single with one son	Child	8	Swiss	Yaoundé, Cameroun	8 years old
Seni	F	30	Compulsory school	Secretary	Administrative assistant	Single	Mother Step father Sister	4	Portuguese	Portugal	24 years old
Kamelia	F	31	Compulsory school	Secretary assistant	Assembling in the clock-making field	Separated with two children	Daughter Son (11 and 8 years old)	5	Somali	Somali	17 years old (in 1997)
Virginia	F	32	University diploma (in Arts)	Socio-cultural host	Lighting director	Single		1	Swiss	Geneva, CH	
Joana	F	32	Compulsory school		Sales woman	Divorced with two daughters	Daughters (12 and 8 years old)	2	Peruvian	Lima, Peru	16 years old (in 1994)
Karin	F	33	Elementary vocational training	Beautician	Dentist Receptionist	Single	Mother Father Brother	3	Swiss	Geneva, CH	
Ana	F	35	Compulsory school	Passing a diploma in Human Resources	Administrative assistant	Single with one son (not living with her)		2	Spanish	Sion, CH	Born in Switzerland, grown up in Spain, till 17

Annex II: Codes used for the analysis of the interviews

Long-term unemployment



## **National Report Germany**

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***Bettina Grimmer and Christian Lahusen***

### **Introduction**

This report is based on 20 qualitative interviews with long-term unemployed inhabitants of Cologne aged between 20 and 34 years. In order to allow for a balanced sample in terms of age and gender, we followed a quota plan when selecting the persons to be interviewed. Accordingly, the sample consists of 10 women (of which five were 25 of age or younger and five older than 25) and 10 men respectively. The interviews were conducted between February and December 2010.

Contact details of the respondents were retrieved from the WP3 dataset. 231 of 329 long-term unemployed interviewed in the course of the survey had agreed to participate in another interview and left their names and numbers. However, when we contacted the persons randomly, it turned out that the majority of them were not ready to be interviewed anymore. Approximately one year after the survey, many of them had either changed their phone number or had found a job, or they were not longer interested in being interviewed. Recruiting 10 persons older than 25 years was quickly done, but since the younger group is strongly underrepresented in the survey sample, we faced problems in finding younger respondents. Hence, we went to the local labour office for young unemployed in Cologne and asked the clients for an interview. To increase their willingness to take part in our research, we paid an incentive of 15 Euros for each respondent. Following this strategy we did not face any problems in meeting the quota plan.

The respondents were free to choose where the interview should take place. Most of them were carried out at the homes of the unemployed, but some of them preferred to be interviewed in a café or park, especially those who lived with their parents. The interview duration varied between half an hour and two and a half hours. Notably the younger group was likely to answer very briefly and sometimes superficially, while the older group was more willing to deliver extensive insight into their everyday lives, their thoughts and emotions. All interviews could be recorded without any problems. Most of the respondents forgot the recorder after a couple of minutes.

After having transcribed the first interviews, we conducted a microanalysis of the first four interviews. We read them line-by-line and discussed them in a group of at least three researchers. For key passages, we applied sequential analysis. According to the approach of hermeneutical social research, we tried to identify a universe of contexts

and meanings of the issues and expressions raised by our respondents. This first step of analysing the interviews aimed at increasing our theoretical sensitivity before we systematically coded the material. At the same time, we conducted and transcribed more interviews. When the fieldwork was done, we started with the process of open coding. First, we paraphrased the five most promising interviews and compiled a list of codes. For every code we identified different dimensions with different specificities and inserted the interviewees' names after the specificities into the code list. This helped us to discover relationships between different code specificities. In a second step, we started with the process of axial coding, trying to find relationships between the codes and identify higher order concepts. At the same time we coded the remaining interviews and complemented the code list. After having coded about half of the interviews, it turned out that the code list was nearly complete. This allowed us to shift from open to selective coding, and on the other hand it showed that the sample is theoretically saturated.

For theory construction we applied the coding paradigm once again. After having identified our core categories (finances, time and well-being as main unemployment-related problems, social exclusion and 'sense of politics'), we related the other codes and concepts to them, paying attention to the categories' conditions, consequences, contexts, intervening conditions and related action strategies. By doing so, we focused on similarities and differences between different cases and went back to the interviews from time to time in order to reconstruct relationships between codes, concepts and categories. The results of this research process are theoretical reconstructions of unemployment-related problems and their conditions and consequences in different social contexts. However, this research report does not claim to provide a coherent theory of the experience of long-term unemployment. It is rather a discussion of theoretical fragments that cover certain problems our respondents linked to their experience of unemployment and that are hopefully worth being compared to unemployment-related problems in other countries.

This report is structured as follows. After presenting a short typology of our respondents based on their different biographical contexts, we will discuss the three main unemployment-related problems raised by the interviewees, namely finances, time and well-being. In a second step, we will relate these phenomena to the question of social exclusion and the respondents' 'sense of politics'. Further, we will discuss some interesting findings that were unexpected but important. Finally, we will conclude with a discussion of coping strategies identified in the material that show how young unemployed deal with their situation by compensating the problems encountered.

### **Types of unemployment situations**

In the following we will present a typology of young long-term unemployed, which is elaborated along the respondents' biographical contexts and structural constraints. This typology aims at giving a summary of the socio-demographical composition of our sample and the reasons for our respondents becoming unemployed. However, the typology will not serve as a basis for the analysis presented in the further chapters. There were no structural characteristics emerging during the analysis along which the

respondents could be classified in a consistent way with respect to all of the unemployment-related problems. Thus, these groups of young unemployed share some structural characteristics, but are still very different regarding their activity, their plans and their feelings.

*Unemployed youngsters (Wolfram, Dieter, Esma, David, Halil, Barbara)<sup>6</sup>*

This group consists of young people that are not necessarily youngsters in terms of their biological age, but rather in terms of their biographical situation. Their main characteristic is that they do not have their own family yet. Either they still live with their parents or they have an apartment of their own in the same house or nearby. Anyway, they are still closely bound to their parental family. Since they do not have to bear responsibility for anyone else than themselves, their main problem of being unemployed is being limited in their leisure time activities. Especially if most of their friends have an employment, they complain about not having enough money to join their clique going to bars and restaurants or on holiday trips, or, conversely, that their friends do not have enough time for them. The reasons why this group is unemployed are manifold. Some of them have finished a vocational training and are now looking for a job in that given area. Others are still in the process of career orientation and are planning to attend a secondary school.

*Unemployed family men (Daniel, Peter, Thomas, Jens, Marvin)*

These young men live with their wives or partners. Some of them have already one child or more children, others live with their partner at their parents' home and are looking for a flat because they are expecting or planning to have a child during the next year. Their partners are either unemployed as well or on parental leave. This makes the family men suffer from financial hardship. The main problem they relate to their unemployment is not having enough money to provide their families with things they need. In addition, their inability to fulfil the role of a breadwinner sometimes leads to a feeling of uselessness. All these men are very homely and family-oriented. Moreover, most of them have grown up in deprived suburbs and in broken families. Their main problem in entering the labour market is their low education, missing vocational training and/or working experience. Unlike their parents, who are mostly blue-collar workers with permanent positions, they have to deal with a tough labour market that offers only precarious jobs for young low-skilled workers.

*Unemployed family women (Nicole)*

This group should be the female counterpart to group 2 – unemployed mothers living with their partner or husband. But there is only one case representing this model in our sample. Hence, it is not possible to generalize main characteristics and speak of a certain type. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that this group is strongly underrepresented in the sample.

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<sup>6</sup> All names have been replaced by aliases.

Unemployed single mothers (Hanna, Mary, Cansu, Selina).

These young mothers live alone with their child or children. In financial terms, they are better off than the family men, because they receive some financial or in-kind support from their families. These are able to support their daughters to some extent because they have well-paid jobs (mainly academics and self-employed) and enough financial resources. Further, the single mothers are very active in having social contacts and compensating their needs through social capital. Although one could say this group suffers the least from being unemployed, their employment commitment is considerably high. For them, the most important thing in working is doing something useful and thus giving identity and status. Due to the fact that they are quite well educated, their main problem entering the labour market is to find a job that is reconcilable with their parenthood after some years of non-gainful work. However, all of them have concrete plans how to overcome these problems in the near future.

Unemployed with severe mental health problems (Patrick, Janine, Tessa, Kerstin).

This group consists of people that have either serious depressions or addictive disorders. They had a seriously problematic childhood, facing violence in their families and/or sexual abuse. Aside from the fact that finding a job would be very difficult due to their lack of qualifications (non of them has completed primary education), they were currently not able to take up a job (see chapter 4 for more information). Thus, being unemployed is a by-product of their situation, but not their central problem. For this reason, we did not include these cases in the analysis, except for one case (Patrick) that is quite interesting for the political dimension.

Before presenting the results of the analysis, a few more words should be said about the sample composition. Table 1 shows the distribution of cases with regard to their gender, age, education, migration background, and if they have completed vocational training.

**Table 1: sample composition**

Age/gender		Female		Male
25 years or younger	Hanna	(El, Vn, Mn, type 4)	Daniel	(Ep, Vn, Mn, type 2)
	Selina	(El, Vy, My, type 4)	Peter	(Ep, Vn, Mn, type 2)
	Janine	(En, Vn, Mn, type 5)	Marvin	(Ep, Vn, Mn, type 2)
	Tessa	(En, Vn, Mn, type 5)	David	(Eu, Vn, Mn, type 1)
	Esma	(El, Vy, My, type 1)	Halil	(Ep, Vy, My, type 1)
Older than 25	Mary	(Et, Vy, My, type 4)	Thomas	(Ep, Vy, Mn, type 2)
	Nicole	(Eu, Vy, My, type 3)	Wolfram	(Ep, Vn, Mn, type 1)
	Barbara	(El, Vy, Mn, type 1)	Jens	(Ep, Vn, Mn, type 2)
	Cansu	(Ep, Vn, My, type 4)	Dieter	(El, Vy, Mn, type 1)
	Kerstin	(En, Vn, Mn, type 5)	Patrick	(Ep, Vn, Mn, type 5)

En = not completed primary school, Ep = primary school, El = lower level secondary education, Eu = upper level secondary education, Et = lower level tertiary education, Vy = completed

vocational training, Vn = not completed vocational training, My = migration background, Mn = no migration- background

As the table shows, the sample is unbalanced with regard to biographical factors. As mentioned above, when coding the interviews, we had the impression that the sample is theoretically saturated, because the code list compiled on the basis of the first interviews seemed complete after having coded about half of the interviews. From then on, very few new characteristics had to be inserted, and arguments began to recur. However, this saturation within the sample does not mean that we grasped all variations that are empirically possible. Following the process of quota sampling has its limitations, and a missing balance regarding other socio-structural characteristics is one of them. On the other hand, this does not necessarily affect the quality of the analysis, since the Grounded theory approach does not claim to provide a 'representative' picture of reality, but rather points out interesting relationships between theoretical concepts and action strategies. Nevertheless, it is important to be aware of these sampling biases when dealing with the results of our analysis.

The first imbalance is related to household compositions. Although about half of the respondents of each gender group are parents, all of the fathers live together with their children and their partners, only one of the mothers is still in a relationship with the father of her child. As said before, the group of 'family women' is strongly underrepresented, and, in contrast, there is no 'divorced father' in the sample. Moreover, none of the respondents is in a relationship and lives together with her or his partner without having a child – thus, we cannot say anything about young unemployed couples without children. Concerning education and vocational training, the sample is balanced with regard to gender. In general, the level of qualification is rather low. This corresponds to the macro population of young unemployed – the lower the educational level, the higher is the risk of becoming long-term unemployed. Having a migration background, on the other hand, is strongly related to gender in our sample. If we exclude the group of 'unemployed with severe mental health problems', only two women remain that come from a German family. In contrast, only one of the young men comes from a migrant family. Further, there is a striking relationship between migration background and having completed a vocational training. Only three of the non-migrants have finished an apprenticeship, while only one of the migrants has not done so. One could conclude that finding a job is harder for migrants, but at least on the subjective level this assumption cannot be corroborated from our interviews. None of the migrants mentioned their cultural background as a problem related to not finding an employment. A last interesting finding that should be mentioned here is that about half of the respondents had an experience at some point that prevented them from continuing their career path. Due to mental or physical health problems, they were not able to remain in their job or to complete their apprenticeship. Even though this was years ago and they would be ready for the labour market again, they did not manage to gain ground there for the second time.

## Analysis

In the following chapter we will present the main results of our analysis. The first section deals with unemployment-related problems our interviewees raised. These are financial hardship, problems in using their time, and issues of individual well-being. The second section relates these problems to the question of social exclusion, and in the third section we will discuss the respondents' relation to politics.

### *How do young people perceive/define unemployment-related problems?*

#### Financial hardship

An unemployment-related problem that was immediately mentioned by almost all of our respondents is financial hardship. Two of them did not receive unemployment benefits yet and lived in their parents' households, receiving only little pocket money for their private needs and activities. Both of them went to the labour office and applied for unemployment benefits when we met them for the interview, in order to overcome dependency on their parents. All of the other respondents obtained tax-financed flat-rate unemployment benefits, because they had been unemployed for more than one year. In 2010, these benefits consisted of costs for housing and heating plus a lump sum of 359€ for costs of living per month. Unemployed aged younger than 25 and living with their parents obtained only 287€ per month. For children living in the household one obtained an additional amount between 215 and 287€ per child, depending on the age. Single parents obtained an additional payment of 129€, while unemployed living with their partner obtained only 323€ each. Consequently, from an objective point of view, there are no wide differences in how much money our respondents get from the labour office.

This is also reflected in the respondents' subjective experience of their financial situation. Almost all of them say that their money is scarce, but as long as there are no unexpected expenses (like a broken washing machine etc.), they can get along with their money. There were two respondents, Mary and Cansu, both single mothers, who said that they could live on their money comfortably, and one, Thomas, who said he could hardly cover his expenses. Thomas lives with his wife and three children. His wife is unemployed as well, so the whole family is dependent on unemployment benefits:

*“Most of the time it's really- because of these unemployment benefits, it is really a struggle for survival.”*

(Thomas, age 34)

The term “struggle for survival” underlines that Thomas faces difficulties in fulfilling even basic needs. Money spent for food has to be calculated carefully, and every bill to be paid causes another problem. In this “struggle for survival”, people need to prioritize, since they are not able to meet all their needs. In the case of Thomas and his wife, covering the children's needs is the first priority:

*“Actually, our life centres really on the kids. [...] That we really comprise, hardly eat anything, so that they have enough to eat and stuff, 'cause I'm afraid we don't have any relatives that could- like*

*one call and they come over. Actually, we're quite alone. And then of course you're struggling all the time. That they get something to eat, that they have enough to eat and stuff."* (Thomas, age 34)

In this passage, Thomas mentions the cause for his troubles in making it through the month. He does not receive any (financial) support from family members, and there is no one he could ask for help if there were urgent shortages. Of course, the example above describes an extreme situation, and even with Thomas', it is not always about 'not starving'. His 'struggle for survival' comprises not only the physical problem of having enough food, but also issues of the children's participation in social life – that they are not excluded in school. To prevent his children from stigmatization, some money has to be spent on things that contradict the logic of 'no more than what is absolutely necessary'. In this context Thomas talks about his daughter, whose friends always buy a bottle of candy milk from the tuck shop during the breakfast break. Although Thomas and his wife would prefer to save the money and do not see the use in drinking candy milk at all, they give her three Euros each week so that she can buy it as well:

*"There is this peer pressure then. Everyone gets it, and I can't say to my daughter, you don't get it. Why? Yeah, we're poor or stuff. That's a no-go."*

(Thomas, age 34)

Thomas' strategy to prevent his children from suffering from his poverty restricts his own opportunities to engage in social activities. The last time he and his wife went out without their children was four years ago. In the meantime, they have stopped even thinking about what they could do, because everything causes expenses:

*"But it's just- if you're planning then, okay, let's go to McDonalds or something like that, so that we have some peace and quiet for us, sometime, or, what do I know, go out for a walk for two hours. Then here we go again. You have to pay her [a babysitter], you have to pay the bus tickets. Then you want to have a drink outside, and then you start counting, hmm, let's better stay at home."*

(Thomas' wife, age 25)

But financial hardship does not only hamper Thomas in going out with his wife and reduce his spatial mobility. It also restrains him from social activities with other people, and makes him losing contact with friends and family members. It is a vicious circle of not having enough money to engage in social activities and stay in touch with people, and on the other hand losing social contacts that could compensate poor financial resources if necessary. In the end, there remains nothing but the anomic feeling that one is not able to do anything. Thomas is an interviewee who seems to be quite far in this process of financial deprivation and social isolation. Others try to avoid this circle by earning additional money. According to the law, persons obtaining unemployment benefits may earn an additional 150 Euros per month without facing deductions. This is also the sum one earns from engaging in an employment measure. Jens, a father of two

children, whose partner is unemployed as well, and who is thus in a similar situation like Thomas, applied for an employment measure for this reason:

*“Sure, it [the money] is missing, missing. Simply because of the kids. But as I said, through the measure we always get an additional 150 Euros on the 15<sup>th</sup>, [...] I’m glad that I’ve got this. And with this, we can manage the remaining 15 days. Let’s put it this way.”*

(Jens, age 28)

This passage illustrates that 150 Euros make a big difference for an unemployed family. Other interviews corroborate this finding, since many of our respondents occasionally take up small jobs to earn some 80 or 100 Euros whenever they have the opportunity. Further, for unemployed who are luckier than Thomas and who have reliable contacts, there is the possibility of borrowing money in case of dire straits. An example for this group is Wolfram, who is currently in trouble because of his broken refrigerator:

*“There is a friend of my mother, [...] she’s really lovely. If we did not have her, I would have been stranded badly sometime. She helped me a couple of times yet. [...] She said she would lend me some money for a new fridge and stuff. And these are such things, if you don’t have this kind of people who attend to you or so, then you’re really in a fix.”*

(Wolfram, age 29)

Wolfram is one who does borrow money not only in problematic situations. His friends even offer to help him out when planning social activities. This enables him to escape from the circle of social isolation and economic deprivation and to maintain his social activities:

*“When my friends say, come on, we want to go to an upcoming concert or so. I say no, I don’t have the money. Yeah, come on, we advance you some money and you pay it back whenever you can, or so. So they really take care that we still can do as many things as possible together.”*

(Wolfram, age 29)

Doubtlessly, this kind of support is connected to several requirements. First, the friends must be willing to ‘invest’ some extra money to have Wolfram with them. Generally speaking, the contact must be of high quality so to say, i.e. a close and trustful relationship. Second, the friends must be able to spend the extra money, which means that their financial situation must be better than the one of Wolfram. This pattern of support occurs only among unemployed whose friends have an income from work. Many of the respondents said that for sure their friends would lend them money, but they are not able to do so since they live on unemployment benefits as well. On the other hand, the unemployed must be willing to take to money from their friends or relatives. We learnt from our interviews that borrowing money is a sensitive issue, and most of our respondents avoid facing such situations:

*"I'm not a guy who asks, you know? Dad, do you possibly have some 20 Euros or so? I don't ask. Because I think one should rather work before you scrounge from your parents, or what do I know. Yeah."*

(Halil, age 24)

For Halil, asking for money is not legitimate. Because he blames himself for being unemployed, he is convinced that he alone has to bear responsibility for this situation. Not asking for money is a question of honour. For others, this issue involves feelings of shame. Nicole, another respondent, was thinking for a short time after having been asked if her friends would help her out. Then she said:

*"Yes, probably. But I don't do that. That's also embarrassing for me. But I'm sure they would."*

(Nicole, age 30)

Needless to say that there is still a difference between asking for money and taking money that is offered. Halil, who would never ask for it, usually takes the money his father gives him. And on the other hand, Wolfram would probably not ask his friends for money to join them.

Finally, we will have a look at the two respondents that said they could live comfortably with their money. Both of them are single mothers, and both of them receive a lot of support from their surroundings. However, the kind of support is quite different. Cansu lives with her daughter in the neighbourhood of her parents. After splitting up with her husband, she faced mental-health problems and stopped working. Now she has been unemployed for five years, but she asserts: "I don't feel like being unemployed because of my family." Her father came to Germany as a son of Turkish immigrant workers in the 60s and was self-employed running a restaurant. With the money he earned, he acquired real estate property and lives now on the rental income. Cansu's mother is still working as a charwoman, even though this would not be necessary. At large, the financial situation of the family is very good. The parents do not only support Cansu's brothers who are students, but also her:

*"My furniture for instance. I have been unemployed for five years, and I got everything from my parents. For instance, holidays, three weeks, [...] my father paid it. [...] So, they support me. [...] They also go shopping for me. Well, I get round about 500 Euros per months [from them], I can also save some money."*

(Cansu, age 28)

Cansu's parents give her in-kind support as well as extra money. Consequently, she does not have regular expenses and can use all of her money (unemployment benefits and what she earns from side jobs) as pocket money. Further, the parents pay everything for Cansu's daughter, from everyday commodities to violin lessons. Being asked about her expenses, Cansu answers:

*“Not for my daughter. If I think something is really beautiful, then I buy it for sure for my daughter. Apart from that, I don’t have any expenses.”*

(Cansu, age 28)

However, Cansu knows about her privileged position. Her friends are unemployed single parents as well, but do not have anyone to support them. She tells us that she lends money to her friends almost every month. One could now argue that such extensive financial support would lower the unemployed person’s motivation to look for a job. Yet, this is not true for Cansu. For instance, she complains that the unemployment office does not let her take part in an employment measure:

*“Financially, this doesn’t make sense, but it’s better than sitting at home. That is, honestly, sitting at home, I can’t do that for instance. I always have to go out. Yes, then I would have deserved an employment measure. Better than going for a walk.”*

(Cansu, age 28)

Frustrated of the labour market for low-skilled workers, Cansu has now enrolled at a school and will do a secondary education degree in order to find an apprenticeship position.

As we have seen from Cansu, parental support makes a big difference for an unemployed person’s financial situation. However, the kind of support does not only depend on the parents’ financial background, but also on their willingness to support their child. While for Cansu’s parents it is a matter of course to support their daughter so that she can maintain her living standard, for Hanna, who is in a similar situation living alone with her son and coming from a wealthy family, it is quite different. Although her parents buy clothes and toys for her son, they never give her any cash:

*“Certainly I cannot go there and say, it’s the end of the month, so I would need some 100 Euros or so. Then my mother would say, no, you have to make it on your own. That doesn’t work. Just as a matter of principle. [...] But of course you will lower your guard only once or twice, that you go there and ask, can you give me some money, and she says no. So you won’t do that constantly.”*

(Hanna, age 25)

Our interviews show that the family is always addressed first when the young unemployed are in financial troubles. If it is not possible to receive support from the family, friends use to help out, given that they are able to do so. We have already seen this with Wolfram, whose parents are unemployed as well and thus not able to support him, but whose friends make sure that he still can participate in their activities. With Mary, support provided through friends and acquaintances goes even further. Mary was born in Russia and came as an au pair to Germany ten years ago. She decided to stay and opened a restaurant with her partner. After a couple of years her son was born, and some years later she split up with her partner and they closed the restaurant. She has

now been unemployed for four years. Mary has very close contact to her parents and her sister and calls them every day. However, since they live in Russia, they cannot assist her in her everyday life:

*"Its just like, for me, because my family is so far away, then you have to rely on your friends, I'd say. When I give my child to someone sometime, then it's really [...] yes, I have very good friends."*

(Mary, age 31)

For Mary, there is the problem that she needs to replace her missing family contacts by a dense network of friends. This will only work if the relationship is comparably close and trustful. Mary managed to acquire such a network. Her friends have very different age groups and social and cultural backgrounds, and most of them have an income from work. Therefore, they can support her in different ways. Further, she has a close relationship with the family of her child's father, who now serve as a "second family" for her. She says her ex was a "crappy guy", but that she has got a great family instead. Because of them, she does not need to worry about her son:

*"Of course, I've really very good support from the family. Moritz, I think I've bought him two T-shirts in seven years. In seven years. Otherwise he gets everything from our acquaintance, and from his grandma, and from his dad he gets everything from Nintendo to Nintendo Wii, whatever. And this is the money that normal unemployed cannot afford. If I did not have this kind of support, then I don't know how it would be."*

(Mary, age 31)

Moreover, Mary is very busy maintaining her living standard. In the weekends, when her son is at his father's place, she waits at table at a restaurant, and whenever she can she participates in employment measures to earn some extra money. Since she cannot afford to have her own car, she made a deal with an old grandaunt of her son. The old lady lives in a retirement home, and Mary goes shopping for her, brings her to the doctor, or just spends the morning with her some days a week. In return, she may use the aunt's car. Further, she is always in search of things the other people do not need anymore.

*"But I think, I dress very nicely, I have a great family from which I really get support, or from my sister in law I get a lot of things. That's like, in my home, I did not buy a single piece from my own money. Oh wait, the plants, cachepots for the plants ((laughing)). But then I'd say, I don't feel like poor, sort of. Yeah? Because from my mother in law, furniture from my mother in law, there a table of- and so on. And the stuff, it's actually always good. Because of that, many people say, Mary, you unemployed? On 300 Euros, how do you live? I say, yeah, like this. But nobody believes that I'm*

*unemployed. Or they say, how I look like, or how I dress, every one says, Mary!”*

(Mary, age 31)

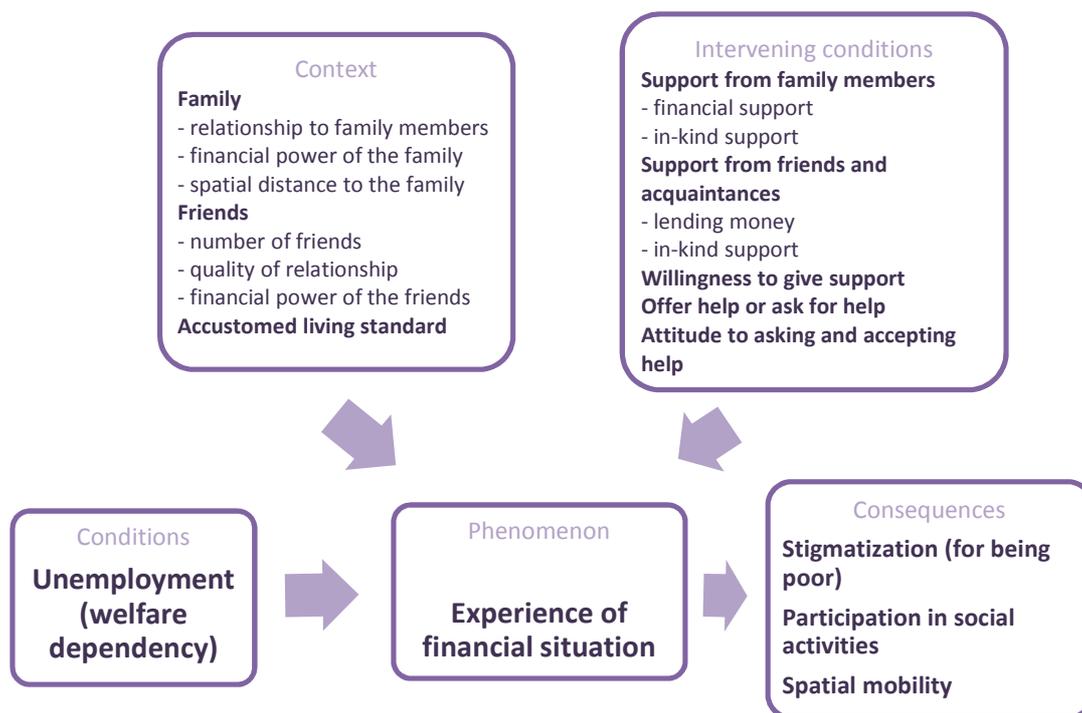
Thanks to her extensive use of social capital, Mary can save some money and spend it on what is really important to her – clothes. For her, it crucial how she dresses up and that she, or her place, does not look ‘poor’. She succeeds in representing a high living standard and uses status symbols like nice dresses, furniture and the car to prevent stigmatization for being unemployed. Of course, Mary, who comes from a wealthy family, has to put much more effort in not feeling poor than other unemployed who are less ‘sophisticated’. To put it bluntly, Thomas’ daughter needs a bottle of candy milk, while Mary’s son needs a Nintendo Wii. How unemployed perceive their financial situation depends to a large extent on the living standard one is accustomed to:

*“Sure, I don’t talk about that to anyone, but it’s definitely hard for me, because I’ve grown up really differently. I really got everything when I was a kid. And when I wanted to have one pair of trousers, I got two instead. And when I wanted to have some shoes, I got them, even though the price was 200 Marks. So there was no ‘No’. And if Mum said no, because she couldn’t, then Daddy said yes. And we used to go on holidays two or three times a year or so. Yeah, something like that. I’m just- I just need to adapt, like going on holidays, now that’s just impossible.”*

(Hanna, age 25)

In the following, we will try to generalize these findings and construct a theory of unemployment-related financial hardship.

Chart 1 (below) illustrates the impact of the variables related to the experience of one’s financial situation. The extent to which financial hardship as a consequence of unemployment leads to stigmatization for being poor, to a reduced participation in social activities and to low spatial mobility depends first of all on support from family members. Family members may support their unemployed relatives through money or in-kind support. Important context factors are the relationship to family members, the financial power of the family and the spatial distance between family members. If family support is not possible, the unemployed can rely on support from friends and acquaintances, which consists mostly of lending money or in-kind support. Again, this depends on some context factors, like the number of friends and acquaintances, the quality of the relationship to them and their financial resources. Further, the question of receiving support from family members or friends depends on their willingness to give support, and whether they offer help of their own or if the unemployed have to ask for help. And finally, the attitude of the unemployed plays an important role, i.e. if they can allow themselves to accept help or even ask for help. Moreover, the subjective experience of one’s financial situation depends on her or his accustomed living standard and the relative loss of status that is connected to it.



**Chart 1: Experience of financial situation**

Time

When we asked our respondents if there was anything positive about being unemployed, most of them answered: “Well, one could say that you have more time, but...” And then it turned out that having time is not seen positive at all – it is rather a burden than a boon. There was only one respondent, David, who said that the plenty of free time was positive for him:

*“You have a lot of time to think about your life and where it should go. [...] You should, if you’re clever, you should make good use of it. And not watch TV like most people do. [...] And better read a book. Yeah? So if you want, you can make good use of your time, even for yourself, or precisely for yourself. Yeah. If you’re clever. Most of the people don’t do that, and that’s a pity.”*

(David, age 24)

For others, being unemployed is not this kind of self-discovery journey. They suffer because they would like to have a regular time structure, or to close gaps in their everyday activities. At large, we found very different patterns of time usage in the interviews. First, unemployed who participate in employment or training measures obviously have a regular time structure. Their everyday routines do not differ from those of regularly employed people, even if their working day is some hours shorter. Unemployed participating in employment measures usually do not need to think about what to do with their time. Another condition that has an impact on the individual time structure of

unemployed people is parenthood. All of our respondents who have children have a regular day structure. They always get up at the same time each day, eat their lunch at a certain time and have other routines that take place in a certain daily time frame. For instance, Mary is one who is busy the whole day. She gets up at seven, calls her sister in Russia, brings her son to school...

*“Yeah, and then, clean up, go shopping, cook, yes, go with friends to the city centre sometime, or at present I’m at the labour office very frequently because of this internship [she is planning to do] [...]. Yeah, then I pick the child up, then I have to bring him to his sports, on Mondays we have gymnastics, on Wednesdays we have handball, on Thursdays we have chess and so on. That’s, yes, in the evening, then you’re- At six we are mostly at home, when all this sports is over, yeah, at ten I go to bed, read a book, yeah.”*

(Mary, age 31)

We can see from this passage that caring for a child can fill the whole day. In the mornings, when the child is at school, Mary has time to run her errands, and the rest of her time is devoted to her son. Mary is so busy that she does not mention their daily meals, while others put much emphasis on this, because the meals give their days a structure. Another important point is that Mary has a lot of friends. Of course, friends usually cannot provide a day structure, but they can fill idle time. Nicole, who is a mother of a boy as well, does not have friends or family nearby, or activities that she could use time on (except of playing handball once a week) – so her daily activities are restricted to her errands. She describes how she does the chores in the mornings, but after lunch, her narration ends. “And then we watch TV”, she says. On the other hand, unemployed who do not have children often do not have a regular time structure at all. Dieter, who is a single and lives alone, says:

*“Eh, yeah. Get up, have breakfast, then I sit down in front of the computer and write applications, so I look for job offers and apply for them. Yeah, and then, read the newspaper, and ((laughing)) actually that’s nearly all. That’s nearly all, I’m afraid.”*

(Dieter, age 28)

When Dieter talks about his day, he stumbles (“eh”) and laughs. This marks that for him it is embarrassing to have nothing to do. This reaction occurred among many other interviewees. They feel ashamed for their lack of activities. Some of them preferred to talk about how their days would look like if they had an employment:

*“Yeah, then my day would be like- but now, it is, it sounds boring. When I say I get up at 12 o’clock ((laughing)).”*

(Halil, age 24)

Some of our non-parent respondents try to maintain a day structure by doing things for the people they live with and by keeping up the chores. An example for this pattern is Wolfram, who lives with his father, who is unemployed as well, but currently participates

in an employment measure. During the week, Wolfram's girlfriend stays at their place, since she is a student and it is easier for her to get to the university from there. Wolfram describes his day structure as follows:

*"Yes, as a rule it's like, that I get up early in the morning together with my girlfriend, then I make her some sandwiches for university while she makes herself up, then I go out with the dog, then I do the chores a little bit, like washing the dishes, sweeping – and once a week, I clean up everything. Then, around noon, I cook lunch, so that when my father comes home from work at 3, so that we can have lunch together. Yeah, then, in the afternoon, I normally chat a little bit with my fellows."*

(Wolfram, age 29)

The same pattern applies to Esma, who has moved to her grandparents after having split up with her husband:

*"Well, eh, yeah ((laughing)). Because I currently live with my grandparents, of course I help them a lot, because they are elderly people, right? Yeah, at 8, or at the latest half past 8 I get up, then I prepare the breakfast, we have breakfast together, then I help my grandma cleaning up or whatever is to be done [...] so I absolutely live a housewife life."*

(Esma, age 23)

We saw from our interviews that most of the unemployed, regardless whether they have children or not, do not have any problems in using their time in the mornings. Almost all of them run their errands and do the chores in the morning. The more they have to do, the earlier they get up, and if there is less to do, they sleep some hours longer. Hence, until noon, most of the unemployed are occupied. But especially among those who do not have children, the narrations end after lunch. Some of them say something like: "and in the afternoon, I sometimes meet my friends" – but as we said before, meeting friends or family members can fill some free time, but will not give the unemployed a regular day structure. And again, this depends on how much time the friends or family members can spend with their unemployed mates. If they have an employment, their social activities are restricted to the evenings or weekends. For instance, Halil says about his friends:

*"Yeah, they are sometimes away on a construction job. Many of them work on scaffolding. And, they often are not here. They're sometimes in Munich, sometimes in Belgium, and some are in the Netherlands. I don't see them as often as in former times anymore."*

(Halil, age 24)

However, we did not find in the interviews that those respondents whose friends and family members are unemployed as well face fewer problems in managing their time. At large, we found that the main difference is about having children or not – and that non-parents usually suffer more from their unemployment with regard to time usage. Yet,

having children does not necessarily lead to a full day. Thomas describes his daily activities as follows:

*“At 7 o’clock the alarm clock goes off. Then I wake my oldest son up, prepare him for school, make his sandwich, at half past seven he goes to school, then I wake my daughter up, prepare her for school, sandwich and stuff, and she goes to school at 8. And then, tidy up a little bit, have a look what has to be done, then I mostly do stuff on the computer until my daughter comes back from school at 12 [...]. Then the little ones get their lunch, because my eldest [...], he gets lunch in school, he doesn’t come back before half past three. Then we wait until he comes back, in the meantime I’ve done homework with my daughter or occupied her otherwise, and when he finally comes, we occupy all the three of them.”*

(Thomas, age 34)

When Thomas describes his day, one has the impression that it is all about waiting for the children. However, except for homework, there are no defined activities he does with them. He mentions twice that his main task is to “occupy” the children, which seems to mean making sure that they have something to do and do not get ideas into their head. He does not go out with them, take them somewhere or do sports together. As we have seen above, Thomas’ family is so hampered in their activities because they have to worry about money all the time. As a result, they have even stopped thinking about what they could do, because everything seems to involve costs. In this case, there remains plenty of time without activity even though one is a father of three. But also many other unemployed said they could not make good use of their free time (which is actually the positive thing about being unemployed) because they have so little money (which is the negative thing about being unemployed):

*“Then you have so much time that you would actually need a lot of money not to get bored. [...] If you could go to the swimming pool every day in summer, or every day, what do I know, go to the amusement park, then it would be fun, right? But in the end you cannot do anything, sometimes you just sit there and wait. [...] I think it is partly very exhausting to do nothing.”*

(Hanna, age 25)

Hanna says this with regard to her experience in the past. Now she is one of those who are occupied the whole day, because she takes part in a training measure that qualifies her for a vocational training in the public administration. The remaining time is devoted to her son. But apart from those unemployed benefitting from active labour market policies, the respondents who are better off in financial terms face much less difficulties in filling their day. We already described Mary’s day above, and Cansu is never bored as well. When her daughter is in school, she meets her parents or goes to her uncle’s business and works there for a couple of hours if needed, or just spends her time there talking and drinking tea with the family. Moreover, she meets her friends every day, goes with them

to parks and cafés, is “spending money” the whole day, and goes to the swimming pool with her daughter very often. Cansu is our only respondent who said that she has got more friends since she is unemployed, because she has more time to go out and meet people.

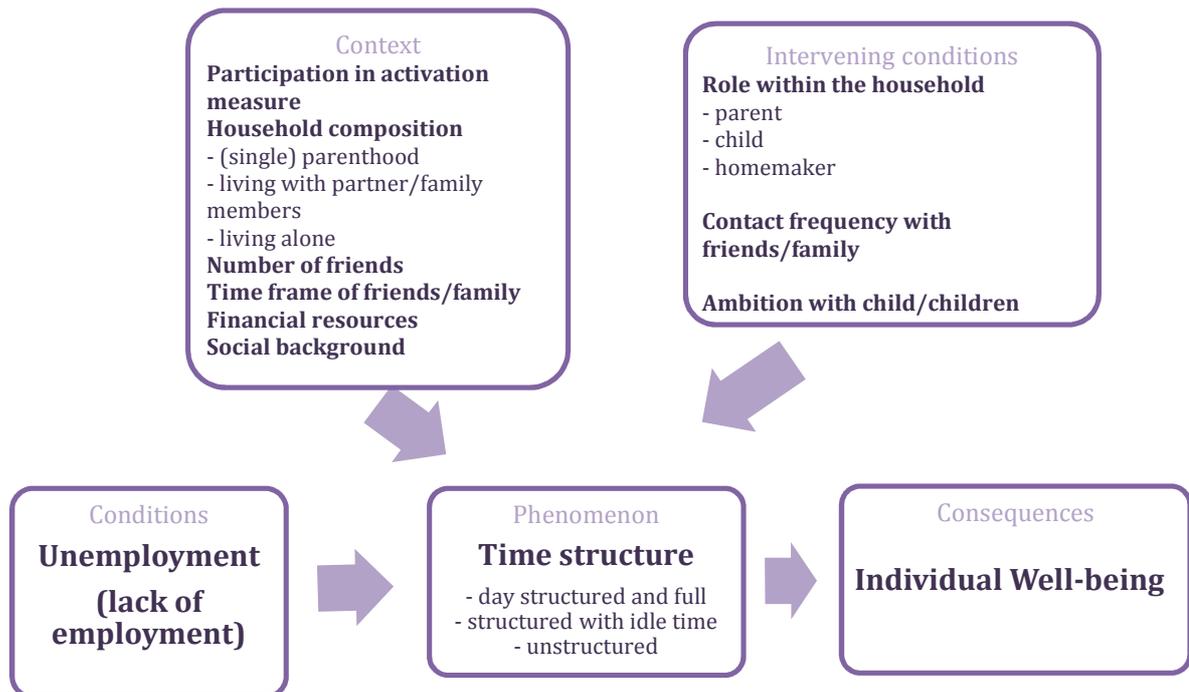
In our sample, it is particularly the single mothers who are very active and busy the whole day. But still the question is: why is this so? Are Mary, Hanna and Cansu (and Selina, about whom we have not talked until now) busier because they are single mothers, or because they have more financial resources, or because they have a lot of social contacts? We found another astonishing similarity between the three of them (which is also a similarity with David, the young man cited first in this chapter): they were the only ones that told us that they read a lot. We do not argue that the activity of reading would make a decisive difference in individual time usage. But it gives us a hint about the single mother’s social background. All of them come from families that are quite wealthy and/or well educated. Neither do we argue that daughters from wealthier families would be more skilled in using their time. The main point is the ambition they have about their children and the role they attribute to themselves as mothers. It is not a coincidence that in social research on inequalities in education the reading habits of the mother are said to be the best predictor for a child’s performance in school. For instance, Hanna is quite creative in finding activities she can do with her son:

*“Well, we actually go on a lot of trips. But we just watch out that we do things that are for free. So that we either just take a walk through the forest, we actually do this every week. So every week, whether summer or winter, we always go into the forest. And this is always fun, because we always find something that is totally interesting, and then we set out for an expedition. So that’s really fun and that’s for free. Or we go for a swim as well, that’s also cheap [...]. Or adventure playgrounds, things like that. So we do a lot of things, especially in spring and summertime, and it’s always- and then we just pick out things that aren’t too expensive.”*

(Hanna, age 25)

While Thomas and his wife occupy their children, for the single mothers it is important to advance them. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, Mary sends her son to two different sport clubs and lets him play chess, and she extensively supervises his homework and his progress in school. She says the only thing that makes her really angry in her life is when her son comes home with bad grades. Cansu does not talk much about her activities with her daughter, but as we know, the grandparents pay very expensive violin lessons for her, and Cansu emphasizes how important it is for her that her daughter will go to the Gymnasium (upper secondary school) next year. Our single mothers put so much effort in advancing their children because they want them to be better off than themselves, or they want to allow for them maintaining the living standard they were accustomed to when they grew up. Unlike for Thomas (but also for our other unemployed families), for the single mothers having children means more than just having them around and caring for them. Parenthood is a kind of ‘project’, a thing that

one has to invest in – and this takes time. However, it is worth to stress once more that this attitude does not legitimize unemployment for our respondents, nor does it reduce their work commitment. All of the single mothers have concrete plans to re-enter the labour market during the next few months. Consequences of individual time usage are rather reflected in the unemployed persons' well-being – we will discuss this issue in the next chapter.



**Chart 2: Individual time structure and activity**

For now, we can summarize our findings about individual time structures and activity of the unemployed as follows (see chart 2). We found three general patterns of time usage in our interviews. The first pattern comprises a day that is clearly structured and full of activity. The second option is a day that is indeed structured, but contains regularly some hours of idle time – especially in the afternoon. Finally, the third pattern describes a day that does not comprise of daily routines at all, or consists of a minimum of routines and is mainly ‘living for the moment’. The more structured and active the unemployed use their time, the less their individual well-being will be likely to be impaired. Day structures and activities are affected by a set of context factors. First, the problem of time usage occurs only for those unemployed that do not take part in a training or employment measure. Second, time usage depends on the household composition of the unemployed. While single mothers have a structured and full day, the day of parents living with their partner is structured as well, but contains idle time. Unemployed living with their partner or family sometimes adapt to the structure of the other household members. And finally, young unemployed that live alone are most likely not to have a regular day structure at all. The possibility to make use of idle time is conditioned by the

number of friends and acquaintances one has, as well as the time they can spend with the unemployed person. Further, as we have seen, the financial situation plays an important role for the question to what extent and what kind of activities are planned and done. At last, the social background of the unemployed has an impact on what kind of activities they prioritize. To which degree these context factors influence the day structure and activity of the unemployed depends on some intervening conditions. It is not the mere household composition, which makes the difference, but rather the role the young unemployed take in their households. We have seen that as parents they are busier than as children. But as children, they still can take the role of the homemaker to compensate their lack of employment at least partly. In addition, the possibility of taking part in social activities depends not only on size and availability of the social surrounding, but also on the contact frequency and the unemployed persons' commitment to stay in touch. And after all, our interviews have shown that it is not only parenthood, but also the ambition the parents have for their children that makes them busy organizing things to advance their offspring.

### Well-being

The third and last category of unemployment-related problems concerns the individual well-being of the unemployed. Under this section we subsume the issues the respondents raised when talking about how they feel about being unemployed. None of our respondents said she or he would feel good in their situation. There were three main problems that were mentioned by several respondents with regard to their well-being. The first problem we already touched upon in the previous chapter is that unemployment can make one passive, due to a lack of activities and money. The second problem involves feelings of uselessness, due to the lack of a job as a task to fulfil. And the third problem concerns feelings of shame for being dependent on the welfare system due to the lack of financial autonomy.

Mary, one of our most active and busy respondents, describes her experience with passivity as follows:

*"I think, if you have been unemployed for more than one year, then you're fed up. Me, I'm really someone who is very agile. I'm really on the way the whole day. But there were times, when my son was younger, you were sitting at home, you were really fed up. When they [the labour office] sent me a letter, appointment, I thought, bite me, now you've to go to Porz [district centre] again, you become lethargic, you're not in the mood for nothing."*

(Mary, age 31)

Mary explains her way out of passivity by her individual character, by the fact that she is an agile person by nature. So to speak, this makes her immune to becoming passive for a longer time period. In general, none of the respondents said that she or he was passive because of unemployment. Those who could be described as passive from an outside view, like Thomas, for instance, did not talk about their passivity, but only about how their lack of money and social contacts restricts their activity. Interestingly, the issue

'passivity' was raised only by those respondents who are rather 'active' in their everyday life. For them, the phenomenon of 'passivation' is something they fear (and sometimes feel), but what they need to combat. Inactivity, which as a consequence leads to isolation, is considered dissatisfying and is to be avoided:

*"If I go out and- I always equate this with being active in sports. When I do something for myself and I come home, I feel free, I'm happy and I'm in touch with the outside world instead of staying at home every day and watching TV, yeah, or chatting. You isolate yourself."*

(Nicole, age 30)

For the respondents, the process of becoming passive is closely related to the process of resigning to being unemployed. The majority of our respondents talked about people they knew and who had just accepted their fate after a while.

*"With my sisters it's like- I have the feeling that they don't want to work. That they hide behind their kids [...] it's already ten years they do nothing. [...] I'm really in a panic 'cause I'm afraid to end up like my sisters."*

(Nicole, age 30)

However, apart from those unemployed suffering from severe mental health problems, Thomas was the only one who did not emphasize during the interview how much effort he puts into finding a job and what his concrete future plans are. At large, the theory of our respondents that there is a vicious circle of being long-term unemployed, becoming passive and lethargic, then stop trying to change this situation and finally giving up on oneself cannot be corroborated from our interviews. If so, it is at least not a common phenomenon, since almost all of our respondents had quite clear plans for their future, a high work commitment put some efforts in finding a job. Correspondingly, our unemployed proponents of this passivity theory think that many or most unemployed have themselves to blame for their situation. In contrast, they distinguish themselves as 'good' and committed unemployed from the passive, lethargic and lazy ones. They have developed strategies to keep active, including every-day activities as well as job-search activities. Hence, with regard to well-being, the statement "unemployment makes one passive" is not an expression of one's experience of passivity, but rather the permanent fear of becoming passive.

The other two unemployment-related well-being problems, welfare dependency and feelings of uselessness, are more interrelated and were often mentioned tandem with each other. Concerning welfare dependency, Wolfram puts it quite bluntly. For him, it is one of the major reasons to seek a job:

*"Cause you can't live on this unemployment benefits crap all the time."*

(Wolfram, age 29)

Although for most unemployed people receiving unemployment benefits is crucial to secure their existence, for some of them it is also quite problematic to live on community expenses.

*“People that live on [tax-financed] unemployment benefits, they have just fallen below the floor. They’re really down below the floor. And if I think about it, that I live on unemployment benefits as well, I don’t want to accept this. Because for me, that’s- of course, you get money from the state, you’re living on the state, but I don’t want this. [...] I see it from my mother. [...] She does her job, she earns<sup>7</sup> her money, and so, this is her money so to say. She can do with it whatever she likes. [...] So she has- that’s her hard earned money. But with unemployment benefits, it’s like- it’s stolen, so to say. And for sure, that’s nothing you can be proud of.”*

(Selina, age 24)

For Selina, living on unemployment benefits involves two dimensions of problems. First, for her it is a question of status. She perceives the group of welfare beneficiaries as a kind of underclass with a bad reputation and low social prestige, and thus she does not want to belong to this social group. Second, for Selina it is a question of conscience. For her, living on taxes is like ‘stealing’ – it is something unethical. She has problems spending money that she has not earned herself.

Besides the point that issues like class identity and morality that make welfare dependency an illegitimate practice, there are two other kinds of experience that could lead to bad feelings about living on unemployment benefits. The first context aspect that has an impact is the experience with the labour office. Patrick describes his experience as follows:

*“For me it’s very exhausting to go there, to the labour office, because I’m really scared of the persons in charge. Because I say, the one who sits there has more leverage. He can cancel my benefits, he can do whatever he wants, and I can’t answer back. [...] For me, it’s- when I go out there, after the talk, I’m soaked with sweat afterwards. I’m messed up. Because of the strain, of the talk and everything, because you don’t have the feeling that the person understands you the way you are. Instead you think you’re a number, or you’re discharged, and then, next please. But I rather don’t feel they properly consider me as a person.”*

(Patrick, age 28)

Patrick is not the only one who suffers from being a client of the unemployment office. Only about one fourth of the respondents reported to have a good contact, for another fourth it is neither good nor bad and almost half of the young unemployed said their

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<sup>7</sup> The German term “*verdienen*” means both to earn and to deserve.

relation was quite problematic. This is mainly related to the sanctioning power of the person in charge, which is sometimes perceived as a permanent threat and puts pressure on the unemployed. Consequently, the counsellor will not be considered as a trustworthy contact person as long as she or he has the power to dispossess the unemployed of their means of existence. Another problem that was reported often is the way the job counsellors behave towards their clients. Many of them feel that their persons in charge condescend to them and put them under general suspicion to be a 'welfare freeloader'. This may lead to feelings of stigmatization.

Apart from the labour office, there are two more sources of stigmatization. The first one is the public discourse about unemployed people and the second one is facing prejudices for being unemployed in the everyday life. When asked whether they were confronted with prejudices for being unemployed yet, most of our respondents mentioned the media. On the one hand, there has been an almost permanent public debate on the 'underclass' in the German media during the last ten years that relates long-term unemployed to laziness and lacking work ethic and is brought up regularly by politicians in order to justify reductions of unemployment benefits or the introduction of new workfare policies. On the other hand, many afternoon reality shows and talk shows on television portray unemployed people that talk about their unwillingness to work and how comfortably they live on welfare. For our respondents, this discourse has negative consequences. Because on the one hand they fear that prejudices against unemployed people will spread within society and make people generalize negative attributes, which will increase their likelihood to face stigmatization in their everyday life. On the other hand, they are permanently confronted with the fact that being unemployed and living on unemployment benefits is a socially undesirable practice. And finally, they have to justify to themselves that – in contrast to many other unemployed – they really deserve their benefits. Apart from media representation, some of our respondents reported of facing prejudices for being unemployed in their everyday life. Sometimes the prejudices come from family members, especially those of the older generation like parents and grandparents, who never experienced unemployment and spent their working life in a brisk labour market. They say things like "anyone can find a job, I always found one" and impute lacking commitment to the young unemployed. Other prejudices come from acquaintances, and some are addressed by friends or by unknown people in public places. Although the prejudices often are not communicated directly, some of our respondents have become quite sensitive regarding this issue. Sometimes, there is just a vague feeling of rejection or the fear to be considered a welfare freeloader.

*"I noticed that when I played handball in Frankfurt. [...] When I was in my handball team and we talked about it I noticed that. Though they said, we don't talk about you, but about the others, those who live on welfare and don't want to work."*

(Nicole, age 30)

Altogether, we found that even if there are individual justifications of the unemployed (that they find good reasons for themselves why they currently live on unemployment benefits), the experience of stigmatization leads to the feeling that one is a socially

devalued person. And the less their social surrounding gives the young unemployed recognition for what they are and keep them grounded, the more likely they are to lack self-esteem as a consequence.

Stigmatization is not only a condition for feeling bad for living on unemployment benefits. It may also have an impact on the third dimension of unemployment-related well-being, i.e. feelings of uselessness. Marvin, a young unemployed from the suburbs of Cologne describes his feelings about being unemployed as follows:

*“Yeah, it makes life harder, right? I’d say. Less money. Though you’ve got a lot of free time, but what to do with this free time? I feel useless. I just sponge off the state all the time. That’s not fair.”*

(Marvin, age 20)

When Marvin says he “sponge[s] off the state”, he makes clear that he also suffers from his welfare dependency, which he considers as an illegitimate practice. However, his problems with being unemployed go even further. For him, it causes feelings of uselessness. The fact that he does not see himself as someone who contributes something useful to society contradicts his sense of fairness. Of course, this is not necessarily problematic because one could think of many other activities through which one could contribute something to society besides paid work. We will come back to this in chapter 3.3. For now, it is enough to be aware that, depending on one’s understanding of her or his role in society, gainful work does fulfil this function and that unemployment may thus lead to the feeling that one is a useless member of society. On the other hand, the lack of a task to fulfil is problematic on the individual level as well.

*“I would say (3 sec) that’s boring. (2 sec) Yeah. Actually, it’s boring. You kinda don’t have a function.”*

(Thomas, age 34)

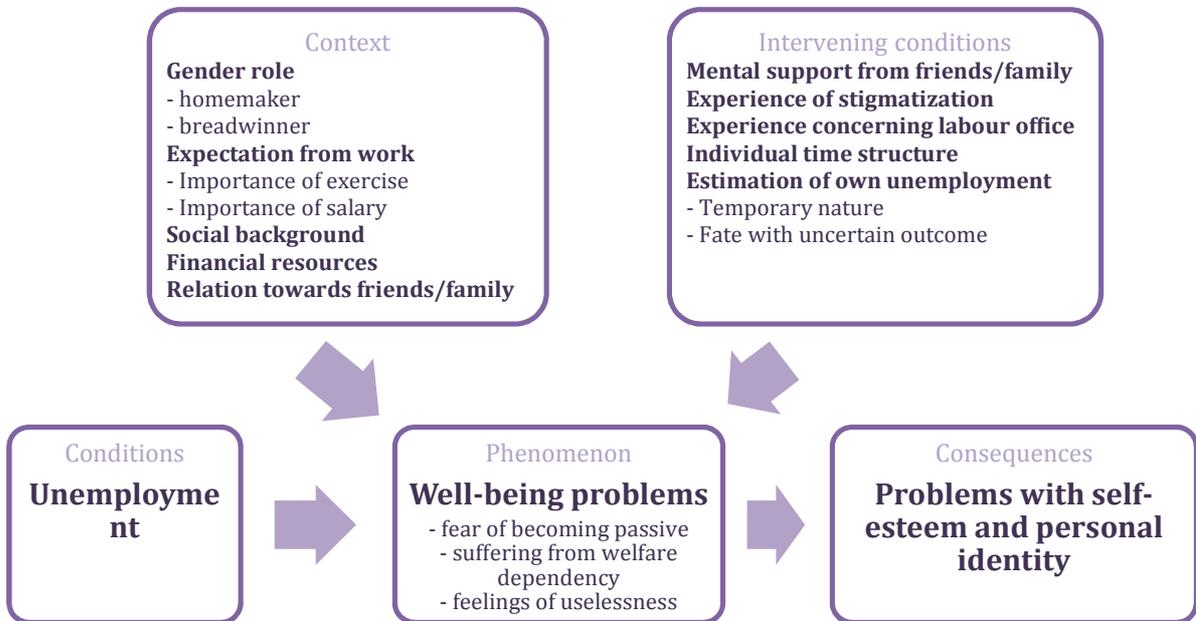
For Thomas, his unemployment does not have this societal dimension. But still, he suffers from his lack of employment because it involves not having a task to fulfil and causes boredom. This is closely related to the question of personal identity, since people usually define themselves through the work they do. Hanna describes her experience as follows.

*“Sometime, you think that you’re dumb. Or you stultify after a while, if you do not find tasks to fulfil any longer. It’s everything about- like- anyone can do that. Anyone can wash the dishes, and anyone can peg out washing, anyone can iron. But the thing that characterizes you as an individual person, that’s your vocation. And if you don’t have this, there is missing a lot. So, a lot for yourself.”*

(Hanna, age 25)

This passage shows that for Hanna, the role of the housewife is not enough. Even if she was busy all day and had enough money to live comfortably, she would still miss something. For her, the most important function of work is that it gives status and identity

to her. In the following, we will put the three dimensions of unemployment-related well-being problems into context with other factors that have an impact on them. Chart 3 illustrates our findings.



**Chart 3: Individual well-being**

One could assume that a problematic relation to welfare dependency and feelings of uselessness apply more to men than to women, since they traditionally fulfil the role of the breadwinner. Nevertheless, this is not entirely correct. It is rather the individual gender role of the unemployed that makes the difference. Even the mothers Nicole, Selina and Hanna do miss a job that gives them independency, status and identity, because they claim to be the breadwinner of their family. On the other hand, mothers like Mary and Cansu, who have a rather traditional understanding of gender roles, do not feel useless at all and do not have problems with welfare dependency. For them, unemployment is just connected with the passivity trap, and this is their main motivation to look for a job. Correspondingly, there is a relation between the main well-being problem of the unemployed and what they expect from the job they seek. We found that there are two groups that can roughly be distinguished. For the first group, which contains more women, the exercise is more important, while the salary does only play a minor role. For the second group, which contains more men, the salary is the most important thing about a job, and therefore they are willing to do almost any task, regardless whether it matches their dispositions and preferences. The first group suffers more from the fear of becoming passive, and for the second group their welfare dependency is more problematic. Feelings of uselessness may be related to both groups, since it depends on how one defines her or his identity – either by being a worker who makes enough money to serve her or his family, or by having a certain vocation. Of course, this definition again depends on the social background. The salary-

oriented unemployed come mostly from blue-collar worker families. They have grown up with the idea that work is a means to make one's living and has nothing to do with self-fulfilment. High vocational positions seem to be inaccessible anyway. In contrast, the exercise-oriented unemployed come mostly from white-collar families and for them work is indeed a means of self-fulfilment and status acquirement. Hence, due to the fact that our sample is so imbalanced regarding gender and social background, we cannot be sure if exercise vs. salary orientation is really a matter of gender – it rather seems to be an issue of class.

Further, there are two more context factors that have an impact on well-being issues. The first one is the availability of financial resources. The more the unemployed person suffers from financial hardship, the more bad feelings about being dependent of the welfare state will emerge. The last context factor we found is the relation to friends and family members. Because the better the relationship to them is and the more mental support and appreciation they get from their social surrounding, the less likely they will be to feel useless. Further, we have seen that experience of stigmatization is another intervening condition for feeling bad about dependency and feeling useless, and that negative experience with the unemployment office will increase suffering from welfare dependency. Moreover, the individual time structure has an impact on feelings of uselessness. And finally, feelings of uselessness and problems with welfare dependency are influenced by one's individual estimation of her or his unemployment. It is harder for those who consider their unemployment as a sort of 'fate', which they not necessarily need to accept, but about which they are not quite sure if and how to overcome it. In contrast, those who consider their unemployment as a temporary state which they will overcome for sure, are less likely to suffer from unemployment-related well-being problems. And again, this is a matter of social class. The higher their social background is, the less the unemployed worry to get stuck in their situation.

### ***Is unemployment connected with social exclusion, and if yes, in which way?***

We will now try to connect the previous findings to the specific research question if and under which conditions unemployment leads to social exclusion. It should be noted that the term 'social exclusion' is not an unproblematic concept since it implies a clear-cut border between those who are excluded and those who are not. However, we did not find a strong insider-outsider dichotomy in our interviews. Unemployment rather involves a process of marginalization under certain conditions. Thus, when we speak about 'social exclusion', we do not speak of an included and an excluded group, but rather of a process that is stimulated by certain risks. We found two dimensions in our material that are connected with this process of social exclusion – social isolation and cultural exclusion.

#### **Social isolation**

Many of our respondents mentioned that they miss social contacts from work. In the previous chapter we cited Nicole, who said that by not going to work "you isolate yourself". Since work is a social activity by nature, it is harder for the unemployed to get to know people and to stay in contact with them. Concerning social isolation, it turned

out that one's financial situation makes the main difference. As we have seen from the first section of the analysis chapter, financial hardship reduces one's spatial mobility and one's participation in social activities. We have also seen that children can be helpful to get in contact with the outside world, but this involves cost as well. When Mary goes with her son to his sport clubs three times a week, she will get in contact with other parents for sure, but she needs to afford the club membership first of all. However, when Hanna 'sets out for an expedition' with her son in the forests, she will hardly meet new people. Getting in contact with other people that are not close friends or family members will mostly involve costs.

Nevertheless, one could think of social activities that are not costly, or at least not too costly. The economic model of financial costs does not apply entirely, because poverty has a psychological dimension as well. Thomas says about his experience with social life:

*"In former times, I could for instance go to my neighbours next door, I could eat there and stuff, I could do that, could talk to my buddies and stuff. Today, the neighbours don't give a shit what you do, and we don't give a shit what they do, so to say."*

(Thomas, age 34)

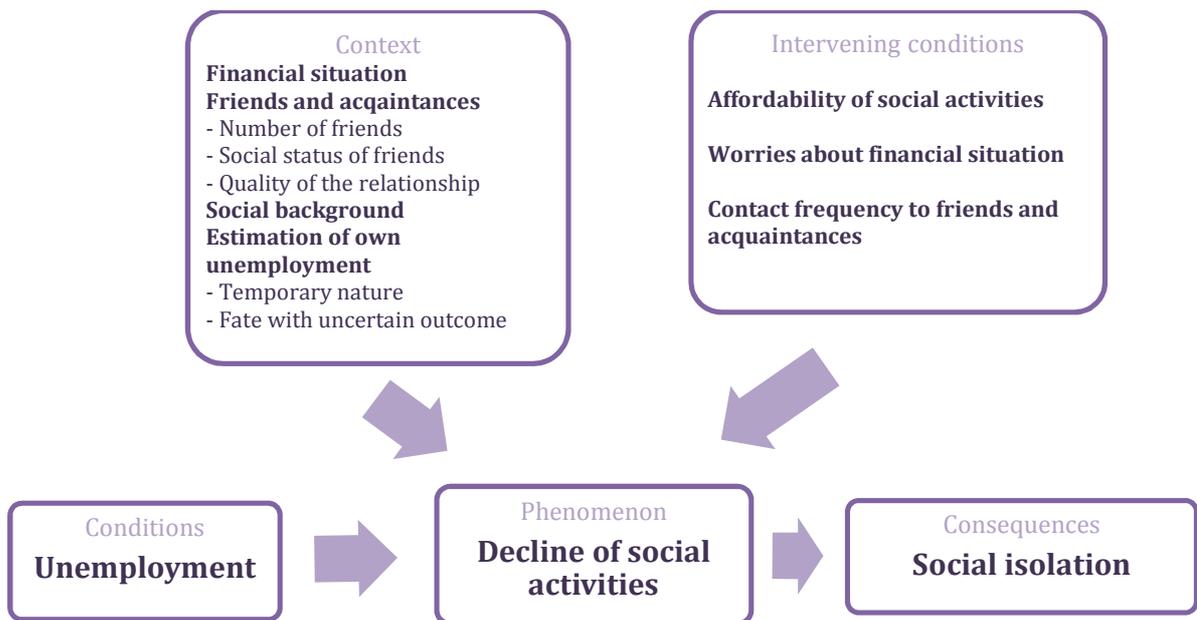
And he explains this as follows:

*"Well, I think, the main reason is that people really gnaw on their situation. That they- I don't say they have so little money that they could not buy anything for a barbecue, but for me- in my opinion everyone cocoons himself in his problems and does not longer communicate with other people."*

(Thomas, age 34)

As Thomas puts it, worries about the financial situation can lead to a "cocooning" behaviour, which results in social isolation. And although he describes it as a general observation, it shows through that this process applies above all to his own situation.

The question that arises now is which factors can impede this process of social isolation due to unemployment and financial hardship. As we have seen from the first section of the previous chapter, social capital is the best means to combat financial hardship. Sure, it sounds quite tautological if we say that lacking social capital results in social isolation. But indeed, it is again about the vicious circle we talked about in the beginning. Reliable contacts to friends and acquaintances, and sometimes family members, can not only compensate missing money, but also provide opportunities to engage in social activities. Chart 4 illustrates our theoretical model of decline of social activities and social isolation.



**Chart 4: Social isolation**

The most important factor that has an impact on the unemployment-related decline of social activities resulting in social isolation is the financial situation of the unemployed. As we have seen, it restricts the affordability of social activities, and furthermore, worries about the financial situation can lead to ‘cocooning’ behaviour and social retreat. Hence, the more an unemployed person suffers from financial hardship, the more likely she or he will be to face social isolation. Moreover, the composition of friends and acquaintances plays an important role, because it can compensate lacking finances and provide opportunities to engage in social activities. In this context, the number of friends (and acquaintances) is important, as well as the quality of the relationship and their social status. Because the closer and deeper the relationship is, the lower is the risk that it will break apart if one has serious problems. And their social status is important because, as we have seen, the more money friends have, the more they will be likely to invite the unemployed person to some activities or to lend her or him money – so the opportunities which activities can be done will increase. On the other hand, a higher status will prevent them from worries about their own situation and make their own social retreat less likely. Finally, all these characteristics of the circle of friends will influence the contact frequency and thus again opportunities of social activities. At last, the social background of the unemployed person has an indirect impact on the likelihood of social isolation. It increases the probability to have friends of higher social status. Further, we have seen that there will be more family support that prevents financial hardship. And it also influences the estimation of one’s unemployment. The higher the social background of an unemployed person is, the less likely she or he will consider her or his unemployment as a fate with uncertain outcome, and will thus be less likely to worry about her or his situation and retreat from social life.

### Cultural exclusion

Financial hardship may not only cause social isolation, but also cultural exclusion, i.e. the inability to live according to socially accepted norms and values. As Patrick puts it:

*“And because of the little money you have, you’ve got to find ways how to get along, and I think that you partly cannot participate in society. Because it’s calculated too tightly, the money, I think it is harder to be a part of society.”*

(Patrick, age 28)

First of all, for unemployed people it is hard to afford things that are taken for granted by other people. Some of our respondents told us they had had a car in former times, but had to give it up because they could not afford it any longer. But also in terms of less costly goods like clothes, mobile phones and other things, the unemployed have to rely on cheap articles. This may lead to a feeling of stigmatization if the unemployed person is confronted with things in her or his everyday life (in advertisements, in shops, in the streets) he or she will not be able to afford. Apart from the unattainability of middle-class status symbols, financial hardship also restricts the ability to take part in socially appreciated activities. With regard to this, many of our respondents mentioned the cinema, and that they can hardly afford to spend an evening there, even though they would like to. As David says:

*“Very seldom. I’ve not been to the cinema for four months. Yeah? So I go there, on average, maybe twice a year.”*

(David, age 24)

When David does not have money to go to the cinema, although he would like to, he does not only miss the pleasure to watch a certain film. It may also influence his relation to his friends, because when they talk about this very film, David cannot participate in this conversation since he has not seen it. This may lead to feelings of inferiority. Another example is provided by Thomas. When he talks about the infrastructure and shopping opportunities in his neighbourhood, he mentions a new shopping centre that was built a couple of years ago, the “Köln Arcaden”.

*“Okay, since we have the Köln Arcaden here, you don’t need to go to the city centre anymore, that’s true. But [...] I only go there when I really need something because it got broken, and because I get it only there. But otherwise, going to the Köln Arcaden actually is not our business.”*

(Thomas, age 34)

In this passage, Thomas expresses his inability to participate in consumption. He only buys things that he really needs, but shopping as a mere fun activity is something he cannot afford. All these examples, middle-class status symbols and activities like going to the cinema and going to the shopping mall, are things that the unemployed can hardly afford. Some of our respondents report that they suffer from that, while the example

above shows that others tend to accept this fact. When Thomas says they do not 'have a business' in the shopping centre, he means that it is not a place to be for 'people like him'. He thus accepts that he is not able to participate in consumption, and in doing so, by saying 'we', he identifies with the group of the poor. This identification makes cultural exclusion a legitimate mechanism and reproduces it at the same time. On the other hand, people for whom financial hardship from unemployment is only a temporary state complain more about it, but will be less likely to accept phenomena of cultural exclusion and identify with the group of the poor. Apart from identification, another strategy to deal with poverty and to elude cultural exclusion is having an anti-materialistic attitude. Instead of distinguishing themselves from the middle class 'up there', they look down on the mainstream society and emphasize that they do not need things like status symbols and extensive consumption. We found this tendency in some of our interviews, but it turned out that this strategy has its limits as well, because these unemployed tend to suffer more from not being able to take part in cultural activities.

Apart from financial issues, unemployment as a social status can have a direct influence on cultural exclusion. As we have seen in the chapter on individual well-being, some unemployed said they are confronted with prejudices in their everyday life. Basically unemployment is considered as an illegitimate practice, and thus the label 'unemployed' is a stigma that goes along with social devaluation and excludes unemployed people from the group of 'normal workers'. Having been asked if he feels that people treat him differently because of his unemployment, Patrick says:

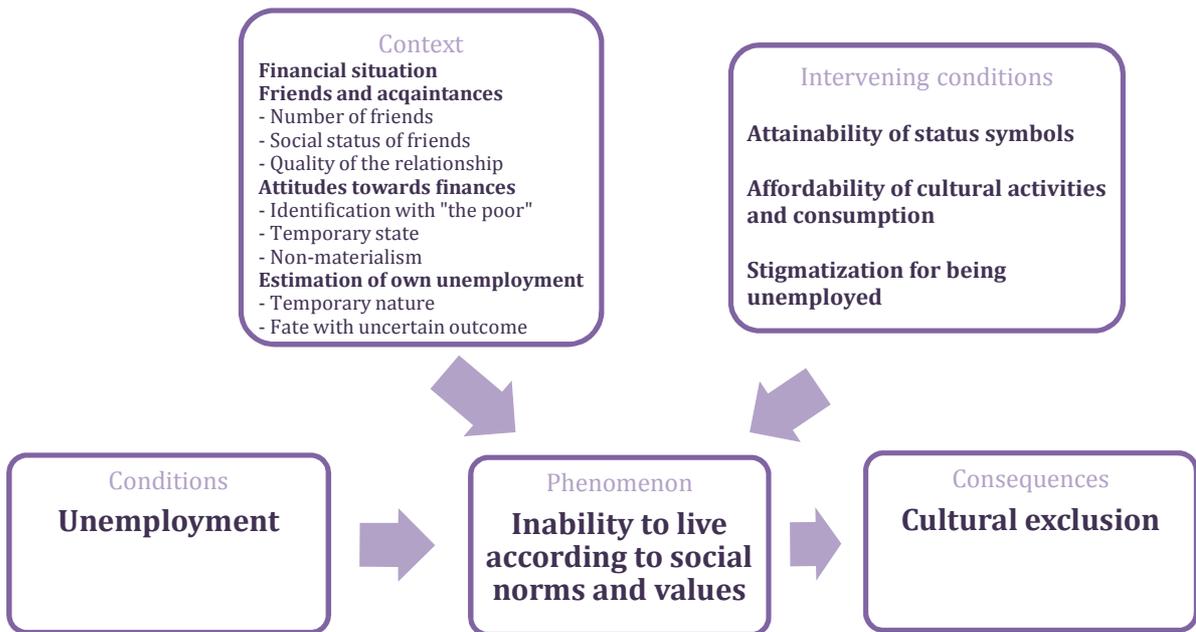
*"Well, I have that feeling, yes. When this- I try to avoid this issue because I'm ashamed of it, but when the issue is raised, then you feel that there's a distance somehow. So you do feel this, that you're not accepted or so."*

(Patrick, age 28)

Even if people do not devalue the unemployed person explicitly, they express a certain suspicion by creating distance. This may lead to feelings of shame. Other respondents, like Nicole, told us that for her, the stigma of being unemployed makes it hard for her to get to know people and find new friends, for example in her handball team, where she feels a strong distance from her team members. Consequently, stigmatization does not only make the unemployed aware that they conflict with socially accepted norm and values, but also contribute to social isolation. Feelings of stigmatization occur mostly among unemployed who have heterogeneous social surroundings. In contrast, those who live in deprived neighbourhoods and have a relatively strong network there, often said things like: "Prejudices? Why should people have prejudices? Most people are unemployed nowadays." However, as we have seen from Thomas, this does not prevent them from feelings of cultural exclusion due to poverty.

Chart 5 shows which context conditions have an impact on the inability to live according to socially accepted norms and values and thus lead to cultural exclusion. As we have seen, the financial situation plays an important role, because financial hardship will hinder the unemployed to afford status symbols as well as cultural activities and

consumption. Further, we have seen several times that social capital provided through friends and acquaintances can compensate poor financial resources, e.g. by lending money, by providing opportunities for social and cultural activities and by providing in-kind support. Again, the most important factors are the number of friends, their social status and the quality of the relationship. Friends have also an impact on the experience of stigmatization because of unemployment.



**Chart 5: Cultural exclusion**

They are important giving the unemployed recognition for what they are and keeping them grounded. But regarding this, the social status of the friends can have a negative impact. The higher their status is, the more likely the unemployed will get in contact with other people who are not familiar with unemployment and there will be a higher risk to face prejudices and feel they are treated with distance. Moreover, the attitude of the unemployed towards their financial situation has an influence on their attitudes towards consumption and cultural activities. While identification with the group of 'the poor' leads to an acceptance of one's cultural exclusion, those who are sure that their financial hardship lasts only for a certain time period suffer more from it, but usually find ways to participate in things that are important for them at least sometimes. Apart from that, a non-materialistic attitude can ease coping with the unaffordability of consumption goods at least partly. And finally, as we have seen in the chapter on individual well-being, feelings of stigmatization occur more often among unemployed for whom their unemployment is a fate they are not sure about how to overcome it.

Both dimensions of social exclusion, social isolation and cultural exclusion, are strongly interrelated. Social isolation is connected with a loss of social capital, and lacking social capital increases the risk of cultural exclusion. On the other hand, cultural exclusion is

likely to cause a social retreat and thus social isolation, either by a decline of contacts to other people, or sometimes even though social retreat as a preventive strategy to avoid stigmatization.

Moreover, literature on social exclusion sometimes emphasizes its subjective dimension. Accordingly, social exclusion is a process that leads to the state that one does not feel being a member of society any longer. From our interviews, it turned out that reflecting one's role in society and having a certain group identity is not necessarily related to the phenomena social isolation and cultural exclusion. Mary, for instance, who seems to be our most 'included' unemployed due to her financial resources, social capital and activities, says she is only interested in private things. If she has anything she needs and people around her are healthy and happy, she is completely satisfied. She does not care about more than her immediate social surrounding. In contrast, other respondents, who face far more problems social isolation and cultural exclusion, indeed have something like a 'public' sense. They see their own situation in a societal context and reflect their role as citizens. We will come back to this in the next chapter.

***Is unemployment connected with political exclusion, and if yes, in which way?***

When we asked our respondents whether they were interested in politics, most of them said they were either not interested at all or not very interested. However, it turned out that some of them who had said they would not be interested were in fact quite 'political' – they had a clear political opinion and even were politically active in some cases. But first, when we started to talk about politics, most of them thought of official politics and politicians. The most frequent definition of politics we got from our respondents was something like 'politics is what politicians do'. Apart from that, the unemployed persons' definitions of politics were quite different. Those who were not very interested in politics brought up rather formal definitions:

*"Politics? Democracy. ((laughing)) Yeah. Everyone has to represent his opinion, I think. Everyone represents his opinion, and, yeah."*

(Halil, age 24)

*"Yeah, that ((laughing)) that they keep up order in the country. That they make the rights, the duties. Such things are politics for me."*

(Marvin, age 20)

From Marvin's definition we can see that he draws a clear line between himself and people involved in politics. He only talks about 'them' and does not relate this to his own status as a citizen. Others did highlight this participatory aspect and related it to themselves:

*"Politics is, for me, there you can shape things. Modifying laws to disburden the population, to give them more courage, accomplishing things they can benefit from."*

(Patrick, age 28)

*“Politics, for me, is, eh, an opportunity to change my life in all directions. If many people agree with me, yeah, or to prevent something if it’s not longer useful for our way of life. So, to contribute, to join in debates, to express oneself, to say what you want and what you don’t want.”*

(Nicole, age 30)

We also came across negative definitions of politics:

*“Politics is a sham, for all of us, virtually it’s the spectacle played for us. Yeah? That’s a, eh, left against right, liberals against social democrats, yeah, that’s a perpetual motion machine, yeah, we do not elect anyone to power, but we only vote them out. Yeah? Politics is a sham. I’ve stopped believing in politics a long time ago.”*

(David, age 24)

These definitions already reflect the respondents’ attitude towards politics. While formal definitions that are not related to oneself mark a distance between politics and the life-world, more participatory definitions are an indicator for a higher political interest and/or involvement, and others show a strong political detachment.

The attitude of the unemployed towards politicians is basically negative, even amongst those who are politically interested. Only few of our respondents said they think the politicians do a good job. However, all of the migrants compared their political performance to politics in their home countries (Cameroon, Turkey, Russia) and said although they were not really satisfied, the German politicians still do a quite good job. Concerning political trust, the results are even more striking. Apart from two exceptions, all of our respondents think that one cannot trust politicians. Some emphasized that the politicians make false promises during election campaigns only to win the election. Others think that politicians take advantage of their positions. At large, there was consensus among most of the unemployed that nowadays most politicians take too little responsibility and are not interested in the problems of the population.

*“Because I think like most people, we can’t change anything either way, right? And things will never change either way. And them, they have their millions, per month or per year or whatever, they’re fine, they do not care for the people at all. So they are amongst themselves. But what about us, they are not interested in that.”*

(Esma, age 23)

This passage shows that there is a connection between attitude towards politicians and voting behaviour. Mistrust in politicians can prevent people from political participation, but this does not apply to all of our respondents. Not all of the young unemployed we interviewed had a right to vote because some did not have the German citizenship, but all of them had a clear opinion whether they would participate in elections or not if they were entitled to. About half of the respondents said they do vote (or would do so). Basically, the voting behaviour is closely related to one’s estimation of political efficacy.

Most of those who think that their vote does count participate in elections, while the others do not. Nevertheless, there are some exceptions from this pattern. The first exception is not voting as an act of protest. That is what Thomas and his wife did, even though they now think it was not a good idea:

*“Last time, I say this frankly, last time we didn’t vote. Because [...] we had the opinion that at a certain point they have to notice, hello? [...] Okay, has worked quite well, the not-voting, they told us only stupid people don’t vote, instead of thinking about why all these stupid people didn’t vote. Next time we’ve got to vote for the Left party then. And if this doesn’t work, we vote for the Pirate party or so ((laughing)).”*

(Thomas’ wife, age 25)

Another exception is not voting, although one does believe that the vote counts, because of lacking political competence.

*“I even don’t vote. Because afterwards I would have voted for something I did not want. I rather let the others vote. Though this is wrong. So I resolved, from next year on I will vote too, and then I’ll always catch up on it beforehand.”*

(Marvin, age 20)

And the third exception is voting although one does not believe that it will change anything.

*“But finally I did vote yet, because I just have the feeling that it is my duty to vote. [...] I voted by hairstyle. Afterwards, yes, I told my mum, I vote for the better hairstyle, because I just feel like taken for a ride.”*

(Hanna, age 25)

Only a minority of our respondents voted to support a certain party or idea. Like Hanna, most of the voters did so because they consider it as a duty. For them, voting is keeping democracy alive and choosing the ‘lesser evil’, since none of the parties completely reflects their own ideas and relevance systems.

Most of the unemployed we interviewed have never taken part in a political activity, and that for the simple reason that they have never come across any political group or organization. Astonishingly, those who have been politically active are not necessarily those who are most interested in politics. For instance, Daniel is one who thinks politics is “just shit”, never concerns himself with it, never voted and would even sell his vote if he could. However, when the subject political activity came up, he said:

*“Yes. But I struck only once and participated in union elections twice, just at work, but otherwise I’m not interested in this. [...] You’re better protected at work. I’ve got a private accident insurance from the union; I’ve got a legal costs insurance in labour law. They*

*just stand up for the workers a bit. You've got- they fight for certain rights at work, and because of this I think union is quite good, labour union."*

(Daniel, age 20)

While Daniel does not see the use in engaging in politics through elections, he is a union member because he directly benefits from it, and accordingly he is willing to take part in elections and activities. For others, the motivation to take part in political activities is not their personal benefit, but rather their friends. Only a small minority of them has ever been involved in political activities on their own initiative just to advocate a certain idea, and none of them is a member of a political action group. If our respondents take part in political protest activities, they often do it for their friends.

*"Yes, I always go to demonstrations. Because of my friends. You, come too. Okay, I say, I come."*

(Cansu, age 28)

*"Yeah, and in Frankfurt, there was an expansion of the airport somehow. And there I protested too, but actually I couldn't care less if they expand the airport or not. [...] These issues don't interest me. If there are kids maltreated or abused. Or elderly people treated badly, then I'm active. The ideas just have to concern me as well."*

(Nicole, age 30)

Instead, Nicole has initiated her own project:

*"In former times, I ran a dance and theatre group. And I did this voluntarily, but the kids and youngsters that participated there, they were so neglected by their parents. And then I thought about what you could do with them, so that they won't end up on the street somehow and already start smoking or stealing or so. Then I made this dance and theatre group. [...] I'm now thinking about doing the same here in Cologne."*

(Nicole, age 30)

Although Nicole's theatre group is not a political activity in a narrow sense, it has a political intention and since it contributes to society, it corresponds to her personal definition of politics. The same is true for the two other forms of civic engagement we found in our interviews. When Wolfram did voluntary work for an organization for homeless people and when Dieter is active in his interest group representing the socially disadvantaged, they do this with a political idea in mind, even though both of them describe themselves as "quite apolitical" persons. These seem to be border cases of political activities.

If we want to answer our research question, whether unemployment may lead to political exclusion, we need to look at changes in the respondents' relation to politics. Like "social exclusion", the term "political exclusion" is problematic as well. Not only does it assume

that there is a clear inside-outside dichotomy, it is also misleading because by becoming unemployed, one does not forfeit the formal right to participate in elections and to be politically active. If we can speak about political exclusion at all, we need to refer to a subjective feeling of being excluded from the public sphere, which is hard to be distinguished from a deliberate dissociation from politics because of lacking interest. Therefore, we will focus on the attitudes of the unemployed towards politics.

Most of our respondents said their attitude towards politics had not changed since they have become unemployed. Either they were never interested in politics or they had always been interested. There are only three cases whose relation to politics had changed in the course of time – David, Cansu and Esma. As to David, we have already seen that he has a very negative attitude towards politics. Earlier, in contrast, he was strongly interested in politics and did participate in elections. He explains this change with the fact that he has concerned himself with politics extensively, and his conclusion from that is that politics is 'only a spectacle'.

*"Of course, the awareness changes to the degree to which you, eh, really concern yourself with it. Yeah? It is- it is not God-given, the attitude I have now, yeah? Just as I said, if you read a lot, and concern yourself with it, at some point you reach a border, hmm, it's just like- well, it is a threshold level. Yeah? Eh, when you've collected enough information, then you can connect the points, like with paint by numbers. Yeah? And then a picture emerges, and when you looked at it beforehand, it didn't make sense, the picture, but at a certain point you identify it."*

(David, age 24)

David assures that his process of political detachment has nothing to do with his unemployment. Nevertheless, there might be at least an indirect relationship, because if David had not been unemployed, he would probably have had less time to concern himself with the subject, and maybe he had been interested in other literature on politics that would have lead him to a different conclusion. The fact that he complains mainly about labour market politics during the interview at least casts doubts on his explanation. But still, we cannot prove that with David, there is a connection between unemployment and political detachment.

In contrast, both Esma and Cansu say they were less interested in politics before they became unemployed. When they had a job, they had nothing to complain about and did not care about politics. But since they are unemployed and dependent on the welfare state, they see more clearly that politics has an influence on their everyday life. While earlier they just did not care, both of them tend to get upset about politics more easily. In Esma's case this has lead to the fact that she still is not interested, but that politics involve more negative feelings for her. Cansu first did politicize when she became unemployed, also because many friends of her are active in politics. She took part in political events and protest activities, mainly promoting the rights of migrants and unemployed people and against globalization. However, after a couple of years she is

very disappointed that neither her protest activities nor her friends, who are members of political parties, did achieve anything. She still takes part in demonstrations, as we have seen above, but rather to support her friends. In her opinion, one cannot change anything in politics, even though she would definitely vote if she had citizenship rights. Again, there is not a clear relationship between unemployment and attitude to politics. Because on the one hand, unemployment lead to politicization, on the other hand the failure of her political activities lead to a kind of resignation, even though we cannot speak about political detachment in Cansu's case.

Finally, we would like to present another changing relationship to politics – the one of Hanna.

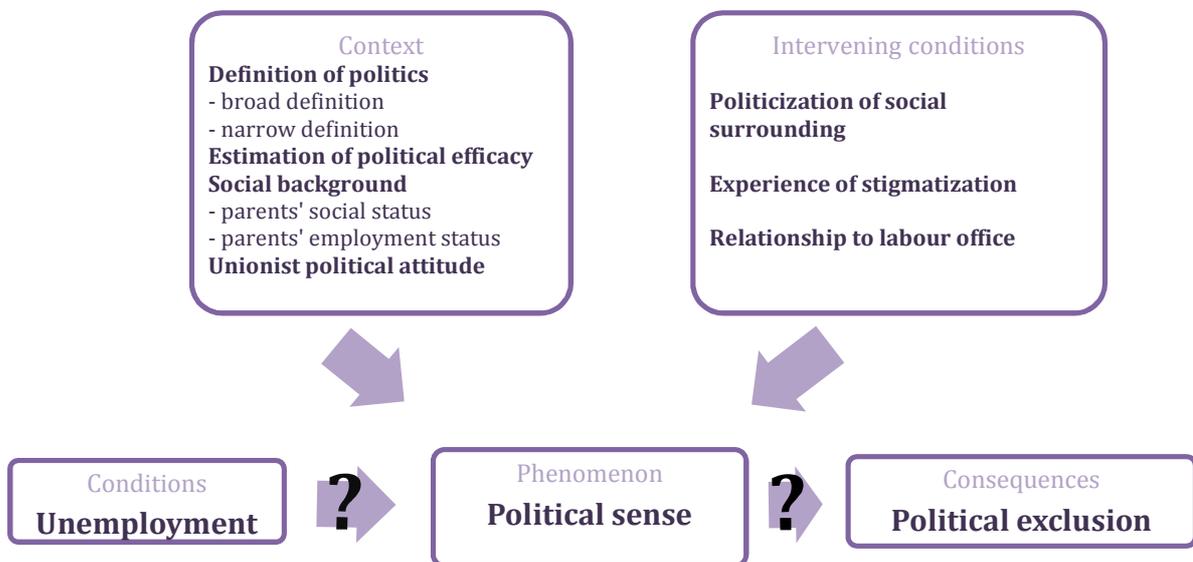
*“Well, as I said before, in the past I haven't concerned myself with politics. [...] I concerned myself a lot with politics at the very moment, because I just had this selection procedure for a vocational training position in the municipality. And then it was just important for me to know about politics.”*

(Hanna, age 25)

For Hanna, her current attention to politics has a strategic reason. She does not deal with it because she is interested in it, but because she thinks it is adequate to the status she wants to attain.

During the analysis, it was not easy to identify the core category of this political dimension. Not all of the unemployed who said they were politically interested were active in politics, and conversely, not all of the politically active said they were interested in politics. As we have seen, political participation is a complicated issue as well, because voting or not voting is motivated by very different conditions. We came to the conclusion that some unemployed have something like a 'political sense' while others do not. By political sense we mean that they brought up political issues during the interview even before we asked them to talk about politics, that they see their own situation in a societal context and reflect their role as citizens or, more broadly, as individuals related to the public sphere. However, we are not able to say which impact unemployment has on this political sense, because as we have seen above, we do not have clear results about the interrelationship between unemployment and the attitude towards politics. Chart 6 shows the conditions that have an impact on one's political sense.

The context factors that have an impact on the phenomenon of political sense are one's definition of politics, one's estimation of political efficacy, the social background and the political attitude. While a narrow definition that restricts politics to the work of politicians is less likely to go along with a political sense, a participatory definition makes it more likely. However, this is not a causal relationship, since it is not clear which attitude occurred first. It is rather an interrelation. Moreover, the higher our respondents estimate their political efficacy, the more will they tend to develop a political sense, while on the other hand, people who think they do not have an efficacy at all are quite likely to react with political detachment. In addition, the social background of the unemployed plays an important role.



**Chart 6: Political sense**

Astonishingly, those whose parents have a low social status and/or are unemployed were more likely to have a political sense. Further, those who had a rather unionist political attitude were more likely as well. These two features can be considered as indicators for a certain social milieu. Basically young unemployed from declining workers families show a mostly pronounced political sense, combined with a classical social-democratic understanding of solidarity. In contrast, unemployed coming from higher social backgrounds had rather liberal and individualistic attitudes. In this context, there are three intervening conditions that contribute to a political sense. First, the more politicized the social surrounding (i.e. mainly friends) of the unemployed is, the more likely will she or he be to become political as well. Second, we found that experience of stigmatization has a positive influence on cultivating a political sense. And finally, negative experience with the labour office has a positive impact as well. The influence of the last two features can be explained by the fact that they may lead to a certain 'class consciousness' that politicizes the individuals.

We already emphasised that we are not sure about the impact of unemployment on one's political sense. And even its consequences are not quite clear. A lacking political sense may lead to political detachment, but if this detachment is perceived as political exclusion depends whether it is considered as a deliberate choice or not. Hence, we cannot provide a clear answer regarding our research question. At least from their own point of view, the experience of unemployment does only seldom change one's attitude towards politics. And if it does, it works in both directions – either one politicizes or one detaches oneself from politics. We can neither corroborate that there is a relationship between unemployment and feelings of political exclusion, nor we can prove that there is none.

## Unexpected but important

In this chapter we will present some findings that emerged during the analysis which were unexpected but important.

- As our analysis shows, there seems to be a contradicting logic of social and political integration. Factors like a low social background and feelings of stigmatization, which lead to social exclusion, have a negative impact on one's political detachment.
- As we have seen in the beginning, not all of the unemployed we talked to were ready for the labour market and currently seeking a job, even though they were registered as job seekers. Suffering from severe mental health problems, they are currently not employable. And for them, unemployment is not the main problem they have to deal with, but rather a by-product of a complex system of personal problems. This has to do with the common practice in German labour administration to keep these people in the system as long as there is the possibility that their situation will change sooner or later instead of inserting them into the system of social aid.
- In our sample, we found striking gender inequalities concerning attitude and way of life of the unemployed. On the one hand, we have very busy and entrepreneurial mothers and on the other hand rather passive and resigned family men. Nevertheless, we must be cautious generalizing these findings since the sample is quite unbalanced with regard to the respondents' social background. While the men basically had lower educational degrees and lower social backgrounds, mothers, and especially single mothers, are less disadvantaged. This also shows that the labour market is still less accessible for young (single) mothers even though they have good qualifications.
- From these single mothers we can also learn that successfully coping with unemployment, especially in terms of finances, does not reduce work commitment.
- A thing we have not mentioned yet is the role of children in relation to the motivation to find a job. As we have seen, some of the unemployed are quite ambitious with their children. And when we talked about their motivation to seek a job, most of the parents mentioned the benefit for their children. Interestingly, mainly for mothers it was very important to have an employment to serve as a good example for their children. Because they fear inheritance of unemployment, they consider it their responsibility to be a role model. In contrast, for fathers it was more important to have a job because they would like to prevent their children from poverty and afford them a decent life. But again, we cannot be sure if this is really a question of gender or rather a question of social class.
- The prominent German discourse about unemployment and laziness seems to bear fruit. About half of our respondents believe that many unemployed are just lazy and do not want to work. The others think that at least a considerable part of the unemployed do not want to work. As a consequence, they distinguish themselves as 'good', 'willing' and 'deserving' unemployed from the lazy ones. This often goes along with a high acceptance of workfare policies. None of our respondent complained that the entitlement to unemployment benefits is connected to more and

more conditions. Even though they perceive this as annoying for themselves, they considered it as an appropriate mean for 'the others, who do not want to work'.

### **Identified coping-strategies of young long-term unemployed**

Our analysis dealt with the most important unemployment-related problems we found in our interviews, such as financial hardship, stigmatization, welfare dependency, time structure and activity. Some of the unemployed had developed strategies to cope with their situation, and we will conclude this report with some examples our respondents provided.

#### *How to deal with little money?*

First of all, having a tight budget means to lower one's sights. We have seen that a non-materialistic attitude can partly ease the experience of poverty, while identification with the group of the poor may lead to feelings of cultural exclusion. Further, we have seen from our interviews that most of the unemployed deal very carefully with their money and painstakingly prepare their budget each month. For instance, Wolfram buys all the food articles he needs in bulk in the beginning of the month and freezes it so that he can see how much money remains for other things during the month. Patrick first contributes a fixed sum to the household budget and then tries to spend as little money as possible during the first week of the month. After this week, he divides his remaining money through the number of remaining days and this value is the maximum amount of money he may spend each day. Most of our respondents said they usually do not borrow money, because otherwise they can get in trouble paying it back.

#### *How to make more money?*

To make more money, some of our respondents enrolled in employment measures or took occasional side jobs. Though they cannot earn much by doing this, we have seen that 100 Euros already make a big difference. The luckier ones (but the minority) get financial support from their parents, and as we have seen, parental support is the best means to prevent financial hardship and social isolation as its consequence. Moreover it is useful to have a couple of good friends who are not unemployed and who can help out if necessary.

#### *How to compensate money through other things?*

A more elegant solution is to compensate money through other things. A good example is Mary's deal she made with the old aunt. Since she is unemployed and has little money but a lot of time, Mary cares for the old aunt some hours a week, and in return, she may use the her car. Further, she gets furniture and other in-kind support from friends and acquaintances. All these things will reduce her expenses and allow her to save her money for other things she wants to afford. Mary is really an expert in compensating money through social capital. But we should be aware that this strategy works only in a social surrounding that is well off.

### How to prevent stigmatization?

Our analysis shows that poverty as well as being unemployed often go along with social stigmatization. As to poverty, we have seen that the unemployed prioritize. For them, the most important thing is preventing their children from stigmatization. As a consequence, the parents will compromise in order to afford their children things they need not to become excluded. Those who have more financial resources can hide their unemployment. For instance, both Mary and Esma said they spend most of their remaining money in clothes instead of other things because it is important for them not to look poor or unemployed. And finally, one may prevent stigmatization, like most of our respondents did, by expressing that they are, unlike the others, 'good' unemployed who are willing to work and thus deserving their unemployment benefits.

### How to assert one's rights at the labour office?

For the majority of the unemployed the labour office is a sensitive issue, and especially if their relation to their job counsellor is problematic they feel they sometimes do not get services there although they are entitled to them. As a consequence, some of the unemployed try to avoid contact to the labour office as far as possible. For instance, Daniel mostly sent sick notes there to avoid confrontation with his counsellor and said, "instead of wasting my time there I rather stayed at home and looked for a job". Luckily he had found one before we met him for the interview. Mary's strategy is to keep a good contact to her counsellor, and when she has the feeling that she does not get a service she goes straight to the team leader and complains. Many unemployed told us that it is important to know about one's right before going to the labour office. Some concern themselves with it via internet, while others call upon advice from unemployment centres and other helpdesks.

### How to maintain a day structure?

Caring for children is the best means to maintain a day structure. Depending on other resources, a lot of activities with the child may further avoid idle times in one's individual day structure. For non-parents it is harder to maintain a day structure. Some do so by taking the role of the homemaker in their households. For young unemployed who live alone it is almost impossible to maintain a clear structure and they will always have idle times once during their days.

### How to prevent inheritance of unemployment?

Among our respondents, almost all mothers feared an inheritance of their unemployment to their children. Therefore it is very important for them to find a job and act as a role model for their children. Other unemployed youngsters even said their unemployment was the reason why they did not have children yet, because having an employment is conditional for them. Apart from that, we have seen that some of the mothers are very ambitious with their children and set value on their education to prevent the risk that they will face the same situation like their mothers.

## Summary

In order to get a deeper understanding of the consequences of long-term unemployment among young people, especially with regard to social and political exclusion, we conducted 20 qualitative interviews of young long-term unemployed men and women. The first thing that turned out already when conducting the interviews was that not all of the unemployed we talked to were ready for the labor market and currently seeking a job, even though they were registered as job seekers. Suffering from severe mental health problems (depression and/or addictive disorders), they are currently not employable. For them, unemployment is not the main problem they have to deal with, but rather a by-product of a complex system of personal problems. For this reason, we left these four cases out of the analysis and focused on those who were actually looking for a job or another career perspective such as training or education.

Concerning the question about unemployment and social exclusion, we found two dimensions in our material that are connected with this process of social exclusion – social isolation and cultural exclusion. The most important factor that has an impact on the unemployment-related decline of social activities resulting in social isolation is the financial situation of the unemployed. It restricts the affordability of social activities, and furthermore, worries about the financial situation can lead to ‘cocooning’ behavior and social retreat. Hence, the more an unemployed person suffers from financial hardship, the more likely she or he will be to face social isolation. Moreover, the composition of friends and acquaintances plays an important role, because it can compensate lacking finances and provide opportunities to engage in social activities. At last, the social background of the unemployed person has an indirect impact on the likelihood of social isolation. Because on the one hand there will be more family support that prevents financial hardship. And on the other hand it influences the estimation of one’s unemployment. The higher the social background of an unemployed person is, the less likely she or he will consider her or his unemployment as a fate with uncertain outcome, and will thus be less likely to worry about her or his situation and retreat from social life. By cultural exclusion we mean the inability to live according to socially accepted norms and values, and it is strongly interrelated with social isolation. Again, the financial situation plays an important role, because financial hardship will hinder the unemployed to afford status symbols as well as cultural activities and consumption. Further, we have seen several times that social capital provided through friends and acquaintances can compensate poor financial resources, e.g. by lending money, by providing opportunities for social and cultural activities and by providing in-kind support. Friends have also an impact on the experience of stigmatization because of unemployment. They are important giving the unemployed recognition for what they are and keeping them grounded. Moreover, the attitude of the unemployed towards their financial situation has an influence on their attitudes towards consumption and cultural activities. While identification with the group of ‘the poor’ leads to an acceptance of one’s cultural exclusion, those who are sure that their financial hardship lasts only for a certain time period suffer more from it, but usually find ways to participate in things that are important

for them at least sometimes. Apart from that, a non-materialistic attitude can ease coping with the unattainability of consumption goods at least partly.

When investigating the question whether there is a relationship between unemployment and political exclusion we came to the conclusion that some unemployed have something like a 'political sense' while others do not. Those unemployed to whom we ascribed political sense brought up political issues during the interview even before we asked them to talk about politics. They see their own situation in a societal context and reflect their role as citizens or, more broadly, as individuals related to the public sphere. This political sense mostly goes along with a participatory definition of politics the respondents brought up. Moreover, the higher our respondents estimate their political efficacy, the more will they tend to develop a political sense, while on the other hand, people who think they do not have an efficacy at all are quite likely to react with political detachment. In addition, the social background of the unemployed plays an important role. Astonishingly, those whose parents have a low social status and/or are unemployed were more likely to have a political sense. Further, those who had a rather unionist political attitude were more likely as well. These two features can be considered as indicators for a certain social milieu. Basically young unemployed from declining workers families show a mostly pronounced political sense, combined with a classical social-democratic understanding of solidarity. In contrast, unemployed coming from higher social backgrounds had rather liberal and individualistic attitudes. In this context, there are three intervening conditions that contribute to a political sense. First, the more politicized the social surrounding (i.e. mainly friends) of the unemployed is, the more likely will she or he be to become political as well. Second, we found that experience of stigmatization has a positive influence on cultivating a political sense. And finally, negative experience with the labor office has a positive impact as well. The influence of the last two features can be explained by the fact that they may lead to a certain 'class consciousness' that politicizes the individuals. However, we are not sure about the impact of unemployment on one's political sense. And even its consequences are not quite clear. A lacking political sense may lead to political detachment, but if this detachment is perceived as political exclusion depends whether it is considered as a deliberate choice or not. At least from their own point of view, the experience of unemployment does only seldom change one's attitude towards politics. And if it does, it works in both directions – either one politicizes or one detaches oneself from politics. We can neither corroborate that there is a relationship between unemployment and feelings of political exclusion, nor we can prove that there is none.

## National Report Italy

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**Simone Baglioni, Matteo Bassoli, Paolo Graziano, Lara Monticelli**

### Introduction

In a path-breaking study on how unemployment was experienced in the late seventies France, Dominique Schnapper found that the experience of unemployment changed across social classes: cultural capital, family revenues, age and social capital were identified all as strong intervening variables in the way the unemployed perceived and lived their status (Schnapper 1994). In Schnapper words: “*unemployment constitutes [...] a social condition used in different ways and experienced differently by the various social groups*” (Ibidem: 253)<sup>8</sup>. Furthermore, she found out that manual workers, and in general workers with a limited cultural capital, were those most harshly hit by unemployment: they could not create a substitutive social status (*statut de substitution*) to compensate the lack of their status given by their employment neither they could replace the lack of socialization and social participation granted by their working environment. Hence, manual or low qualified workers were those experiencing the ‘*chômage total*’, that is the ‘total unemployment’, where the fact of being without a job meant being cut off from almost all the dimensions of a worth living life.

In writing this report we will make often reference to Schnapper’s work: we found many interviewees that could qualify for her ‘*chômage total*’ situation and although our sample is almost entirely comprised within a single social category or class (working class with poor cultural and social capital) we found among our interviewees the same patterns of experiencing unemployment she found more than thirty years ago and in a different country. Supported by her, as well by other studies, we will argue that our findings show once more that most of the aspects we use to consider being strictly associated with the status of unemployment, e.g. the poor level of social capital or the low level of political participation, in fact are enrooted in traditional, encompassing social differentiations. Unemployment may have an impact on them, but neglecting the role of pre-existing social differentiations on the way people get involved in social life or on how individual perceive themselves may sound like an academic artificial sophistication instead of a picture of the reality.

This report presents a partial analysis of 21 interviews with young unemployed carried out in Turin in the year 2010. The sample is divided in two age categories: the first group includes unemployed aged between 19 and 24 years old (twelve interviews) and the second those aged 25-34 (nine interviews). It has been more difficult to find and to

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<sup>8</sup> Translated from the original French by the authors of this report.

convince women to accept our interviews: we succeeded in getting only seven young women compared to fourteen men. Most of our interviewees were recruited at a social enterprise weekly job centre desk, while few have been reached through snowballing, via ties provided by some of the civil society organizations interviewed for WP2 and at the public job centre office. Interviews lasted on average one and half hour although some were much shorter and could not really be used for this report. The difficulty in receiving meaningful and articulated answers from some of the very young interviewees is already a result: a mix of self-disclosure difficulty, typical of research with sensitive issues and subjects, and scarce habit to discuss publicly about unemployment. Despite these cases, the questions and the structure of the interview were well accepted as it was not problematic for the interviewees to be recorded: the attempt to establish a certain degree of sympathy between the interviewers and the interviewees was overall successful. Interviews took place in various places, most of them in a closed space made available by the social enterprise where interviewees were recruited, but we have also interviewed unemployed at their place, in cafés or restaurants. Interviewees were not given compensations under any form for their participation.

**Table 1: summary of interviews with young unemployed in Turin**

	<b>Age categories (years)</b>	
	<b>19-24</b>	<b>25-34</b>
Women	4	3
Men	8	6

Our interviewees share some common features: they all have a working class or small bourgeoisie background; some of them have parents having migrated in the sixties and seventies from the underdeveloped South to work in the car industry (Fiat) of the “industrialized Turin”; some of them have experience of addiction (drugs) either directly or indirectly via a member of their family; those who have previous working experience have mainly been employed in the informal or black market and in low qualified jobs (in the retail or restaurant services) even for long periods; they have a poor educational and cultural capital and also their social capital is narrow. Hence, “our” unemployed are far from being representative of the larger Italian unemployment panorama cutting across social classes and educational levels. However, we claim that they well represent the young unemployed that use the “Sportello Lavoro” (Job placement service) of the “Consorzio Abele Lavoro”, the non-profit organization with whom we have collaborated to develop part of our study. Thus, they tell a lot about a specific component of the current unemployed cohorts in the city of Turin.

The report firstly analyses how unemployed people perceive and define their status. It then discusses if unemployment is related to social isolation and it continues discussing how the lack of a job may be linked with political exclusion. Finally it presents some of the coping strategies the unemployed invent to face their financial and social difficulties.

### ***How do unemployed people perceive/define unemployment related problems?***

Unemployment affects several aspects of life: income, everyday life organization, self-esteem, prospective planning. Although some of these effects (e.g. income and material resources, self-esteem) are observable in and important for the general population of the unemployed, unemployment interferes also with other aspects of life that are particularly relevant for youth populations, like the capacity to plan and even to 'dream' a prospective life. Transition to adulthood may really be negatively affected by joblessness because the lack of funding makes leaving the parent's house as unattainable target. Protracted experiences of unemployment may deprive young people of their capacity to plan a move forward in terms of autonomous life. Hence, definitions and perceptions of unemployment by the youth comprise both material and symbolic dimensions.

The saliency of *financial aspects* emerges as a key-issue among our interviewees' perception of unemployment, in fact it is undeniable that joblessness firstly affects income. The majority of our interviewees are working class youth, hence not to have a job has on them an immediate, "measurable", effect in terms of "spending possibilities". However, there are differences among youth unemployed in Turin in terms of financial aspects of unemployment. We found three groups:

1. young unemployed living with their family of origin whose parents are either working or pensioners with a stable income;
2. young unemployed living with their family of origin whose parents though are deprived of a stable income;
3. young unemployed living alone.

For those living with parents who receive a regular income (salary or pension) providing enough resources for the needs of the family, the financial hardness due to unemployment is still perceived but primarily as an impediment to conventional forms of consumption and leisure:

*"you know there is always this situation that I have to ask my mother for buying a pair of jeans, or shoes. [...] I would like to go swimming, to go to the gym but obviously these are things you need money for and I cannot afford them now so I have no hobby"*

(Woman, 25).

*"No, I don't go in places like pubs, clubs, because as you say I don't have the money for. My friends used to go in these clubs and found a girlfriend there...but you know, I don't have these [gesture for money] and so cannot afford going there. [...] I don't practice any sport, I don't have the money for that neither".*

(Man)

Similar patterns of perceptions of unemployment as a loss of income preventing access to superfluous goods or leisure activities can be found among the young unemployed who live with an employed partner:

*Where did you have to cut expenses in your family budget after becoming unemployed? Did you change your way of life or you manage to get on with the same life?*

*No, I would not say we are able to live the same life, in fact before we could afford going out in the evening or we used to have a pizza on Saturday night somewhere, now we never go out and if we have a pizza then we bake it ourselves or there is always the frozen pizza to eat at home. Also buying clothes has changed, before I used to go the market for buying them, which was not such a luxury habits, now I do not go anymore...even buying knickknacks at the market as I did sometimes has become unaffordable, so for sure we cut these expenses”*

(Woman, 35)

For young unemployed whose parents are themselves in difficult financial situations (some are unemployed too or ill persons depending on a meager public subsidy) the loss of income due to joblessness affects a wider spectrum of everyday life, well beyond the consumption of leisure activities or shopping. In this type of household, people have difficulties in paying rents, bills and in purchasing basic goods like food. Hence, being unemployed is perceived as a situation pushing the entire family further down in the social scale and further away from happiness and ordinary life:

*“Each time I find a little job or a I have the opportunity to earn 100 Euros, I save them. The day after comes my father asking: ‘Do you have 10 Euros? I need fuel in my car’. I take them from my account at the Post Office and give them to him. The following day is my mother asking ‘Do you have 5 Euros? I need to pop-up my mobile’. At the end of the day I don’t keep anything of this saved money. When I see that the fridge is empty with the money left I buy food. And afterword they tell me: ‘You could have kept your money’...such a depressing comment..but the bad thing is that my father does not recognize what I do.....he says ‘You eat too’ but he does not recognize my role in this...at least tell me ‘Thank you, I acknowledge your good action’. It is depressing...”*

(Woman, 20).

Finally, for young unemployed living alone and not able to count on family, relatives or partner’s support, the financial dimension is the key aspect as this type of unemployed live in conditions of deep deprivation. Their basic needs are satisfied only in so far there are church or other charities helping:

*“I cannot count on my parents’ support as my mother is the only one working at home, and it is already difficult for them to live in two with her salary and having two more people to feed [herself and her son] it would make the situation even harder....I look for my food at the church or in various associations [charities]...three to four times per*

*month and I eat something with that. [...] I don't eat meat, I eat pasta, what should I say...luckily my son eats at school, he can eat meat there and for dinner having a dish of pasta is ok for him. In any case I always manage to get something [to eat] from somewhere...an acquaintance, someone of the San Vincenzo charity that calls me as she has cooked the spezzatino [meat with tomato sauce and vegetables] and she can give me some of it...eventually she can give me a couple steaks [...] sometimes they also have five or ten Euros for me. [...] I am nine months behind with my rent....for an overall amount of nine thousands Euros.*

Q. You said you have four brothers, you have a boyfriend, couldn't you borrow some money from them?

A. *Oh my God, you are asking me something...it would be like taking the bread out of their mouth! Absolutely no!*

Q. So...

A. *It's out of question, they cannot give me money....".*

(Woman, 34).

In addition to financial issues, previous research on unemployment has stressed the *use of time* as another dimension through which people define and perceive unemployment. Industrial and post-industrial societies have been organized around the rotation between working and non-working time, hence, all unemployed recognize the perturbation of their life rhythms due to joblessness, a mixed sense of boredom and the incapacity to manage the time according to a precise planning or intention (Schnapper 1994: 71).

We found evidence of such a perturbation of life rhythms also among our interviewees. In this case, though, there is a difference among unemployed according to their cultural capital. Most of the young unemployed we spoke with have a low cultural level, and for them the perturbation brought in by the lack of a job is stronger as they have nothing or very little to fill their large amount of free time. Whereas for the few with a (even if slightly) higher cultural capital, unemployment becomes an opportunity for getting involved in volunteering or in civil society associations.

When we asked about how they spent their ordinary day, young unemployed appeared as retired or old people instead of persons in their twenties or early thirties:

*"I do some shopping, my mother sends me to buy food, then I go for a walk, that's it. Sometime I drop my CV around...that's it, the usual things"*

(Man)

*"It depends...I sleep, I watch a movie, I download movies, I don't know, sometimes I have things to do, shopping...Do you help at home [with cleaning, etc.]? Yes, yes.*

(Woman, 25)

*"I miss my job, now once I have accompanied my child at the kindergarten at nine o'clock if you have a job interview or something do to it's ok but otherwise you don't have a busy day, I miss my job...I feel meaningless...I would like to do something, but I can't...I am born to manage or to organize things... [...] So without a job you found yourself in a new world? Yes, you feel...[in a world] that does not belong to you, it does not belong to you".*

(Woman, 35)

Even those who report a more active job search involving also electronic job hunting, or those distributing their CV across several institutions and organizations describe this activity as a boring routine. Something that needs to be done whose real impact on their life is rather scarce:

*"Now I spend most of my time at home, or I go out looking for a job. It has happened several times that I went downtown to drop my CV, I don't like to do it but I go....At job placement agencies? Yes, I enrolled with these agencies but never managed to get a job through them. I send my CV and even if they don't look for workers I leave my CV anyway...that is the worst of the phases [...] I hope they would need me".*

(Woman, 20).

*"I spend my days on face-book, they have invented this damn computer...what should I do, I drop my CV around, or take documents to my solicitor or to the tribunal" (Woman)*

*"In the morning I look for a job, in the afternoon I see some friends...in the morning I go with Antonio, my friend, and I distribute my CV to firms".*

(Man, 20).

Only one among our interviewees uses the availability of free time as a social and cultural investment. In our sample, he is the only young unemployed with a bourgeoisie background (mother and father have both a high school diploma, the father was an employee at La Stampa, an Italian important newspaper and the mother was working at home taking care of the family although she was trained as accountant) and a certain cultural capital (he has an high school diploma and attended a couple of special trainings for PC usages). In comparison with the cases presented above, his experience represents an evidence of the difference that the cultural level makes on the perception and experience of unemployment:

*"My hobby is a complex one, it has various aspects, we replicate civil and military life in the XI and XII centuries, at the basis there is a certain historical research, we make our clothes starting from iconographic sources like paintings, frescos and other images and*

*we replicate the role of a popular man as well as the one of the gentleman in a credible manner.*

Q. Is it an association?

A. *Yes, it is a cultural association.*

Q. This gives you visibility? Are you called for walk-on parts?

A. *Yes, a lot, people like this type of activities.*

Q. How many members does your association have?

A. *We are ten persons.*

Q. Did you set up this association?

A. *Yes, I am a founding member, it was founded 2 and half years ago...we have all different backgrounds but each of us had a previous similar experience. [...] it is unemployment that has pushed me to do other things, we can say that although the association was born when I was working now that I cannot find an employment-- because in the last times I cannot manage to find a job-- I devote most of my time to it, to volunteering, to this type of activities, just to employ my time on a useful manner"*

(Man, 25).

Other definitions and perceptions of unemployment are related to aspects of *identity* and *self-esteem*. The perturbations produced by unemployment on the organization of everyday life shown above have an impact also on the self-perception of the unemployed. The fact of being without a job is portrayed by our interviewees always as a negative experience, as a status that keeps them apart from the rest of the society, something depriving them of their social and individual meaning. There are no differences in this regards among our sample: no difference between men and women, no difference between working class and bourgeoisie, no difference between unemployed that can count on family or relatives for income support and those who cannot. They all live their status as a really problematic situation:

*"not having a job is something psychologically hard to bear, it is not a good situation, I feel like an host in my parents' house, not because I don't like them, but because I think that the time for [leaving the parents] has come....I can't bear this situation, I am stressed and my parents too are stressed as they are worried about my future, I would not say there is a constant conflict among us but there is tension, I can feel some tension...[...] moreover with a girlfriend things get worst when you are unemployed because...well, because when you have a job is a different social life. I try to say this better: having a job makes you more confident, it gives you esteem, you trust further yourself...[...] being twenty-five years old*

*and having a partner since four years and still not being able to move living together is a strong constraint on a relationship”*

(Man, 25).

*“it is terrible, it is terrible, as I was used to work since I was on my early twenties..I get used to wake up early to go to work...at least I could enjoy that: to be alive in the morning and not to sleep over...now I miss that”*

(Woman, 35).

*“a man is nothing without a job”*

(Woman, 20).

*“I miss the most important part of one’s life, a job...actually the most relevant thing in our life is a good health...and I have that...so I miss the second most relevant thing in life...a job, to understand what we want to make out of our life we need a job, [to elaborate] a minimal capacity of planning, a future, ways out...”*

(Man, 35).

The negative effect of unemployment on individuals’ self-perception is even clearer if we ask them about differences in other people attitudes towards them between “then” (when they had a job or were studying) and “now”:

*“[Until I was studying] when I met someone the question was ‘What do you do in your life?’ and the answer ‘Well, I study, actually I am going to graduate soon’ and the reply ‘Oh nice, interesting’...now when they ask me ‘What do you do in your life? Do you work?’ and I say ‘No, I am looking for a job’ ‘Ah’, that’s all, the conversation stops there”*

(Woman, 25).

There are also perceptions of discrimination due to joblessness as lack of economic means necessary to dress along the current conventional ‘youth dress-code’, as stated by this very young woman:

*“it is normal, when you are on your twenties, to desire buying a nice shirt when you see it on the windows but I cannot afford it, I cannot afford spending even fifteen Euros....but the when you go for job interviews you meet these ladies model “The devil wears Prada” and they look at you....they humiliate you”*

(Woman, 20).

The majority of the young unemployed we have met in Turin spoke about their status with a resignation in the tone of their voices, in the words used. Few, though, lived unemployment with anger:

Q. How do you feel being unemployed?

A. *Bad, can say that? I am deadly furious [she uses indeed a very strong word: incazzata nera] with the municipality of Turin, with the State, with funding agencies, with the authorities, with all and everyone because it is impossible not to be able to find a job...*

(Woman).

Unemployment affects the capacity of young people to plan and sometimes even to imagine their future. Without an income and deprived of long-term perspectives, our interviewees are left in a sort of limbo of the “now and here” which obstructs their transition to adulthood. Also those that are in good terms with their parents report a malaise about a situation they are aware is unnatural. For young unemployed whose families live in extremely difficult situations, as many in our sample do, the lack of opportunities to build their own life perpetuates a status of deprivation passed from one generation to the other, postponing any project of social mobility. Having a job or not represents a watershed between those who succeed in their passage to adulthood and those who fail. Being in employment, at least for those who are out of it, is considered like something activating a virtuous mechanism where all the typical steps of an adult life are undertaken: leaving the parents’ house, adopting a satisfying social status, finding a partner, building his/her own household.

*“For me it is imperative, we can say vital, reached a certain age being able to be independent economically, I do not want to escape from my family but I think that when you are twenty-five years old it is legitimate to have an own flat, an own life, and for being unemployed I cannot do it and this is something making me suffer”*

(Man, 25).

Q. How do you imagine your future?

A. *Eh, I see a very bad future, I have the impression we do not make progress but rather we regress to war time [...] because there is no work, workers are made redundant and so they have to become thieves”*

(Man)

And even for those who are more advanced in their process of adulthood, because they are married and /or have children, the fact of being joblessness has implications in terms of self-esteem and self perception of social role:

*“Personally I would wish myself to find a job that I like to be satisfied with myself, this is what I miss. I feel realized in my sentimental life, I found the person of my life with whom I made a child, hence I miss a job and with a job other projects that go with like a new flat...I miss a job to be satisfied...it would be enough to be satisfied, only that.*

Q. Where do you see yourself in five years time?

A. *Where? I hope not here [she laughs] in the same situation because at forty years it would be even more a critical situation...at that age one will have to content herself with an ordinary job of cleaner and anyway you do it but with which satisfaction or enthusiasm you keep on going? And maybe you find yourself crying and saying 'I don't feel realized in my life and would like to go back'"*

(Woman, 35).

Only among few of the youngest interviewees there is still the capacity to dream or to hope seriously a better future. Age makes the difference: despite the hardships experienced, being twenty years old allows this young woman thinking a better future:

*"In a year time I hope to have a permanent job. In ten years I would like to have a family to give my children what I haven't got, from nestling to bigger things. I do really hope that in ten years all this will happen, it is something I do really hope it will happen"*

(Woman, 20).

A final dimension that tells about how unemployment is defined and conceived of by the youth in Turin focuses on *who* or *what* they consider responsible for their situation. In general, the majority of the interviewees have a rather scarce or superficial perception of the causes of unemployment. It is always an external subject to be blamed: employers, public institutions (local and national levels of government) or immigrants. There is a sort of 'externalization' of responsibility as individual capacities and limits are only seldom indicated at least as one of the causes of unemployment. The capacity of self-limits analysis does not extend beyond the critique of their families or social background:

*"[the responsible of the situation] is Berlusconi and rich people...the crisis exists but...it is the State that does not provide funding, if there are no funding for cooperatives that help people in need who's responsible for? The State that does not allow them [social enterprises and cooperatives] to strengthen their structure, or to buy a minivan and then go for public contracts"*

(Woman)

*"all these immigrants [she calls them extracomunitari, that is foreigners from outside the EU] haven stolen a lot of jobs, eh? Not to be arrogant but if we accept to work for eight or seven Euros per hour they go for three...not only in cleaning but also in care services for elderly people, in the manufacture industry, in the building sector you see a lot of foreigners. It is not that the Italians are not willing to take those jobs but rather because they [the immigrants] are too cheap. They have stolen many things, you go in job placement agencies and you find more immigrants than Italians [you find] Romanians, Moroccans and so on. They steal always the better jobs. Let's go ahead like this...what can we do? [...] The public*

*social assistance schemes should introduce the nationality criterion, I am an Italian citizen so you first put me in place and then them [immigrants]”*

(Woman, 34)

Even an interviewee with a certain educational/cultural capital (at least in comparison with the rest of our sample) includes immigrants as part of the problem, although as parts of a larger and more complex scheme of responsibilities:

*“yes, we can say that immigrants steal jobs but the employers are those making this possible, what I want to say is that immigrants come from very different situations than Italians, so we cannot compare them with the [behavior of the] Italians. When a person is desperate is available to do no matter which job, they will not claim workers rights so....if the employer can pay someone two Euros per hour instead of five and make the worker work for a longer time, of course he will hire the immigrant. In this sense they steal jobs but it is a consequence of choices taken well above them”*

(Man, 25).

### **Is unemployment connected with social exclusion, and if yes, in what way?**

Unemployment is considered a status reducing the capacity of individuals to keep a vital social life for it cuts the opportunities of socialization that are related to the working environment. Moreover, unemployment contributes to social isolation for its consequences on the character and psychological well-being essential to get involved in social life. We found some evidence about such arguments also among the young unemployed of Turin where the fact of not having a job seems to affect social life primarily for it reduces income and hence it narrows the opportunities of socialization that are portrayed as inextricably linked with forms of consumption:

*“With friends one [an unemployed] has to say no to many things, instead of seeing them four times a week you see them once, maybe two, you are forced as for seeing them you need to move, to go in clubs....of course one does not take a drink but fuel does cost and it is rare that when we go out with friends we do not go in a club or similar place”*

(Man, 35).

However, the general overview of social life emerging from our study confirms class theories of social capital. Social life depends on social status habits, hence low or working class socialization will tend to be based on family ties whereas individuals with higher cultural and educational capital will tend to have a broader range of ties and acquaintances. To sum up, having a job is relevant for social life but it is not the most relevant factor to predict individuals social capital. Most of our interviewees' socialization

depends on family ties, replicating a rather typical pattern of intra-family exclusive socialization of low social classes.

*“my friends are all gone...my school friends, my university friends, we don't see each other anymore...I go out with my boyfriend and his family members, his sister, his brother in law, they are more or less of our age...I like them”*

(Woman, 25).

*“on Sunday I use to go to see my brother...yesterday I've spent the all day there, his wife used to be my best friend when we were kids. My best friend, we are like sisters...my sister in law is my life, I've named my son after her name”*

(Woman, 34).

*“we don't have friends [she refers to herself and her husband] apart from my two brothers that are more or less of our age with their girlfriends, so we used to go out with them and their friends but for me these were not 'my friends', and I did not like them....so basically we are alone, we spend our evenings among us, you and me, me and you...always like that and at 35 years old you feel like an old person”*

(Woman, 35).

Finally, not only social life does not depend too much on work, actually sometimes the types of work of our interviewees are detrimental to social life:

*“[my friends] work during the week and they use to go out together on the weekend, but on the weekend I was all the time working at the pizzeria, it was difficult to see them, and when you finish working at two o'clock in the morning after having worked for eight hours during which you have been running from one side of kitchen to the other and then you have to wash dishes, glasses and so on and you end [working] at two or even at half past two....then you would need to go home and take a shower before going out with your friends...well, after all that you don't have the energy to do this and then you don't feel motivated to go out”*

(Woman, 25).

To sum up, the patterns of socialization of the young unemployed we interviewed in Turin appear as more or less typical patterns of socialization of working class or low-qualified workers one, where socialization is rather a matter of infra-family relations and may even be strongly negatively influenced by the amount of hours worked and their distribution across days and weeks.

### **Is unemployment connected with political exclusion, and if yes, in what way?**

Unemployment may be positively related not only to social isolation in terms of limited access to personal ties and friendships, but it can also influence the way people perceive and evaluate politics. The literature has shown that in general people experiencing unemployment do not develop critical attitudes pushing them to political activation, or if this happens then specific circumstances are in place to explain such a political awareness or mobilization (Baglioni et al. 2008; Baglioni 2010; della Porta 2008). These specific characteristics have more to do with environmental and organizational aspects than to individual-personal attitudes. Hence, evidence about unemployment leading to social apathy suggests that lack of individual involvement and sense of belonging extends also to the political dimension.

However, in our research we focus on a peculiar group of unemployed, the youth, and this has to be considered when analyzing the role of joblessness in relation to interest in politics and political activation. In fact, the youth are portrayed by several quantitative and qualitative research as by definition not interested in politics and very skeptical about the efficacy of the various levels of policy making in solving their and their societies problems (Cittalia-Anci 2008, Livi Bacci 2008). The young unemployed of Turin do not represent an exception in this regard (cfr. also WP3 report) as most of those we interviewed share a small or none interest in politics and a strong distrust in politicians. Cultural capital (including education) makes the difference between those who are really interested in politics (and are capable of using their status of unemployed to get motivation and time for politics) and those who consider politics as something useless and as such not worth their attention.

Starting with the majority of our interviewees, their consideration of politics and politicians is well represented by statements like:

*"[politicians] are a band of big eaters, they only think to eat themselves and they don't care about the rest...each of them takes what he can for himself and no one thinks to the poor"*

(Woman)

*"[politicians] tease us...in any case they get their thirty thousand Euros per month, they have even personal assistants to hold their briefcase [portaborse] this gives you the idea how much they care about an individual. Indeed they do well for themselves and they don't care about the others. Do you speak about politics? If yes with whom? Yes at home with my mum...we are here struggling to have something to eat and they seat with a nice dish of pasta in front....they're teasing us...you see how good they live their life compared to us"*

(Woman, 20).

Q. Are you interested in politics?

A. No.

Q. So you don't even vote?

A. No.

Q. You don't read about politics?

A. *No, I only listen to the news on TV...I only voted when I was eighteen years old after that I never voted again.*

Q. Why?

A. *Because in any case they don't help us, why should I vote if those who read our ballots change our vote afterwards? We are not those who decide, remember!"*

(Woman, 34).

The only form of political participation experienced by young unemployed in Turin is voting. Voting is perceived on the one hand as the ordinary behavior of a citizen, in most cases as an inherited ordinary behavior. In other cases, though, voting becomes a tool, we could say, one of the very few tools, young unemployed have to conform to the rest of the society, to feel part of it although reluctantly:

*"Politicians of the left or of the right side are all the same, they only think to their pocket...if one is starving you don't find a politician knocking at his door and saying 'I feed you'.*

Q. Do you vote?

A. *Yes I do, I've always voted since I could.*

Q. You said before that nothing changes because of politics..

A. *Yes it's true but still I go to vote.*

Q. So you think voting is something relevant in our life?

A. Yes.

Q. Why? Why you go to the poll?

A. *Because I've always voted*

Q. So your vote is important?

A. *No, politicians don't care if I vote or not, but I always voted to conform to the norm, I vote like all the other persons, so I know I will not get a job through voting but I still go to poll"*

(Man)

Only in one case we met with an unemployed that affirmed the availability of extra time and the problems related to unemployment were incentives for political mobilization. This is the among the very few interviewees with a slightly higher level of cultural capital and with a bourgeoisie background:

Q. Since you are unemployed does your interest in politics change?

A. *Yes, it has increased.*

Q. Increased?

A. *Yes, a lot.*

Q. Why?

A. *Because the condition of unemployed fosters problems that push you to find a solution and politics may help.*

Q. Politics is a solution or should find solutions?

A. *It should find solutions even if finding 'the solution' is a utopia.*

Q. Why politics should find solutions?

A. *Because that's its essence, politics is to take care of the society, of societal evolution, and politics should take care of the society, of societal wellbeing, of its citizens, of the nation.*

Q. Do you think politicians are doing a good job?

A. *No*

Q. Why?

A. *You see how many [unresolved] problems there are around..."*

(Man, 25).

To sum up, politics and young people in Turin do not match well as it does not match well in the rest of the country and in other European societies. Whether unemployment has to do with such a distance between people and policy makers is hard to say: for sure, in only one case out of twenty-two interviews we met with a young unemployed for whom politics and policy making had a clear meaning, for whom unemployment coincided with a stronger commitment to be active in the public sphere.

### **Coping strategies**

Due to the harsh conditions young unemployed have to face in Turin (or, more in general, in Italy) where for people not having already worked for a certain amount of time there is no real income support policy (cfr. WP1 report), survival strategies need to be adopted. The most common coping strategy to face financial/economic difficulties is to seek support from the family (parents, partners and other relatives) either as 'cash' providers or as persons to whom ask for cloths, food and even a 'roof' as many of our interviewees cannot afford paying a rent or a mortgage.

*"My father's pension is quite good, not a very high pension but we can live with that [...] it could be really worst without that pension, if we did not own a flat...Can you get money from your parents? Yes, not too much, but yes"*

(Man, 25).

*"My parents have rented this flat for us [her child and husband]...they took the rent at their name but they made some papers allowing us to stay in"*

(Woman)

However, there are also young unemployed who cannot count on their family for economic support: these are the most exposed to vulnerability and to the condition of 'chômage total', in this cases charities, and especially the Catholic church and its associations, and local welfare state services provide, at least partially, the help required as discussed above (cfr. *supra*).

After family and charities/public services, another common coping strategy to meet financial/economic needs is to seek employment in the irregular market. This is very diffused in Italy, in 2008, the most recent period for which data are available, it was considered representing more than 12% of the country's overall employment sector for an amount of 2,9660 million Euros (Inail 2011). In Turin too people are massively employed through informal and irregular forms of employment as stated by our interviews for WP1 and WP6 and as confirmed by the in-depth interviews analyzed in this report. Below we report an example of a young woman whose employment history consisted exclusively with jobs in the irregular market:

*"Since the secondary school I've started working...I started working with an informal contract at 'Orto Gallery' that are stalls selling cheap jewelry...I was employed irregularly but I was still a student so I did not care and having some money in the pockets was good [...]. At the end of the school I worked in a self-service restaurant near Piazza Carlo Alberto, there as well I was employed informally...but working there was not worth the effort, I used to work for eight-nine hours per day for three hundred Euros per month. I worked few days there but then I felt ill because of the stress. After that I worked in a show room of electronic goods as a secretary. For how long have you worked there? For 4 months more or less. Which contract did you have? I was employed irregularly at the beginning and I earned six hundred Euros then she wanted to put me under an apprenticeship contract but I refused because of the little amount of money that implied"*

(Woman, 20).

Another coping strategy is to seek for seasonal employment: several interviewees, especially young women, were able to find a job at Christmas or in the period of summer sales where big retail chains hire shop assistants just for the time of the sales or just for the peak shopping days near new year's eve:

*"I worked with an apprenticeship contract at the Decathlon for two months, January and February, I was a cashier during sales. It has been a nice experience like the one I had at Zara in July and August for the summer sales"*

## Summary

Previous studies have argued that few individual-level variables affect the way people experience unemployment: age, cultural capital, and the relation between economic needs and personal-family income<sup>9</sup>. Our research contributes with new evidence in support of these analyses. In particular, the in-depth interviews presented in this report show that social class indicators such as cultural, social and economic capital have an impact on the way young individuals live with unemployment and perhaps explain their life better than other indicators.

Young unemployed in Turin present a relevant degree of social isolation, of anxiety, of sense of personal inadequacy that put them very close to the 'chômage total' described by Schnapper (ibidem) for manual workers and to the 'unemployed communities' à la Lazarsfeld<sup>10</sup>. The peculiarity perhaps of the effect of unemployment in this social cohort (young working class unemployed) consists with its intervention in preventing young people from starting an autonomous life. More than its effects on the extension of their social networks, more than its effects on keeping young people far from political mobilization, we could say that unemployment freezes the opportunities of young people to become adults. It confines them for who knows how many years in a limb of material and psychological dependence from families who are themselves in need and unable for scarcity of material, relational and intellectual resources, to prospect them a better future.

Unemployment as we have met it in Turin is very selective in fact, it is perhaps the stronger reproducer of social inequalities as it keeps even further from the collective and individual goal of social mobility those who are most excluded at "the origin", and the very few opportunities it may offer, in terms of lack of time and space constraints, are seized, if they are, by the most advanced in the social stratification, those who less need that.

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## **National Report France**

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### **Introduction**

This report presents the results of in-depth interviews held with 20 young, long-term unemployed people from Lyons, between 18 and 34 years old. To get in touch with these young unemployed and get a meeting, we went several times in front of the '*Pôle-emploi*' job centres. We systematically asked the unemployed who had agreed to reply to our questions to give us the addresses of one or several other young unemployed people. On the basis of this "snowballing", we then made contact with all these people. Meetings were most often arranged in a café in a relaxed atmosphere, rarely in the home of the person being questioned. Some of the young unemployed clearly did not want to meet us at their home, or still lived with their parents. In each case we left the choice open to the interviewee. Recording the conversation posed no problems, even if occasionally we stopped the recording short when the information being given by the interviewee regarded a controversial, or confidential issue of their private life. The length of the meetings varied going from 30 minutes to almost two hours. Often the questioning would be prolonged into a more informal chat, covering much more widely and in a diffuse manner "the experience of unemployment". As a whole, the people replied with great kindness and in a climate of confidence. If, on occasion, they did not reply, or had difficulty replying, it was because they did not understand the meaning of a few rare questions. In all, fieldwork was conducted from February 2010 to April 2011. The detailed list of people questioned, as well as their main sociological features are reported in Annex 1.

The discussions were held by the authors of this report, strictly following the guideline worked out by the Polish team (cf Annex 2). Basing ourselves on the approaches developed for grounded analysis by Charmaz (2006) and Corbin and Strauss (2008), we encoded, line by line, a small number of meetings, in order to identify the main tendencies. We progressively extended this same approach to the whole of the interviews, to broaden and refine this data. In this report, we attempt to understand "the experience of unemployment" as it is lived subjectively by these young unemployed. The whole of the subjects treated is extremely wide and covers together activities linked to the search for job opportunities, but also the daily life of the young unemployed, the degree and the forms of their social exclusion, or even their relation with politics. Through the whole of these dimensions, we identify a number of clear trends, allowing us to draw some standard profiles, but above all to understand how the young unemployed cope with their situation and try to move forward.

## **Types of situation of unemployment**

The study of the biographies of the young unemployed and the observation of their living conditions, yields up a set of observations, which when reassembled in a more systematic way, allow one to grasp concretely the unemployment situation. While the accounts given by the young unemployed of Lyons of the circumstances and the personal stages of their biography which coincided with the loss of their job can give the impression that there are about as many personal cases as there are respondents, it is nevertheless possible to highlight a number of pertinent sociological variables enabling one to account for the different conditions of the connection to unemployment and its variations.

The objective ways of being unemployed, but also to live this situation and to emerge, is based on a whole range of factors themselves strongly linked, including gender, level of schooling, social origins, but also the previous social trajectory and the cultural capital of the family, variables to which must be added the specific district and the employment areas offering the opportunities of finding employment.

If the absence of education capital is a very big handicap and this even more when associated with a lack of social capital – the children of the lower classes without diplomas being the ones most permanently hit by unemployment – education does not have the same return for all young people in the labour market, especially for men and women. In other words, it is the women from the lower classes and without diplomas those who are the most disadvantaged regarding employment. At equivalent education level, married women and with children are in a more serious situation of deprivation and social exclusion. In fact, their new family obligations and often also their residence far from the centres and areas of employment prevent them from remaining in the jobs they held before (which were often night shift work, lagging in relation to the rhythm of family life and too poorly paid to make up for the cost of child care expenses), constraining them to give up looking for work and leading them to increasing idleness.

To understand the way the unemployment situation is experienced, it is necessary to relate it to the personal path of the unemployed person, in particular the importance of educational investment, especially at school, that the family has put in the young unemployed person. The time lag between the subjective probabilities determined by these investments and the endpoint of the real path is even more harshly felt, given that access to a diploma by the young unemployed corresponds for the family to a new social experience that has not been mastered, where the greatest fears and uncertainties can go hand in hand with the biggest hopes. This is why young graduates who, for the family, represent the first generation to hold degrees, tolerate with more difficulty than others the situation of the unemployed, which they tend to view – and with them the whole of the members of their family group (especially their parents) who were expecting the fruit of their educational investments – as unjust and outrageous. The feeling of deprivation is not as strong for those already having certain cultural assets, combined most of the time, with assets and social relationships and information on ways of breaking out of unemployment, who tend to view their situation as accidental and temporary.

As for the children of the middle and upper classes, they seem less marked by unemployment, at least initially. “Work isn’t everything”, as an interviewee explained. The relationship with the diploma, but also the deprivation of a job is different for holders of a diploma who succeed in getting a social position by the sheer force of their diploma and for those who reached the same position thanks to a sort of prior familiarity with their current world of work (in the form of relationships all made up from within the working environment, information on ways of finding a job, etc.) that brings the belonging to a family of holders of diplomas over several generations. The difference between the expectations formed at school and in the family and the inability to find employment are however the cause of a large number of disappointments through time.

*“Work at any price”*

In our discussions, women from the lower classes holding diplomas, mostly at middle level or even not very high, have to find how to resist exclusion from working life and thus tend to accept almost any kind of job, particularly those often involving living conditions specific to single people, that is to say requiring substantial availability, despite their family obligations. Their first jobs often required physical strength, either in the content of the task, or by how the task was carried out. Here, it is really the family path which seems to explain this over-investment. Far from being in the situation – like the men having a similar school or social path or like women from the same scholastic level coming from the middle and upper classes – of putting up with “the unemployment test”, these women demonstrate a fierce energy and willpower to break out of it at the earliest and at all cost. The intolerable nature of unemployment prevails ever more strongly the wider the gap felt between the reality of the labour market and the expectations raised at the outset of one’s studies. This gap is especially wide for the families who see for the first time in their history one of their family members acquire academic qualifications of a certain level.

*“Unemployment that leaves no marks”*

Holding economic assets and social assets protect men without diplomas even more against the downgrading that unemployment engenders. Children of the higher classes frequently discover, when they find themselves without a job, powerful protection within their family circle and networks of relations that each of its members can call up in their favour. Even when the lack of a diploma enhances relatively their likelihood of unemployment, they can make recourse to a kind of social remediation and quickly rectify the disadvantageous situation caused by their lack of academic qualifications, succeeding in avoiding the social labelling that unemployment generally to the unemployed coming from other social classes. The experience of unemployment cannot be summarized as the face, even the stereotype, of the jobless person, defeated, resigned, marginalised. If unemployment means, for a majority of jobseekers, a “pain”, it does not necessarily result in the decline of the individual. It is amongst the young coming from well-off families that one finds features close to the model of “inverted unemployment”, identified by Dominique Schnapper (1983). The individual makes the choice of devoting their time to self-employed, unremunerated activities, such as

creative, family or even militant activities. In this case, work is seen as alienating and the individual claims his or her liberation from working and to choose to live differently. This attitude remains however uncommon in our discussions, and variables such as gender, age and social affiliation build a strong differentiation in the relation of young people in long-term unemployment. This situation is viewed very differently depending on the resources. By resource, we understand not only the financial means of the person, but likewise the capacity to adopt alternative activities, the socialisation of the individual, and their integration into the family.

Finally, the more the attachment to and identification with work are strong, the more unemployment will weaken the young person in their own identity. Deep down, the central role of work in social identity building is even more apparent in the absence of work. Thus the young unemployed assign on the whole a core value to work. One sees it in the case of the young unemployed who conduct their job search along the lines of a full-time occupation. The rules of competition in the labour market are accepted. Unemployment is lived out like a phase to go through with a commitment as equally intense as if it were a job. In this case, the young unemployed persons continue to identify themselves by their occupation or their training. Even without a job, they put their own resources in the service of their prime objective: the return to work.

### **Analysis of the material collected in the field**

#### ***How do young unemployed people perceive / define unemployment related problems?***

It is striking to see that many of the interviewed young unemployed are unable to express the experience of unemployment as a problem. They describe this situation as being almost normal. Their lifestyle is often totally maladjusted to working life, but it is viewed as a routine. In other words, most of the unemployed are not in a reflexive relation with regard to their situation and do not question themselves therefore about its abnormal, atypical or even disagreeable nature. Laura provides a good illustration when she gives an account of her day :

*:Already I get up late. Around 11h30, midday. Then, the afternoon, either I see friends or then I go and see the family and then in the evening, well I get back and get in front of my computer, or I watch the telly”.*

For Adeline, the days are overall the same :

*In the morning I have a lie-in, I wake up at about 11h, then I get up, I stay in front of the telly...or I get in front of the PC, I make something to eat, after I do a bit of housework, after I get stuck into the PC (laughter), and then well the evening I watch the telly until any old time, and then well, and sometimes I even look for work (laughter)”.*

The question of time – which has to be filled or waited for – is ever present. Most of the unemployed questioned have ‘lagged’ schedules. One can see that to make busy

oneself, filling in the day – that is to say manage the lack of activities – becomes an aim in itself, as Romaric explains:

*“I try not to get up too late, usually it's half-nine, half past 9 because there's not much point getting up too early, so after, half past 9 I feel it's quite good, after it's either, either it's nice weather and we go out, do a bit of sport, either you bum around in front of the telly, console, anything that helps pass the time, a bit of reading, quit a lot of films, and then yeah, I mean activities which are more, more expensive in terms of the budget, you make do with what you've got, mainly for me it's the telly and the PC, otherwise get out a bit to do a bit of sport”.*

Estelle, on the other hand, has very full days. One part of her day is taken up with household chores (*option: tasks*) (she still lives with her mother), the other is spent looking for work. It is this mix of activities that she describes;

*“I get up around 9 o'clock, it's housework and then I prepare the meal for my mother, I sit at the computer and do all the job offers, all the time, all the time; Even when I wasn't looking any more, I looked anyway, even when I had a current task, I was looking for the next months. And then in the afternoon, since I've already cleaned up and made the meal, it's either there's still something else to do like ironing, but if not I'm in front of my PC and I play games or I watch serials. Games networked on internet. The evening there's the whole of my team of games which is there and then we play matches (laughter)”*

Sometimes, the impression is of wasting one's time, of having a life different from the others, to be out of line, to be obliged to put back one's projects, which dominates, without there being necessarily any guilt.

*I'm bored, I feel as though I'm on another planet compared to the others, there's a big gap. In terms of money, they have all got money coming in, but me, since I haven't worked a great deal, I don't get unemployment benefit. I had it after l'OPAC (social housing organization) for 6 months, up to September, and after in October I started work again on a few jobs but it's not enough for me to get real pay and it's not enough for me to get any money from the Assedic, so even as regards money I can't really do what I want to, I can't save up money either, I feel I'm stagnating, that I'm apart in relation to the lives of others, I mean, compared with real life, a job, having a house”*

(Estelle)

So far, it is rare for the unemployed to accuse someone, something, or a system. To the question: “ Can you blame someone or something for your unemployment situation?”,

the answer is virtually systematically 'no'. What is rather striking, is the almost total absence of political explanations, or even simply systemic. In a word, the young unemployed do not blame anyone, if it is not themselves. Thus Enzo replied to us:

*Oh well, [on blaming someone], no, apart from me no no-one. It's true" I don't feel more supported than that, but in any case not by anybody, not by any administration, but since I neither count on them for the moment, I don't blame them for not being there, because I don't expect anything from them, so it's clear that there's not many around to support us, since I always assumed when it's personal that, well if I found a job it would be thanks to me and not thanks to some sort of administration, for the moment I don't blame them for anything".*

Some young unemployed demonstrate great immaturity, and in any case are incapable of providing a considered and coherent explanation of their situation. Their behaviour seemingly dictated by erratic events over which they have hardly any control. Such is the case of Karim:

*Well, it's a little bit my fault also and it's quite a bit the fault of my guidance adviser at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year. Me I ask her a thing on computing, and I don't know if she likes computing also, and she pulls me out a file on a BEP, and she told me here this is it, and I more or less read the file, I say to her: "Yeah" and I registered, so there"*

For Adeline, the situation is personal. She does not blame anybody for her unemployment situation since it was wanted.

*"It's me who decided not to continue with my contract. I was to be employed on a permanent basis, so it's me who sort of wanted it, but to direct myself elsewhere what in another place, in another company. There where I was, the working conditions became unbearable, so I preferred to leave and I don't blame anyone".*

Stigmatisation is a very real phenomenon. It seems to be felt more often by men than women, on the grounds, as Maeva says, "a man without a job isn't possible" (laughter). The social stigma is very strong, even when the entourage and family demonstrate much understanding towards the young unemployed. This is the case of Aurélien, who assumes a large part of the responsibility and carries with him a strict judgment.

*"They're going to say that you don't feel proud, because you're moving towards the age when all the people around you are at work, you're still the little ugly duckling, the last, finally one of the last who no longer works, no work, you don't feel proud, after personally it's not always easy to accept, you feel a bit shitty".*

In certain cases, work is perceived as alienating and the individual demands their emancipation from the latter. Stéphanie shares quite openly with us the advantages that accrue, according to her, of the fact of being unemployed:

*“When I found myself unemployed, I was exhausted; burned out as they say. I was quite out, I was fed up with everything, I took no pleasure in working. I just went there for the monthly pay, obliged to so as to live. And then, when I found myself out of work, in the beginning, all of a sudden, I could breathe. I had time for myself. Do you realize, I’d forgotten what it was like! So then I looked after myself and I started to do all that I hadn’t done before”.*

The fact of being out of work does not therefore have only drawbacks. Some of the unemployed say they are now available for those around them. In a certain way, those who are out of work offer their main asset, their availability. As Kim says:

*“You’re always there for the people who are near to you. At any time of the day”*

For Maxime, being unemployed is the opportunity for introspection which can be beneficial:

*That, allows already to get to know yourself a bit better because you’ve got many, many moments of doubt, that helps to grow up a bit, to see that you’re able to overcome those phases, that helps you to sort out the folk you can count on from the ones you can’t count on, that’s also important, it’s just that the positive, you do a great job on yourself, no, on that it’s interesting, otherwise you can’t say either that it’s the experience of life”*

For Laurent, it is family life and the privileged relationship with his two children that he appreciated as a result of his unemployment.

*If there are positive sides, I looked after my kids, I saw life at school, I saw the ritual of shopping, to prepare the food on time and for the kids’ time also, I was close to my children, they tell me about their day, trips out of school, to go with them to sports or to the swimming pool, time for myself, some time to look after the house a bit, the wall I left white for 3 years and which I should have done yellow. Thankfully there are positive sides, otherwise you sink more quickly”.*

Even if they regret being unemployed, the young people questioned are generally content with their lives. Two explanations converge here. Firstly, the situation they are going through brings them to appreciate a certain number of features, in particular the solidarity that establishes itself around them. Then, there is doubtless a ‘natural’ psychological inclination to reflect that they are satisfied with their lives. In other words, it is after all very painful to declare to others – above all in the context of a discussion –

'yes, my life is not satisfying'. Thus, having explained how the situation of being unemployed was distressing for her, Fanny declares :

*“Beyond the fact of not having a job, yes. I find myself in good company, I have good relations with people I like, my family, I have a social fabric which allows me, in spite of everything, to live my life even when unemployed, so yes, apart from having no work, yes I'm quite satisfied”.*

Unsurprisingly, those who have had a higher education are generally the least satisfied.

According to the Tocqvillian theorem, it is the subjective momentum of social phenomena that matters and not the very fact of being without work. Estelle is today even more disappointed given that she undertook studies that did not enable her to obtain a job commensurate with her education. She voiced deep regrets, while those whose situation is objectively worse express none or few.

*When I decided to leave Uni to go to work, I didn't expect that 3 years later I'd be in the same position as when I left Uni. That's very hard to accept. Now, I tell myself I should have continued, I could have made an effort [...]. Now, if I look back, I'd make the effort to stay there [at the Uni]”.*

The accumulation of failures at the job-searching phase is also a demoralising factor bringing about a loss of confidence. At every inconclusive job interview, above all when one has the feeling that it had gone very well, morale takes a knock and discouragement wins, as in the case of Imène.

*At the interviews, I was told several times that I had to have experience, of at least a year, but nobody offers it to me. Therefore I found it difficult, so I started looking again also filling the shelves, and I was at André the butcher, that, it went great, the job interview, I replied really great to all the questions, even the ones about stock rotation, stuff I'd forgotten but I remembered, that went really great, and the temp called me to tell me I hadn't got the job, just because I haven't got sparkle, and that...that gutted me, really I was sickened, everything's super fine, I was going to get a fixed post. A “sparkle”, and it was shelf-filling, he gave me some smiles the butcher, he said perfect, or he gave me some encouraging stuff...to tell me I don't have “sparkle”...!”*

The reading of these few testimonies highlights that unemployment is a complex and multifaceted experience, even if feelings of weariness, of monotony and of discouragement are predominant in the accounts given. Time clearly plays here an aggravating factor. If unemployment can be experienced in a relatively positive manner at the outset, after a few months its deconstructing effects make themselves harshly felt. Everyone, depending on their relation with work, lives unemployment differently, those

whose work was the most traumatic coping no doubt the best with its loss, at least early on.

***Is unemployment connected with social exclusion, and if yes, in what way?***

For all the people questioned, unemployment is above all synonymous with a loss of earnings. Financial problems are numerous and are, as such, a problem. But above all, they entail almost systematically a diminution of social activities – which are rarely cost free – and shut off the unemployed from their traditional networks (especially friends). The remarks of Laure are witness to this progressive reduction of social bonds.

*“Out of work, with what you get, everything’s a worry. A drop to drink, an evening with your mates, well it’s at least 20 euros. You do it once a week, that’s not much, well you eat up half your budget, or not far off it. So, you pay attention to everything, you calculate everything and in the end you don’t do anything, you stay at home because there at least it doesn’t cost anything, or not much”*

It is often the lack of money that limits going out, contacts and finally social life. To the question “Is there something you can no longer allow yourself? Elodie replies :

*Ah yes, going out, well, social life. Going out with friends, go and have a bit of fun, getting out of the house, doing something other than going out on the street, having an outside social life, that’s really the big black spot”.*

Finally, when social contacts are discarded, Internet appears as the ultimate form of link.

All the young unemployed questioned spend several hours a day on the Internet. Its role goes well beyond the search for jobs, it is also clearly a substitute for social contacts (Facebook particularly).

***Does unemployment affect relations with family members, and if yes, in what way?***

From this viewpoint, the family is very often a bulwark against the severity of the social world and the damage that unemployment causes. But the relationship is ambivalent. Some of the unemployed enjoy family support, whether that poses a moral problem or not. Others, on the contrary, seek to maintain their financial independence, even when their family is ready to help them and would have no difficulty in doing so. As sociologists of the family have demonstrated, the latter is an emotional bulwark ever more important as other forms of social bond vanish. With its means – even when they are weak – it protects, activates its networks and supports the unemployed person. For the young unemployed, it is often the parents who play a crucial role in this respect. Even when friends doubt the motivation of the young job seeker and/or their ability to find employment, the family remains the unshakeable base of support.

*There it’s now 14 months [since I became unemployed]. When it got to nearly 8 months, you start to wonder a bit, at the end of 8 months, started to wonder if I, some people, wonder if I really do everything*

*to find something [...]. But it's just the friends, in my family, that hasn't changed anything, they're always there when I need them".*

But the family is occasionally also intrusive, as in the case of Karim:

*"My mother, that's the one who was the biggest pain in the neck: you've got to find, you can't stay without anything..." Got to understand her on the other hand, and my friends, they pushed me a little bit to look for, even if there's one or two they couldn't too much because...hum, they don't do anything either...every day she hammers on and on and on".*

This family pressure, the experience of unemployment reveals, can be a source of lack of understanding and damage the parents/children relationship. Karim again:

*"I resent a bit my father and mother. And myself, because I didn't push myself enough, for a time ...well a long time, I didn't really go the whole hog to find a job. And my father and mother because they just put pressure on me. Even my mother didn't consider me a man, because I wasn't working, not in active life not socially included".*

Family relationships suffer from these charges, when the unemployed person has to hand over some of the money they get to their family. Such is the case of Estelle, who still lives with her mother. One can see that the deal between the latter and her is not conducive to good relations and shows up several tensions.

*My mother wanted me to contribute. When I worked at the OPAC I earned a minimum of 1400 and a maximum of 1800 euros, depending on the number of days in the month and according to the bonuses, and so then she asked me for 250€ a month, and in fact me I didn't know how much I had to give her, so said to her: "if I give you 100€ a month, is that o.k.?" She [her mother]: "no, with what you earn, it's 250€!" Then I said "ok", more I am always at home so I give it to her. But when I was out of work, I brought home about 800, and she asked me for the same thing, so therefore, even to economize, well it's hard, and more than that, sometimes she asked me for a bit more, and again a bit more"*

The family realm is also the place you don't talk about. Julien, on unemployment :

*I stayed almost a year looking for a new job, without even training. You don't talk about in the family, very little"*

If the family seems to be the bulwark against exclusion, even with extremely limited means and if it increases social pressure, on the other hand it is striking that the assistance of civil society is for most of the time inexistent. The associative networks seem weak. None of the young unemployed is in touch with an association of the unemployed, for example. During our interviews, the only civil society organization cited is AFPA (national association for adult training, a public body).

The cumulative/collective unemployment situation and social exclusion appears quite clearly. If the unemployed are not always isolated, on the other hand they are almost always surrounded by people and networks who are themselves relatively poor or deprived of resources, whether financial or social. The situation of the neighbourhood is enlightening from this point of view. Some of the unemployed say they do not take public transport, because ticket prices are too high. They then sometimes ask a neighbour for a lift to a job interview, or to an employment agency. But if no-one they know has a car and if public transport is not convenient for the place of the interview, then the unemployed will give up. In general, the matter of transport is critical and clearly constitutes an important factor in exclusion: to get about is relatively expensive and is all the same indispensable when looking for employment.

More widely still, in the inner cities (*option*: poor neighbourhoods), solidarity is often real and seeks in any case to exert itself, but it is difficult to borrow money from a neighbour who has none, or very little. Likewise, in some families, many people are unemployed, or were jobless in the not-too-distant past. Here also, one can easily see the cumulative effect of the process of pauperization or of social exclusion. The young unemployed are often surrounded by people in a situation of more or less great precariousness, whether in the area of the family or in relationships with neighbours. The case of Adeline is an example in this respect :

*My little sister for example. She hasn't got a job, she finished her hairdressing CAP and hasn't found an employer. So she's been unemployed for a year. After, I know a lot of unemployed...I've also got a neighbour who's unemployed, she's even got the same profile as my little sister, so there. My mother was on unemployment benefit for 2 years, after that she was out of time and couldn't claim any more. But that's 5 years ago"*

Sometimes, the help from the family is structural, in the sense that it subsidises totally and over a long period the needs of the unemployed person, in any case it supplies substantial assistance. As with Nouriati:

*My mother pays the rent, and I don't need much, just for cigarettes and for going out"*

Unemployment is not necessarily synonymous with privation for those who have never been financially independent, or who were not very well off as children. Nouriati again:

*Well, I didn't have a pay packet before, so there's nothing I have to give up. My mother gave me nearly nothing in the way of money"*

The role of the family is therefore very ambivalent on the whole. It seems essential for the young unemployed many of whom have no other choice but to rely on family resources to provide for their needs. At the same time, this relationship of dependence is a source of tensions if not of conflict. It is also a source of inequalities since, quite clearly, it is only the well off families which can most efficiently assist the young unemployed, whether it is financially but also with the strategies to find employment.

***Does unemployment affect relations with friends and acquaintances, and if yes, in what way?***

The relationship between unemployment and friendly relationships is also very ambivalent. On the one hand, long-term unemployment progressively translates in an erosion of social and friendly contacts. Many of the unemployed explain that the loss of employment has isolated them without moreover necessarily accusing their friends. Or then, the friends who stay are themselves also unemployed, as Julie explains:

*Since I've been unemployed, I don't have many friends. So most of them are working, but the girlfriend with whom I'm, I'm often, she's out of work too, well, she was in hairdressing for two years, you can't get a contract with BEP, so like that we found ourselves out of work".*

We do not know if it is the experience of unemployment which is the cause, but Adeline has few friends. Less and less. She seems very disenchanting :

*I have few friends. I had a load of bad experiences so I don't worry anymore, so now I don't even know if I can call them "friends" or "mates". Well I see them quite often anyway, every weekend".*

On the other hand, the friends who remain are an essential resource for the young unemployed, who are perfectly aware of it. It is they who play the role of confidant, those who could bring moral, logistical, or even sometimes financial support. It is also with them that they spend most of their days, simply to fill in the time and break the boredom. Friends are also a source of motivation, not necessarily that they bring real material assistance but their simple presence allows for retrieving a bit of desire and energy. When they have themselves known a period of unemployment, friends understand the situation better than the one who is out of work. That is how Charlie puts it :

*"You can say my close friends they support me also quite a bit, because they've all been there, there are some who are still at the same stage of looking also, so we spend a bit of time together (laughter), it's not bad because that enables to really motivate yourself, because you quickly tend to get yourself into a routine where you put off a whole lot of things until tomorrow, so the fact of being several enables, at least two, well to give yourself a little kick up the ass, get moving with the searches, I don't know, type some letters of motivation, that's not bad and then the others, well, they don't bother with it too much but they're there, whatever".*

The help and the reassurance provided are numerous, involving as well financial assistance as moral.

*Oh well, I know that if I want to poke my head out the door, clear my head, and I haven't got the means to go out, that's not going to be a problem. They'll take charge of me. If I need them to pass by*

*the house to chat, they'll come along with pleasure, so we'll say I've got a little hard core on which I can also really count"*

(Romaric).

For other out of work people, the area of solidarity is really very limited, either the friends are few in number and not well off, or the young unemployed person has the worst scruples to ask for their assistance. Such is the case of Laurent, who when asked : "Would you say you have someone to turn to, or who could help you?", replies:

*I have my wife, that's enough*

***Does unemployment affect relations with neighbors and people from the local society?***

Social relationships in the districts, or in the neighbourhoods, seem less important than networks of friends or families. Anyway, the district is often described as a hostile place. This was the case of Julien, who lives in Lyons and wishes to move away. This is also the case, but with much more virulence, of Estelle, who lives in a deteriorated suburb of Lyons. Evidently, considering the perception she has of her environment, the latter cannot be considered to be a resource.

*Life in my district, it's very noisy every evening, a number of children that you don't even know or you've seen growing up and who all of a sudden look at us and insult us. Now it's better, it's summer, it's calmer. It's all the time a mess and Friday evening there are children under 10 years old who are left alone until one o'clock in the morning shrieking at the bottom of the house.*

***Is unemployment connected with political exclusion, and if yes, in what way?***

The relationship of the young unemployed with politics is interesting in more than one respect. If the profile of the unemployed as little politicized and little interested in the business of the city exists, it must not hide other cases testifying a crucial degree of politicization, going as far as being strong. A somewhat intermediate case has to be stressed, that of young unemployed people saying they are little or not interested at all in politics, but who for all that vote and above all have discussions one could class as political in their daily life, especially with friends. This for example is the case for Laura. During the interview, her first replies show that his relationship with politics is totally disembodied and has no real sense in her mental world.

Q. What is politics for you?

A. *First of all a good President*

Q. Are there any aspects of politics that interest you more than others?

A. *No*

Q. Do you, for example, listen more to politics at local, national, international, or none of the three?

A. *No, none of the three.*

However, a little later in the discussion, Laura declares she talks politics with her friends and votes at every local or national election. One can advance the hypothesis that she views the exercise of civic rights as a moral obligation, but without her assuming the real meaning of this act.

Many young unemployed specifically make a link between their situation of being out of work and what they think of politics. To put it another way, they judge political action through the difficulties they are going through, which explains then the generally unkind judgment they hold on the personnel and political actions.

In an astounding way, unemployment leads certain young people to open up on the reason for their situation, the general state of society and represents, on occasion, the emerging process of a process of politicization. That is the case with Romaric:

*“Well, yes because I admit that at one time I was even less interested than before, so I had maybe, I was falling a bit into the cliché, and it’s true that since I’ve been interested a minimum, even if I’m interested not more than that, I think there are some people of value in place, I have the impression that we’ve really got a quality French political class”.*

This is far from a total disinterest in politics, or, concerning the political personnel, the cliché “all rotten”. On the contrary they are qualified remarks generally made, often complex. There is often a lot of comprehension of the political personnel. For Laurent:

*“I don’t know, compared to other [countries] it’s not too bad. For unemployment, it’s a crisis, what to do to recruit? I wouldn’t like to be in their place [the employers], it’s not getting any better”.*

Even if he does not feel politically qualified, Laurent does not show indifference or rejection, but rather some indulgence. He is very interested in politics:

*Ah yeah, yeah, it gets discussed often, it’s even stormy. You remake the world. You talk with my wife’s friends. You’re interested, because you hope it gets better, you wait there’ll be a new generation, there’ll be a better one, but in fact they’re all made from the same mould them there. But there’s no stable political compass.*

*The usual ideological criteria seem inoperative. They don’t live on the same planet, and yet there are, you could say who are close to us, there’s one [woman] who’s from Poitou Charente, there’s one who’s in Lille over there, the Martine, the others the right, phew!, and yet I’d voted for the right, perhaps not so much because I like Sarkozy, it was because there was on the other side who I didn’t like. No, there everyone dreams of Dominique Strauss Khan PS, that’s what works in France...an economist like that, that would be fine”.*

Laurent votes in terms of a feeling of nearness and of acquaintance, that he explains in the following way :

*The municipal, the presidential and the parliament I vote. The European and the regional ones I don't, because I don't know my candidate. With a real citizen's reasoning, as much on the meaning of the election as on the blank vote. Above all, I'd like them to count all the blank votes in the votes cast. That wouldn't be bad, it's a number even so, I'm sure the blanks would come out on top, that would show anyway that there are those who aren't happy, they should change your heads of the list there.*

*Useful and important, the vote? Yeah, phew, so there I do my citizen act I'm going to say, I don't know if it means much, but yes I do it. But I'm sure that the last two, if I don't like them, I won't go and vote, and if they counted the blanks, I'll go and vote blank.*

The case of Karim is also very interesting and, to a certain degree, surprising. He too is very interested in politics :

*"Politics, I like a lot yeah, well the politics that interests me it's more the debates, the exchange of ideas, a little bit the repartee and to see the ideas of each one. It's that that's politics for me".*

At the same time, he extends no confidence to the political personages and does not vote:

*I think we really haven't got the right president. I don't see me voting, I don't see it's who right now can help France go forward, I don't see any politician. Me I think there's nobody who's up to it, me I don't like their ideas, they're not interested in France's real problems, sometimes they divert the problems onto stuff euh...because that gives them more publicity, that makes more votes [...] You can't say that I trust them"*

Karim was even committed, in the sense that he has several times demonstrated publicly for a particular cause:

*"I don't know if you can call that « politics », but for Palestine, for the Israelo-Palestinian problem, I went on demonstrations, I'm very committed on that, that touches me really[...]. I don't belong to an association, but it's through the social networks that I'm in groups, on Facebook, I'm in loads of groups, they give out news on Palestine every day and when there are demonstrations, I'm aware".*

He gives a short political explanation, although pertinent and relatively sophisticated, of the reasons for his commitment.

*"It's an armed power [Israel], supported by the Americans against a nation without a State, that's why".*

For Estelle, on the other hand, it is degrees zero interest in politics. To summarize and as she says :

*I have no opinion on the political establishment, none, not even negative”*

One sees it, the relationship with politics of some young unemployed covers very different realities, ranging from the most totally apolitical to a relatively strong commitment, based on structured convictions and ideology.

### **Identified coping strategies of young unemployed**

The idea of strategy is problematical when applied to life projects. What emerges quite often, is quite the contrary, the absence of strategy or the incapacity to explain the evolution of their personal and professional path, as well as the difficulties experienced. In a significant way, expectations are often very minimalist, as the following extract shows.

Q. Where do you see yourself in a year's time?

A. *I see myself getting a job, already, then get my driving license, and then it'll be already good.*

It is resignation that dominates, with also one of its corollaries, that is to say the capacity to be satisfied with little. One can be unemployed and satisfied with one's life, no doubt because, on principle, one satisfies oneself with what one has and one expects little. As a general rule, it is more the aspirations, the wishes, which are expressed, more than a veritable strategy.

*“I hope to have been able to stay at least 5 years in the same firm to climb the grades and have real stability. So I'd like in 5 years not to be still having to go from one time-limited contract to another one, no little temporary jobs, so really get settled, if not in a region at least in a firm”*

(Fanny)

Very often, it is really the praise of normality which is expressed; to have a job, a house, a spouse, children. The capacity to project oneself is not inexistent, but relatively limited. Almost no one spontaneously makes projects for 10 years, for example. Laurent has a perfectly coherent life plan, but for the next few years :

*“In a year I hope to have this job, be a manager at Casino, in 2-3 years I hope to move, have a change of district, I'm fed up, I'm striving for more calm, afterwards I don't know”.*

Sometimes, the strategies are postponed to the next generation. The idea is then in some way to make it that the children do not repeat the same mistakes as the parents, to avoid finding themselves without work. We find a net overinvestment of the family area. At the same time for oneself, for one's personal balance, and for ones offspring. As

if the harshness of industrial relations and the labour market were opposed to the gentleness of the family area.

*In 5 years it's better, in 5 years I'll already have my baby, married why not, I'm all for marriage so I don't mind, in order, married or baby, I couldn't care less. And given I'll have my child, since I'd have already worked before to have my flat, given I'll have my child and I want to bring it up, I'll be a child minder, and with my husband, and there, and he comes home".*

Finally, only Adeline has a coherent and organised vision of her future. Her remarks are consistent with her actions, she is capable of spontaneously building coherent long-term life projects.

*Yes, I wish to resume my studies at the start of the year, on an alternating basis, still in the accounts field, I'd like afterwards to become an accountant and following that open a consultancy, that's on a scale of 10 years"*

In their contacts with the social institutions, the strategy of the young unemployed is easier to identify. It is essential here to keep in mind that the interaction with employment centres and, more widely, the whole of the institutional players which follow the path of the young unemployed in their search for employment, represents a high psychological cost to the latter.

In one word, the repetition of the procedures demotivates. It is an important aspect to be underlined: in registering the young unemployed for a multitude of procedures to be accomplished, these institutions take the risk of discouraging and disappointing. The unemployed are well treated, sometimes listened to, often respected, but the repetition of actions and the fact that they do not translate into any effective improvement in their situation, is a factor in depression and of discouragement. As Laura says:

*"In the beginning it went rather well. They sent me quite a few letters To find a job, all that, then as time went by they sent me fewer and fewer letters".*

Romarcic analyses the situation even more precisely and shows how the process of application 'at all costs' – one can be struck off if one refuses 3 job offers – is an element of demotivation because it entails false hopes.

*"Well, it's above all the false hopes that are difficult to handle. It's when you, when you have an interview in a firm, you're 100 at the start, a second interview you're not more than 5, last interview just 2 left for the job and you end up not getting it. And then when at the end you're just two and they tell you it's not for you, you get a good slap on the head, then there's a little period, well just that you're glad to have friends and the family, to get you back on your feet, but it's the same, for your morale it's not, it's not easy to handle, it's*

*quite difficult to get back on your feet, you wonder if it's still worth it since it's now more than a year"*

Smarting from this painful experience, Romaric does not get involved in steps towards finding a job unless the chances of success are high. Other young unemployed people even give up looking for work to protect themselves from negative self-judgment induced by repeatedly unsuccessful job searches. In a way an exchange at the offices of the ANPE itself also falls within a negotiation of identity between the job seeker and the official of the institution.

Lowering ambitions, at least momentarily, is a main theme. Far from the image of the unemployed "slacker", it is a question of finding a job at all costs. As Stéphanie says:

*The important thing is to find something, whether it pleases you really or not, the important thing is to get yourself back into the labour market, for, because finally it is easier to find something you like when you're already in work, because you've got more connections, develop your network so it's really perhaps really lower your claims (option: demands) at the outset".*

That can involve working at the minimum wage level, perhaps as a temporary worker, but in the case of Maxime remaining in his field of expertise.

*Let's say I need something in the field where I'm looking, in the commercial field, because I don't want to put to one side, therefore it stays in my field of activity, after I'll say about contractual conditions that it could be a fixed duration contract, perhaps temporary work, that I'm ready to accept, with a wage really not very high, that I'm prepared to accept".*

Others are even less demanding. Karim is handicapped. Nevertheless, within the limits of his physical capacities, he would accept any kind of employment.

*"What type of work will I accept? Housework, materials handling, dishwashing, anything, fast food, all, I'll take everything. All that's accessible".*

For Laurent, the only worthwhile strategy comes down to determined voluntarism. Handicapped for life, he was brought up in a family of 7 children and two of his brothers committed suicide. He counts only on himself and his capacity to bear the hardships:

*"I never complained! I always said to myself: 'there are those worse off than you!' What there is, it's that you've got to try and bounce back at all times, if you stay with a setback, you don't go forward"*

Through their conduct, it is often an approach of distrust with regard to the social institutions which is dominating. The unemployed have to deal with them, even if only to be registered, if it is not to get benefits, but very often they do not believe in the purpose of the action taken. It is a very Goffmanian atmosphere which is thus described, in which each actor plays their role, but without really getting involved.

*It's true that I don't feel more sustained than that, but in any case by nobody, by no administration, but since I don't count any longer on them for the time being, I don't blame them for not being there because I expect nothing from them, so it's clear there are not many around to support us, since I always started from the principle when it's personnel that, well if I found a job it would be thanks to me and not thanks to some administration or other, for the moment I don't blame them for anything"*

It is likewise the situation that Romaric describes, that of a setting in which the administration on one side, the unemployed on the other, pretend to play their parts, but without any conviction and without believing in their actions.

*I have very friendly contacts with them let's say, but I go along knowing that, well when I'm called, I go because I'm supposed to go, but I expect nothing of them because, they proposed me a whole lot of things, they've never proposed me anything that was in line with the profile we drew up together, so I haven't the impression that they're of any use, as well I find they don't do their job well, what, I haven't the impression that it's the fault of the contacts I have in front of me, I get the impression it's the fault of the machine they're working for, so I have human relationships with my guardian, very good, all the while knowing she's not much use".*

This type of attitude translates into conformist behaviours, where the unemployed formally respects the procedure for seeking employment, but without giving themselves a single chance of finding any.

*"I had a single experience you could say really negative, because I refused several offers that didn't correspond at all, and you can't refuse indefinitely, you're obliged to go and present yourself to certain interviews, and I went to have an interview therefore at Echirolles, near Grenoble, for a job as a loading-bay supervisor, just because in my job experience it was noted that I had worked in transport, in maritime transport, but well I am a commercial traveller and so they sent me for a job as a loading-bay supervisor at Echirolles, it took me three weeks to get repaid my tickets, so I really had to pay them, it was at the time I was still getting my unemployment benefit, so if I hadn't been they could have, well I could have been struck off, so I was obliged to go there, I turned up very nicely in front of the person who received me, I was in jeans, in a T-shirt, unshaven, I told him straight away that I'd never come to work for him, that I was presenting myself because I was obliged to, but I found that not pertinent, already they've spent some money because they reimbursed my tickets. They have maybe lost a bit of face vis à vis the employer, because the guy sent him someone who wasn't a bit interested, not at all trained for the job and I arrived*

*really like a tramp, because I didn't want them to take me at all, so I did everything I could not to be taken, so there, it was a waste of time for everybody, for me for him for them, for them above all"*  
(Aurélien)

Estelle even has the feeling of being manipulated, deceived. She drew from it a deep bitterness, buffeted between the employment agency and the potential employers.

*"You looked for paid training. I was fooled once, they told me it was going to be paid, it was as medical secretary, so it interested me. I went to the appointment, so it was meeting with several people, and the lady she told us no, it wasn't going to be paid, so it didn't serve any purpose, I'd have lost 5 months, it's from November to April, without having any pay nor anything, so my mother she wouldn't agree. Therefore I dropped it, and at another appointment the lady of the employment agency says to me: " so, how did it go?". And I tell her : "well that didn't go so well, me I can't stay 5 months without getting being paid anything, Then they called the company, and the woman who answered said : "But no, we never said that it wasn't remunerated, of course yes it is remunerated!"*

If one attempts to understand and to conceptualise the diversity of projects from the young unemployed, a job-related project is always a difficult combination between individual expectations and the opportunities offered on the market. The notion of "biographical transaction" of C. Dubar (1991) enables one to point out that everyone constructs their identity in a dialogue between their past history and the future they anticipate, in a "subjective trajectory". The narratives of the search for employment amongst the young unemployed allow us to better understand these patterns of biographical transaction, more or less in continuity with the past work-related identity. This transaction is also relational, often as a linkage with counselling or recruitment specialists, and at times with the spouse. In following this approach, three cases can thereby be identified.

#### ***The projects built in the continuity of the past trajectory***

For the young unemployed who have already worked, the first reaction after the shock of unemployment has passed is to try and find the same kind of position. Repeated failures to in occasion of interviews and discussions with employment advisers can bring them to lower their requirements in terms of remuneration, contract, or to alter the strategy. But beyond the duration of the unemployment, the variables of qualifications and previous work experiences seem largely to explain the differentiation between these projects.

#### ***"I want to stay in the same occupation"***

This project in continuity is frequently found amongst young graduates, who remain quite confident in their chances of success. Their educational qualifications have formalized their membership status. This central role of studies and diplomas in the construction of social and professional identity is particularly marked. Their professional identity could

be defined as a “network identity” (C. Dubar, 1991). The filter of school certification makes them less dependent on uncertainties of the labour market.

*“I try to continue the same occupation as self-employed”*

Some young people with updated technical competencies can consider a project of setting themselves up as consulting experts. But they may also be tempted to continue their occupation with the status of self-employed, in the profession of provision of services to companies (training, human resources, quality). The financial risk of such a project is not negligible. The financial situation of the young person (or household) strongly influences this type of project. Having a spouse who is working, not being in debt, having some resources are factors encouraging such risk taking.

*“I accept being unskilled and I'll try to climb up from within”*

The young self-educated (without a higher education diploma) realize rapidly that the lack of a higher qualification gives a negative signal to companies, in the context of an influx of young graduates. This project is not necessarily linked to the duration of the unemployment, but also the way of interpreting unemployment. Some young people having a very strong relationship with work prefer to look for an unskilled position so as not to remain unemployed, a situation they cannot stand. Some young people strike a balance between unskilled and geographical mobility, some preferring to accept an unskilled post rather than get separated from their family or moving. This bargaining of the employment project takes place especially if one spouse or the other works and does not for the moment foresee sacrificing their career.

*“I accept any kind of job so as to get a foot on the ladder”*

Young people are sometimes obliged at the end of a long period of unemployment to apply for jobs for which they are over qualified. However, they regard this as a standby job, a temporary downgrading, accepted in the framework of a longer-term strategy of regaining full status. This acceptance of downgrading is justified for different reasons according to the individual: to rebuild a network, to break off a long term of unemployment, to confront financial difficulties.

The accounts of job searches allow for seeing the non linear evolution of the projects, which get transformed depending on the opportunities, the meetings and the financial situation. Sometimes the project broadens out progressively starting from the previous occupation, in terms of functions or sector; other times we assist to downgrading projects, often after at least a year's unemployment. The duration of the unemployment seems therefore to explain partially the gradual lowering of requirements, but the self-educated can more easily accept to re-mobilise former occupational identities.

Projects may also be constructed around identities of expectations less in connection with the past trajectory, whether it be through the creation of an enterprise, or a radical change of occupation, which we can call “reconversion”.

### ***Projects constructed in the break-up ; the career junctions***

The young unemployed find themselves sometimes going through a new adolescence, looking for the types of occupation towards which they would like to reconvert, without knowing whether the project is realistic or utopian.

Not all young people are attached to their former occupation or the way of their choosing, or to their initial training, and they can envisage a change of career or of sector, by trying to transfer their competencies towards nearby activities. This possibility is found to have been developed in particular by the young unemployed whose competencies are less marked in terms of sector or speciality.

#### ***"I am looking to set up or take over an enterprise"***

The status of founder of an enterprise is clearly valued by the young unemployed, referring to the positive and dynamic image of the entrepreneur, in line with currently dominant liberal values. Enterprise creation seems to be one of the essential projects of the young in search of employment.

#### ***"I am looking to get myself reconverted, whatever the status"***

Faced with the obligation to "give up complaining over your last job", and to have another project, the young can pick up unfinished primo-insertion projects, or build projects linked to their hobbies, or to their personal values. Once built, this project often encounters the problem of lack of work experience in the field, and therefore of credibility.

#### ***"I'd like to take an open competition for the public service"***

Another reconversion possibility to avoid downgrading could theoretically be also the transition to public sector status. However, because it needs preparation for a contest where the competition is very strong, this project is rarely raised in a credible manner. For the young, this project is both arduous at the intellectual level and not easy to juggle with classical job searching.

### ***The absence of a project : looking for motivations, or discouragement***

#### ***"I took a sabbatical year to find my way"***

Those who have not yet started their job searches occasionally take a bit of time off before launching themselves in another activity project. Some young people assert thus needing several months' breathing space and therefore have not made any approaches for a little while. These young people often stay focused on that past failure, on a job they often idealize. In general therefore they have neither desire, nor motivation to launch themselves in any new job seeking, and take time to "rebuild themselves". Romaric has thus needed to take a few months of "holidays" to recover, to take time to carry out leisure activities and to reorganize his personal life.

## Summary

Twenty young long-term unemployed people between 18 and 34 years old were interviewed in Lyon. To get in touch with these young unemployed and get a meeting, the members of the French team had to visit several times the '*Pôle-emploi*' job centers, finding out those people willing to be interviewed (and their contacts, as search proceeded through snowballing). Final interviews were most often arranged in a café in a relaxed atmosphere, and only rarely in the home of the person being questioned (since some of them were still living with their parents). Recording the conversation posed no problems, while the length of the meetings varied between a min. time of 30 minutes to a max. time of two hours. Generally, interviewees replied with great kindness. As regards gender, the final sample contains interviews with 12 women and 8 men. Attention was specifically focused on "the experience of unemployment" as it was lived subjectively by the interviewees, covering activities linked to the search for job opportunities, but also the daily life of the young unemployed, the degree and the forms of their social exclusion, as well as their relationship with politics. Through the whole of these dimensions, the main aim was to understand how young unemployed people cope with their situation and try to move forward.

Interviewees offered an account of their personal circumstances that can give the impression that there are about as many personal cases as there are respondents. Yet, the way that the unemployment situation is differently experienced can be assessed by relating it to the personal path of the unemployed person, in particular the importance of educational investment, especially at school, that the family has put in the young unemployed person. It was interesting to find out that young graduates who, for the family, represent the first generation to hold degrees, tolerate with more difficulty than others the situation of unemployment, which they tend to view – and with them the whole of the members of their family group (especially their parents) who were expecting the successful output of their educational investments – as unjust and outrageous. Feelings are less intense for those having cultural assets, social relationships, and information on ways of breaking out of unemployment. This type of unemployed tends to view their situation as accidental and temporary. In the case of interviewees of upper classes descent, unemployment is hardly a traumatizing experience: "work isn't everything", as an interviewee explained.

Our interviews also revealed the existence of a specific type of unemployed who will look for work "at any price". In particular, women from the lower classes resist exclusion from working life and thus tend to accept almost any kind of job, particularly those often involving living conditions specific to single people, requiring full availability and low family obligations. In this case, the family path stands out as a crucial factor to understand these women, as they demonstrate a fierce energy and willpower to break out of unemployment at the earliest and at all cost. The intolerable nature of unemployment prevails more strongly when a wide gap is felt between the reality of the labor market and the expectations raised at the outset of studies, especially for the families who see for the first time in their history one of their members acquiring an academic qualification of a 'high' level.

Another crucial finding is that economic assets and social assets offer an effective protection against most deteriorating consequences of unemployment. Children of the higher classes frequently discover when they find themselves without a job, a powerful protection within their family circle and networks of relations. Even when the lack of a diploma enhances relatively their likelihood of unemployment, they can quickly compensate the disadvantageous situation attached to the lack of academic qualifications. In particular, they can more easily avoid the stigmatizing labeling that unemployment generally brings to those who come from lower social classes. Thus, it is amongst the youth coming from well-off families that one finds features close to the model of “inverted unemployment”, as identified by Dominique Schnapper. In this case, unemployed people make the choice of devoting their time to unremunerated activities, such as creative, family or even militant activities. Work is seen as alienating and the individual claims his or her liberation from working and to choose to live differently. This type of unemployed remains, however, uncommon in our discussions, and variables such as gender, age and social affiliation build a strong differentiation in the relation of young people in long-term unemployment. This situation is viewed differently depending on the resources, in terms of financial means, the capacity to adopt alternative activities, the socialization of individuals, and their integration into the family.

Finally, the more the attachment to and identification with work are strong, the more unemployment will weaken the unemployed youth in their own identity. The central role of work in identity building is even more apparent in the absence of work. This can be seen in the case of young unemployed people who conduct their job search along the lines of a full-time occupation. The rules of competition in the labor market are accepted, and unemployment is considered to be a phase to go through with a commitment as equally intense as if it were a job. In this case, the young unemployed persons continue to identify themselves by their occupation or their training. Even without a job, they put their own resources in the service of their prime objective: the return to work.

## Annex 1:

N°	Name	Sex	Age	Educational level	Personal Situation	Children	Nationality	Housing Situation	Persons at Home (Including the interviewee)	Siblings	Parents - personal situation - âge - qualification - current occupation	Religion
1	Adeline C	F.	1987 23 yrs old	Bac +3 Accounting	Marital life	0	Fr.	Renting Social Housing	4 persons -The Spouse - The spouse's two children	- 1 brother (29 yrs) - 1 sister (18 yrs) - 1 half brother (15 yrs)	Divorced Father : 50 yrs, CAP in cooking, bus driver Mother : 48 yrs. no qualifications, carer.	Atheist
2	Romarc J	M.	1983 27yrs	Bac + 4 Commercial college	Single, Lives in a joint tenancy	0	Fr.	Renting	2 persons - The joint tenant	0	Married Father: 55 yrs, physiotherapist Mother: 52 yrs, Dentist	Atheist
3	Laura B	F.	1991 20 yrs	BEP hairdresser	Single	0	Fr.	Renting Social Housing	3 persons - mother - young brother	- 1brother (27 yrs) - 1 brother (11 yrs)	Widow Mother: jobless (Cotorep – handicapped rehabilitation)	Atheist
4	Estelle DC	F.	1987 23 yrs	Bac A	Single	0	Franco-Spanish	Renting Social Housing	2 person - Mother	1 sister (19 yrs)	Divorced Father : 46 yrs, bus driver Mother : 42 yrs, factory worker.	Catholic
5	Karim N.	M.	1990 21 yrs	BEP level, industrial electronics	Single	0	Fr.	Renting Social Housing	4 persons - Mother - 1 brother - 1 sister	- 1 brother (31 yrs) - 1 brother (19 yrs) - 1 sister (13 yrs)	Divorced Father: 61 yrs, retired Mother; 51 yrs, jobless (occasional housework)	Muslim
6	Laurent C.	M.	1976	5th	Married	2:	Fr.	Renting Social	4 persons -	7 brothers	Divorced Father	Atheist

			34 yrs	level Lifelong Learning equivalence BTS MUC		11 yrs and 9 yrs		Housing	spouse - 2 children	and sisters Between 20 and 45 yrs	(no contacts) Mother : 70 yrs, retired	
7	Imène H.	F.	1989 21 yrs	BAC+1 commerce	Married	0	Algerian In process of naturalisation	Renting is being lodged in social housing)	4 persons - Father-in-law - Mother-in-law - Husband	17 brothers and sisters From 13 to 50 yrs	Remarried Father 68 yrs, company manager for distribution of agricultural material Mother 43 yrs, jobless.	Muslim
8	Laure N	F.	1991 19 yrs	Vocational diploma in Sales (BEP)	Single Mother	1boy (18 months)	Fr.	Renting	2 persons - child	4 sisters including a half-sister, 25-23-18-9 yrs.	Divorced: Father 75 yrs, Congolese (RDC) retired, Mother: Congolese (RDC), Jobless	Atheist
9	Nouriati B	F.	1991 19 yrs	Vocational diploma (BEP) in maintenance	Single	0	Fr	Renting Social housing	8 persons Grandfather Grandmother mother 5 uncles (from 6 to 22 yrs.)	3	Father : 50 yrs Mother : 42 yrs.	Atheist
10	Fanny MB	F.	1990 19 ans	Bac STG accounts	Marital life	0	Fr	Renting Social housing	Unstabilised home life. Lives with the grandparents (8 persons), the aunt or with friends.	1 sister	Father deceased Mother : 39 yrs	Evangelist.
11	Maxime B	M.	1988 22 yrs	Bac Level	Single	0	Fr	Renting	4 persons - Father - Stepmother - 1 half-sister	1 sister 20 yrs 1 half-sister 10 yrs	Divorced. Placed with the DAS then fostered in a family; Father:45 yrs, foreman roofer,	Atheist

											Mother : 45 yrs, factory team leader (management)	
12	Julie N.	F.	1985 25 yrs	Bac +4 in Communi- cations	Marital Life	0	Fr	Renting	2 persons - spouse	1 brother 1 sister	Divorced Father : 53 yrs Mother : 51 yrs	Atheist
13	Stéphanie B.	F.	1976 34 yrs	Vocational Bac (cabinet maker)	Single	2	Fr	Renting Social housing	4 persons - 2 children - a girlfriend co- tenant	2 half- brothers (34 and 45 yrs) 1 half-sister (46 yrs)	Divorced Father: deceased Mother : Employee at IKEA	Atheist
14	Kim V.	F.	1982 28 yrs	CAP in dressmaking	Single	0	Franco - Italian	renting	2 persons - 1girlfriend co- tenant	2 brothers (25 and 27 yrs)	Married Father : 55 yrs printing worker, Mother 56 yrs. Cleaner	Atheist ( Catholic parents)
15	Aurélien D	M.	1978 32 yrs	Bac level Accounting	Married	2	Fr	Home owner	4 persons - woman - 2 children	- 1 half-sister (48 yrs) - 1 sister (36 yrs) 1brother (43y)	Married : 75 yrs, retired, former shopkeeper Mother : 66 yrs, jobless	Atheist ( Catholic parents)
16	Charlie A	M.	1992 18 yrs	Vocational diploma BEP mechanic	single	0	Fr.	renting	5 persons - parents - 2 brothers	- 1 brother : 15 yrs ; - 1 brother: 17yrs	Married Father : 39 yrs machinist, Mother: 38 yrs, jobless.	Atheist
17	Julien F.	M.	1987 23 yrs	Bac electrician	single	0	Fr	Homeowner (p arents)	3 persons parent s	0	Cohabiting ; Father : 43yrs shopkeeper Mother : 42 yrs, shopkeeper	Atheist
18	Elodie BM	F.	1989 21 yrs	Bac STT (Technology)	Single	0	Fr	Renting Social housing	4 persons - Mother - 2 sisters	- 1 sister:15 yrs ; - 1 sister: 18 yrs	Father :Unknown M other: 41 yrs, distance teleworker	Atheist

19	Enzo B	M.	1984 26 yrs	BTS : IT Management	Marital Life	0	Fr	Renting	2 persons - cohabiting	- 1 brother (24 yrs)	Divorced - remarried Father : 47 yrs, employee of the territorial public Service (editor) Mother : 46 yrs ; jobless	Atheist ( Catholic parents)
20	Maeva L	F.	1983 27 ans	CAP cookery	Single Mother	1	Fr	Is in foster care	2 persons - 1child (2 yrs)	Not known	Unknown	Atheist

## **National Report Sweden**

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***Tuula Bergqvist, Jennifer Hobbins, Birgitta Eriksson***

### **Introduction**

This report presents the results from the YOUNEX WP4 qualitative interview study dealing with the social and political exclusion of unemployed young people. The analysis is based on 20 interviews with long-term unemployed people living in Karlstad, Sweden and surrounding areas. The interviewees were unemployed persons aged between 20 and 35 years who have been looking for a job for one year or longer. The interviews were conducted by two researchers working on the project during 2010.

Some of the interviews were conducted with persons that responded to our earlier WP3 survey and had agreed to be contacted again for face-to-face interviews. We had a list of around 30 names, but experienced some difficulties in arranging the interviews – most of these persons had already found jobs, or we failed to make contact with them, as their telephones had been disconnected, for example. Another problem that occurred was that after we contacted some of them and set a date and place for the interview they failed to show up. After we had gone through the list of names, half of the interviews still had to be conducted, so we obtained more respondents by asking the first interviewees to ask their unemployed friends if they would be prepared to be interviewed and so on. By also using our own contacts and the employment services, we managed to obtain the required number of interviews.

We interviewed 13 men and seven women. We have only two women in the age category of 18 to 25 years, but we managed to fill the quota for the age category of 26 to 35 years with five women. We interviewed five men in the younger and eight in the older age category. The background of the interviewees varies as regards education, work experience, family relations and nationality.

The interviews included questions about the persons' unemployment situations, starting with the backgrounds of the interviewees, moving on to their financial situations and their relations with the employment office, before continuing with questions on their social and political lives and ending with questions about their plans for the future. All of the interviews were recorded and an average interview lasted between one and one and a half hours. The interviews were then analysed, using some of the techniques and procedures of established theory (Corbin & Strauss 2008) to identify central concepts and categories from the data. While working with the analysis memos were written to relate the emerging categories and concepts to each other.

The report is divided into six parts. After this introduction we start with presenting the problems faced by long-term unemployed young people in Sweden. We continue with presenting unemployment-related problems in different spheres of life. The third part discusses unemployment and social exclusion and is followed by a part describing unemployment and political exclusion. In the fifth part we account for how the unemployed cope with their situation – we discuss their coping strategies – while the last part concerns issues related to unemployment which we deem to be of particular importance.

### **Unemployment and social exclusion**

Employment is a central prerequisite for social integration, as has long been known. Our need for social contacts, regular activities, a time structure and participation in achieving collective aims are fulfilled by employment, for example. Employment fulfils these human needs to different extents, largely depending on how well one manages to attend to these needs in one's spare time<sup>11</sup>. Consequently, a loss of employment means more than just losing work and income for most of the interviewees, particularly for the long-term unemployed. Unemployment may involve a disintegration of existing social networks, a lack of social recognition and a loss of the spatial and temporal structures of everyday life. Losing a job puts one at risk of being shifted to the edge of society or even ending up completely outside of it – one becomes socially isolated.

Social exclusion (isolation) may also be called a limited world of experiences. This limitation may be experienced in different spheres of life, as we describe below. The limitations appear clearly when the unemployed do not have enough social contacts and increase when they cannot get the required social support from the contacts they do have left.

One's experience of unemployment will probably be affected by the degree of emotional support one may get from friends and family, as well as by the kind of social networks one has outside the workplace. The extent of financial hardship one suffers will also influence the experience of being unemployed<sup>12</sup>. We can clearly see that people miss having routines, activities and a social network when they are unemployed. All of our respondents described passivity and not having anything to do as problems they experience. Earlier studies<sup>13</sup> have shown that it is harder to maintain a meaningful social identity without work, and one may experience difficulties in finding other meaningful social activities to participate in. Being unemployed may lead to a loss of social status, which in turn leads to the development of a feeling of failure. Coupled with the loss of

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<sup>11</sup> Jahoda M (1982) *Employment and unemployment. A social-psychological analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>12</sup> Nordenmark M & M Strand (1998) Towards a sociological Understanding of Mental Well-being among the Unemployed – The Role of Economic and Psychosocial Factors. *Sociology*, August 1999 vol. 33 no. 3, pp. 577-597

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

social networks the situation may lead to social isolation, especially in combination with financial difficulties.

None of the unemployed feel that they are completely without social contacts or economic resources, yet they feel that they are limited in these regards. It is quite obvious that unemployment limits the everyday life experiences of the concerned. Any such experience of limitation on its own, or in combination with other experiences, may lead to a retreat from social life. When needs which are usually met by employment failed be fulfilled in another way there is an increased risk for social exclusion. Below we will describe the unemployment-related problems experienced by the respondents in different spheres of life.

### **Unemployment-related problems in different spheres of life**

Our results show that the problems related to or resulting from unemployment are connected to the very central elements of people's everyday lives. Below, we describe how these problems are related to the spheres of the labour market, finances, social contacts, emotions the rhythm of life and plans for the future.

#### ***The labour market***

##### *Attitudes toward employment and unemployment*

Work has never been accorded so much importance as in today's industrial society. At least initially, the importance of work does not reside as much in work *per se*, but rather in the security offered by receiving a regular income. Children are socialized to understand the importance of paid work by seeing how their parents go to work and are expected to educate themselves with the goal of getting a job so that they are able to retire later – after a long working life. Through this we assign an even greater importance to paid work: it gives us an identity. Today the first question asked by a new social contact often concerns one's profession, which functions as a "reciprocal identification pattern through which we are able to evaluate the personal attributes and knowledge, as well as the economic and social standing which are associated with this profession"<sup>14</sup>.

This has clearly been shown by the respondents in this study. Not being able to present oneself as belonging to a certain profession is experienced as shameful and to be avoided as far as possible. One of the respondents chooses to present himself as a "musician interested in society", while another prefers to make a joke about being unemployed in order to move the focus away from an uncomfortable situation where he feels inferior or worthless to another topic of conversation between equals.

*Well, you introduce yourself with your name, right, and then you try to make a joke of being unemployed. No, no, you are between jobs, or, you know, you joke that you've got something going, or you lie about having an interview scheduled or a meeting you need to*

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<sup>14</sup> Beck, U (1986) *Risksamhället. På väg mot en annan modernitet*. Göteborg: Daidalos. p.224

*attend or... It's not exactly highly regarded anywhere to be unemployed, so you try to avoid saying that you don't have a job and try to find another excuse instead.*

The view of work as a virtue is prevalent in the Swedish welfare state. Here citizenship and its associated civil, political and social rights are indistinguishable from duties like working and paying taxes, especially in social politics. This point of view prevails in the entire Swedish society due to the combination of a long history of influence by the working classes, a strong trade union movement and long-standing social-democratic politics<sup>15</sup>.

All of the interviewees felt that next of kin, such as parents or a partner, are understanding and helpful, for example by giving them information about jobs they may possibly apply to. A feeling of inferiority or inadequacy most often results from meeting new people. One of the respondents describes an incident when a new acquaintance asked him why he is unemployed, despite being both smart and social. In the following quotation he expresses a societal problematic as far as prejudices about unemployed people and the blame for unemployment is concerned:

*It's things like these people think about, which determine whether people get jobs. And I mean, I've also been working, I know of course that there is... This is a sign of a lack of understanding and it's a sign that they in some way...lay the blame at the door of the unemployed person, not at the workplace which had no space for him or her. It's a... I see it as a sign of where the blame lies. And a friend will never say this to me, but he may think it.*

This idea that the cause of unemployment is the individual is reflected in the interviews, where it is clear that the unemployed blame themselves for their situation. The shame is related not just to one's own expectations of having a job and income after finishing school or further education, but also to the expectation which "the others", those with jobs, have of the unemployed.

The power structure of society is articulated through all interactions where one actor is superior to the other. The inferior actor sees him/herself and his/her situation through the eyes of the superior actor and seeks the superior's approval. The concept of asymmetric roll assumption, which clarifies the uneven distribution of power, was originally developed to describe the position of women in society<sup>16</sup>. Yet asymmetric roll assumption may be observed in different contexts where one party is in a subordinate position to another party – an inferiority which the unemployed experience in relation to those who are employed. Even if it is unusual for the unemployed to be directly confronted with prejudices or reproaches, they are well aware of the importance of working and supporting themselves. When they see themselves through others' eyes,

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<sup>15</sup> Johansson, H & Hornemann Möller, I (red.) (2009) *Aktivering – arbetsmarknadspolitik och socialt arbete i förändring*. Malmö: Liber

<sup>16</sup> Holmberg, C (1993) *Det kallas kärlek*. Danmark, Alfabeta.

they see people who fail to do their share. One respondent said that he “thinks he leeches off society sometimes”.

Another cause of feeling inferior has its origin in the unemployed person’s financial situation, which, as mentioned earlier, is described as the most straining result of unemployment:

*It's of course mostly for your own sake that you want to have a job, precisely because money is so...big and important in today's society.*

### Definition of unemployment

The unemployed people who participated in this study represent, as described in the introduction to the report, a variety of different types of involvement in the labour market. Some have never worked, while others have had many full-time jobs, if only for limited times. Yet the interviewees present a common definition of unemployment.

*Even if I'm employed by two businesses, I'm not guaranteed a job. Therefore I regard myself as being unemployed.*

*You know, I don't know when you can say you're completely unemployed. Because that's also a question of definition. I've had jobs, but they haven't called me in to work for them. So on-call work, that's about the only job you can get today, it seems. Most of the time permanent, full-time jobs are out of the question. And...then I've had a job, but they haven't called me in to work for them, for example. So to be unemployed...I was actually unemployed before, a year and a half ago. I worked so much that I managed financially. But I haven't been working full-time.*

Employment is therefore associated with having a full-time job with a fixed monthly income. The respondents describe their experiences with doing on-call work, where they sometimes work longer than full-time hours, but which still cannot be regarded as “jobs”, due to the insecurity of these positions. What will happen next week, next month? Here the insecurity is not primarily related the fact that on-call or temporary jobs – especially those with hourly remuneration – have at best a tenuous relationship with the social security system, or to the lack of in-service training, or to not having an opportunity to further one’s career or getting promotions and improving one’s income. Instead the insecurity is grounded in the financial unpredictability. The interviewees see temporary employment, regardless of how many hours one works, as equal to unemployment, since these jobs do not give one a set, full-time income on which one may base a budget.

### Other problems than unemployment itself

In the media “the unemployed person” is often portrayed as an individual whose only problem is unemployment. If this assumption were true, the problems experienced by the unemployed could easily be solved by providing them with employment. The

underlying assumption of this argument is that the unemployed have the same (good) chances of obtaining jobs and retaining employment. However, this is not true for everyone.

In our material there are different descriptions of problems of various grades which negatively influence one's chances of getting a job, or even completely overshadow the problem of unemployment. Yet, these difficulties are not always visible. One respondent tells about the problems he experienced in school, about the fact that he failed to complete school because he had reading difficulties. He was regarded as lazy and the underlying cause of his problems had never been investigated. After several years of unemployment his case administrator at Arbetsförmedlingen (the Swedish Public Employment Service) encouraged him to get help and then it was finally discovered that he suffers from dyslexia. Sebastian, who had experienced great self-doubt until then, was relieved.

Dyslexia is a type of invisible disability, which certainly is minor, but far from unimportant in an information society. Yet its effects may be mitigated in time with the correct assistance. Another respondent describes how his much later diagnosed neuropsychiatric condition (ADD) created problems in school and in his working life. Amongst other things serious sleep disorders made some working hours impossible to keep to. He also experienced difficulties concentrating, something which created enormous problems: in part with possibly completing further education and in part with performing repetitive tasks at work, where his lack of concentration could directly place him and others in danger. His experiences have resulted in stays at psychiatric clinics due to depression, as well as a prolonged and ongoing rehabilitation process. A third respondent had grown up under difficult circumstances at home which caused her to have major problems, such as depression, but also difficulties with social interaction, one of the skills most highly regarded in a working environment by employers as well as colleagues.

The unemployed young people with immigrant backgrounds experience completely different types of problems. Here the Swedish language is simultaneously seen as the biggest obstacle as well as the key to the Swedish labour market. It is seen to open doors to internships and other types of experiences on the labour market, which may lead to permanent employment.

These young people have very different problems, which influence them and their future on the labour market to different degrees. Yet they have in common that their problems are on a completely different level than the mere lack of permanent employment.

### Finances

*Constantly worrying about your finances can really wear you down psychologically.*

The interviewees mentioned that their financial situation and the resulting worries are the biggest problems they experience in connection to their unemployment. Most young people have not managed to "work themselves up" to receiving high, income-based

unemployment benefits and instead receive lower benefits – often the basic benefit – or their periods of receiving unemployment benefit have expired and they are living on social allowances.

In essence, the Swedish unemployment insurance system comprises two parts: a basic benefit, to which all unemployed citizens are entitled, as well as an income-based benefit based on earlier gainful employment. The maximum basic benefit is SEK 320 per day. This amount is indirectly related to earlier gainful employment and is paid to those who had full-time employment before becoming unemployed. The amount is proportionally reduced in relation to fewer hours worked before becoming unemployed. The income-based benefit, for which young people without work experience only rarely qualify, may at most be 80% of the income earned before becoming unemployed during the first 200 days of unemployment. For the next 100 days it is at most 70% of the income earned before. Parents of minors are entitled the benefit based on 70% of earlier income for a further 150 days. Most of the respondents participate in an employment initiative for long-term unemployed young people called the “youth job guarantee”. In this programme the benefit is even lower: after only 100 days the benefit is reduced to 70% of previous income and then to 65%. Thus the youngest unemployed people experience more financial difficulties than those who are over 25 years of age.

Despite receiving relatively high benefits, in an international context, the unemployed are subject to financial restrictions. They manage day-to-day living, some of them better than others. However, all of the interviewees have told stories about how difficulties arise when they have unplanned expenses, such as when a car breaks down or in cases of illness.

*Two months ago I couldn't go to the dentist. I had acute pain, I had a big, ugly boil on the roof of my mouth and...and I had no money to go there, so I had to wait for it to go away on its own. [...] And that costs, would've cost SEK 1000. Sure, my mum offered to loan me the money, but...I already owe her money and I don't really want to get into more debts. It's smart not to get into debt when you are unemployed.*

Despite his acute illness this respondent felt that he could not borrow more money, because he knew that he would be unable to pay it back. Although financial help from friends and family is important in enabling the unemployed to pay for day-to-day or unplanned expenses, it is also associated with moral guilt which becomes a burden – and which comes in addition to the financial debt. Notwithstanding the view that parents have a certain responsibility to assist their adult children financially, the feeling of “sponging” is deeply rooted and is associated with debt. The wish to cope independently is clearly expressed, but due to the limited resources constituted by unemployment benefits, the possibilities of achieving this are slim.

Beyond daily expenses the interviewees feel that they are unable to indulge themselves with something extra. Celebrations such as birthdays and Christmas may be exceptions, since the interviewees then receive money instead of presents which enables them to

buy clothes or something they usually would not be able to afford. As they are permanently living on limited resources, unexpected earnings are often invested in “unnecessary” things like clothes or games, which in turn sometimes makes the interviewees feel guilty (“I should’ve saved it for an emergency instead”). This can lead to a general feeling of depression about their financial situations.

From the interviews it is clear that the desire to cope comfortably with their everyday expenses is very strong and this includes the wish to save money to cope with unplanned expenses like the ones mentioned above, or for example paying an unexpectedly high bill or a doctor’s appointment. Dreams about travelling have also been mentioned. The unemployed spoke about travelling for different reasons. Holidays were mentioned as the most important reason, as well as being able to travel to visit friends and family in other places, but mobility is also important when looking for employment. Thoughts about jobs and seeking employment are often present in the back of their minds in most contexts and were often mentioned, not just as vague thoughts, but also as concrete plans.

Yet the financial limitations described by the respondents do not only concern money. Relating oneself and one’s own situation to the reigning norms and values in Swedish society means that differences in living conditions appear starkly, something which emerged in all the interviews, irrespective of the respondents’ class background. The next quote describes pleasure trips, something which this respondent thinks most (employed) people take for granted:

*There are things we in Sweden actually take for granted: like being able to go to Liseberg [an amusement park] once a year or being able to go on a charter trip for a week or something.*

Here the orientation towards the middleclass is clear and the discrepancy in living conditions is experienced negatively. In addition to the feeling that he cannot live like “everyone else”, the difference also generates a feeling of guilt towards close friends and family members who are indirectly affected by his financial limitations. This is described in more detail in the section headed “Feelings associated with pressure and shame”.

### Social contacts

Unemployment can, and usually does, have an effect on one’s ability to keep in contact with other people and to continue to sustain one’s previously existing social networks. The problems derived from unemployment are mainly related to one’s financial situation – for instance a lack of money and a diminishing interaction circuit – and stems from the lack of opportunity to get social support.

Social support reduces the effects of unemployment and influences how the unemployed cope with their situations. It is important to have family and/or friends to share the experiences with and to be able to go out and join various activities. Even if the experience of unemployment varies between people, it is important for everybody to be able to maintain their social networks, as these can compensate for the social functions of employment.

The main problem experienced in maintaining one's social connections when unemployed is often a *lack of money*. To be able to take part in social activities and for example join one's former colleagues for some drinks or a movie, one has to have money. Financial problems caused by low levels of income during unemployment can restrict social activities and may in a worst case scenario lead to social isolation.

Money is often seen as a prerequisite for taking part in social activities and keeping one self occupied. In the opinion of the interviewees there is a strong connection between free time activities and the money at their disposal. One of the unemployed describes the situation as follows:

*If you had money when being unemployed you could do so many things. Then you could do sports and travel and go to festivals and live concerts and exercise and you could do anything, which you can't do now! But those two usually don't go hand in hand.*

Because of their restricted economy the unemployed need to prioritize:

Q. What would you want to afford? What is it that you miss the most?

A. *To do sports and exercise, that is what I miss the most actually, that would be very healthy, because you feel very good doing it.*

This citation implies that feeling good is not such a usual occurrence in the everyday life of an unemployed person. According to our material, unemployment quite often renders one homebound, trying to figure out what to do. Even though one might have the money to go out for a cup of coffee or to the movies, one probably will not have anybody to share these activities with, as everyone else is working. Therefore losing a job and receiving low levels of income can cause both mental and physical illnesses.

It can clearly be seen from our material that unemployment, especially long-term unemployment, diminishes everyday social networks. When one loses a job, one's social contacts are automatically reduced. Even when one stays in touch with old colleagues, contact lessens over time and one no longer shares in the common world of the working place. Work automatically fulfils many social needs; needs which are no longer being fulfilled when you are unemployed. Through employment individuals are linked to goals that are anchored in a collective and activity is enforced. At work one talks about things with colleagues which one does not discuss at home – especially not if one lives alone. Even if one is living with somebody one does not discuss the same topics with him or her as one talks about at work. During their unemployment many people develop a pattern – the more they stay at home doing nothing, the less motivated they are to do anything.

*Finally you can't do anything, sometimes you just sit and wait for time to pass.*

The importance of having someone to discuss one's situation with clearly emerged from the interviews. Having the possibility of discussing their situation may prevent unemployed people from shutting themselves off from their surroundings. Access to a

functioning social network where one may get support helps one to cope with negative episodes in one's life. It is also clear that friends who are or have been unemployed are able to provide better support than friends who have no personal experience of unemployment. Friends who have been unemployed may appear to be more understanding of the problems an unemployed person encounters. Amongst unemployed friends one does not feel abnormal. The effects of unemployment may be mitigated if there are more unemployed people of a similar age living in the same place. A certain normalization of unemployment takes place, which may diminish the feelings of shame that are caused by being unemployed.

Our material shows quite clearly that there is a risk that unemployment may reduce the quantity of social contacts through lack of money and through the reduction of social networks. More specifically, there is a risk that the number of spontaneous contacts one usually encounters in everyday life will be reduced, since so many unemployed people are lonely and do not participate in special activities. When one is unemployed, one fails to come into contact with people one "normally" meets, for example at the working place or when one goes shopping. An unemployed person's social contacts are exclusively people he/she chooses to spend time with. On the contrary, in the general course of things one has both welcome and less welcome social contacts at a working place or amongst one's classmates. Spontaneous contacts may widen one's horizon through new interests and fresh topics of conversation.

However, the quality of social contacts does not necessarily have to suffer. There seems to be several possibilities for good and functioning social contacts even for a long-term unemployed person. The unemployed can rely on their families and their closer friends to provide them with the support needed.

### Emotions

#### ❖ *Disappointment*

School, possible further education, a job and family followed each other chronologically in earlier generations and through socialization the individual is expected to follow such a "normal biography". When the individual fails to fulfil these expectations disappointment develops, which is often aimed at various authorities. Our data shows that disappointment developed in an early stage in those cases where the respondents failed to complete their schooling with the expected results, finished with a poor or incomplete academic record or failed to complete school at all. This disappointment recurs when respondents embark on their working lives. In this case the unemployed person is disappointed in himself:

*I'm not really satisfied with how I managed my education in gymnasiet [upper secondary school], now, afterwards, I feel that I could've bitten the bullet and done a bit better.*

According to the "normal biography" one's working life should start after one has completed school. Although their experiences with looking for employment have been varied and include both successful and less successful attempts, the interviewees share

a disappointment in employers who fail to respond to job applications. This failure creates a degree of mistrust and also decreases their motivation to continue searching for employment. The applicant's self-confidence may also be affected: neither the effort that has gone into writing an application and completing the application process, nor the self-revelation which takes place as a matter of course during the application procedure has been treated respectfully. Disappointment also occurs when an on call or temporary job fails to lead to permanent employment.

According to LAS (the Swedish Employment Protection Act), an employee is entitled to a permanent appointment if he/she has been employed for a period of five years by the employer: either as a general, temporary employee or as a substitute for a period equivalent to a combined total of at least two years' full-time employment<sup>17</sup>. One of the respondents describe two different instances when he has been employed as a substitute for two years and hoped to receive a permanent appointed, where the temporary positions were abruptly ended days before the two-year period has been reached:

*I worked for exactly two years and then...they appointed a new temporary employee they could keep for another two years. So they do as they please.*

This statement reflects a sense of impotence and resignation which is also expressed in other contexts where the unemployed experience a lack of control over their lives. As mentioned before, the feeling that one is being forced to do without (not only material possessions) leads to impotence and frustration. Here it is not just the inability to make one's own decisions that is at issue, but also a feeling of being left at the mercy of "the system". Sebastian, one of the respondents, describes how he is suppressing his desire to have children, because he wants to earn a secure income first. He deplores the fact that his unemployment supersedes his own wishes as the most important deciding factor in planning his family's future.

Finally, disappointment is also connected to expectations that further education, work experience or completed labour market training will lead to permanent employment. Labour market measures are seen to have a positive influence on the respondents' social lives, while different factors contribute to the fact that permanent jobs fail to be forthcoming.

*I think for the most part the benefits are more on the social front, rather than in the training itself.*

*Just before, they said there were three or four thousand vacancies. But then the recession came while I was attending, then all the truck drivers were fired, so there was no job for me. So when I completed the training there were no jobs available at all.*

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<sup>17</sup> Lag om Anställningsskydd (SFS 2007:391) is the Swedish name for the Swedish Employment Protection Act

The recession provides a structural explanation for the fact that the training failed to lead to a job. Individual explanations often concern the degree to which one is employable, which to a great extent is related to one's ability to adapt, i.e. a personal skill which makes it easier for the individual to adapt to different situations<sup>18</sup>. However, being suitably qualified for a job is also about having (relevant) education and appropriate work experience. When the latter criterion is fulfilled, the expectations of success, i.e. getting a permanent job, are great. When one fails to achieve this it leads to disappointment and incredulity:

*I've actually been to a job interview. I've worked as a telemarketer in the telecoms industry before, so I thought that's great, I can do this, you know. And I think it's really fun to work in a shop, that's what I've got most experience doing... But then she called and said, no, sorry, you didn't get the job... I think she said I don't have enough experience, or that was her excuse, And that was strange, because I've worked with sales in telecommunications before and I've worked in a shop for a year or something before...so I don't think she made her decision based on experience, I think she lied to my face.*

#### ❖ Loneliness

One of the difficult consequences of unemployment in a social context is the feeling of isolation which may arise when social contact is reduced. This is particularly experienced by the unemployed whose social contacts have jobs and therefore are unavailable a social company for large parts of the day. At the same time it so happens that many friends who are unavailable on working days are still available online from their jobs for parts of these days.

Even the contact between unemployed people may be reduced. As described under "Rhythm of Life", time is often seen to be passing more slowly and to become more drawn-out, because there is no reason to hurry and the tempo of daily routines, which tends to be high for working people, decreases. This may even result in less-frequent physical meetings with other people.

Yet we could observe how the new social media may change the situation somewhat. Being connected to the Internet may reduce feelings of isolation, since it provides one with more opportunities to communicate with other people; not only with established acquaintances, but also with new contacts, as well as with those who are geographically remote. The respondents use a great variety of ways of communicating online, for example by talking or chatting, or by sending different types of messages on a variety of forums. Less active effort is required for online communication than when keeping in touch in a "traditional way", where two parties call each other, decide on a time and

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<sup>18</sup> Crespo Suárez E & Serrano Pascual A (2004) The EU's concept of activation for young people: towards a new social contract? In: Serrano Pascual, A (ed.) *Are activation models converging in Europe?* Brussels: ETUI.

place to meet and have to keep this in mind and perhaps prepare for the meeting by dressing in a presentable way, looking at the public transport timetables or making sure that there is enough fuel in the car before they are finally able to meet. Using the Internet makes it easier to keep in touch, because many of the traditional stages involved in meeting someone may be omitted, which may lead to more frequent interaction.

Another aspect is that virtual contact allows for the modification of the self. Positive aspects may be emphasized, while those which are seen as negative may be hidden in a manner which is made impossible by direct contact. This may improve self-esteem, which is often rather low. By for example getting involved in online role-playing games, several functions are simultaneously fulfilled. The possibility to develop skills and knowledge which are respected in these circles is experienced very positively, not least because the unemployed seldom are met with respect in meetings with the outside world. Furthermore, playing games keeps one occupied and provides one with positive experiences.

*I play World of Warcraft in my spare time. It's of course rather...of course rather depressing to do that actually, but it's quite nice when you don't have anything else to do...it sort of fills your day quite well and then you've got something to look forward to and so.*

“Sitting at the computer” does therefore not necessarily result from laziness. Instead the computer is used by young people to maintain their social contacts. It also provides them with an occupation which may contribute to personal development and improvement of skills and abilities. Particularly playing games may have unwelcome consequences when there are no external timeframes to limit the time spent at the computer. In some cases this led to game addiction, or to transforming an originally fun occupation into a demanding duty. In this context, giving up playing games was experienced as a relief:

*There was a lot less pressure, I had much less...pressure on me. Because you feel that you had, that you were expected to perform in front of your online friends.*

#### ❖ *Pressure and shame*

As described above, economic difficulties may lead the unemployed to feel ashamed of their situations. Combined with a lack of social support from their environment, the unemployed may suffer psychologically when feeling that they fail to live up to expectations. The support given by friends and family and their understanding for the situation may lessen the feelings of shame. We also observe how feelings of shame and pressure from outside are closely related to each other. Pressure from outside may originate from various sources; even from those who are the ones giving social support to the unemployed, i.e. their closest friends and family members.

Unemployed people may experience *pressure from parents* if their parents constantly urge them to look for employment. The appeals in themselves may not always be negative, and may just as well function as encouragement. Yet constant appeals which

remind the unemployed that they fail to fulfil the expectations of their surroundings reinforce the already-present feeling of shame they experience.

The unemployed may also experience *pressure from friends*. It is clear that unemployed as well as employed friends may contribute to intensified feelings of shame. Unemployed people reap many advantages from keeping company with others who are unemployed and by having friends in similar situations, as described above. However, when an unemployed friend succeeds in finding a job it may result in an obviously negative situation as the feeling of shame is reinforced. Thus a positive situation with is a shared predicament that is not regarded as abnormal is exchanged for negative feelings of pressure to also find a job and not be left unemployed. The pressure to do things, to go out or travel, may intensify the feelings of shame experienced by the unemployed with working friends and may even lead the unemployed person to experience envy.

Additional *pressure* may be felt to come *from employers*. It could be important to show your worth when looking for employment. It is clearly indicated that the unemployed may experience stress about not being sufficiently extroverted or socially competent during a job interview. The belief in one's abilities decreases if one has been prepared to work for a long period, but nobody seems interested in the skills one offers. It is offensive when a workplace fails to let job seekers know if their applications have been successful, something which seems to occur often. In this way the feelings of shame and incompetence are reinforced

It is also clear from our material that the unemployed experience *pressure from the Swedish Public Employment Service*. Naturally the employment service makes demands and has expectations of job seekers, but the interviewees may feel that the demands and expectations are unreasonable. One of the respondents states that it is unreasonable to expect that one looks for work eight hours a day. One fails to fulfil the demands and expectations in this regard, just as one fails to find employment. The unemployed risk falling into a vicious circle of guilt and shame for once again not behaving like society expects them to.

Finally, the unemployed may experience *pressure from the society*. In Swedish society the norm is to be employed and when one is unemployed one should not in any way be satisfied with one's situation. Those who do not view their unemployment as purely negative, but instead looks upon it positively, may experience contradictory feelings of guilt. It is not socially acceptable to openly admit that one is partially enjoying unemployment. The unemployed may also experience *pressure from the media*. Information and incidences highlighted by the media, as well as the picture painted of the unemployed in the media may reinforce existing feelings of shame, if these do not correspond to the way the unemployed person feels or to how he/she wants to be perceived.

❖ *Lack of confidence*

*The feeling of not being capable of anything makes me feel worthless. [...] And I can't expect other people to like me if I don't like myself first.*

Long-term unemployment may easily result in a lack of self-confidence. Over time and after receiving several “sorry, not this time”-replies when one applies for jobs, it is hard to retain self-belief whilst preparing to receive the next negative reply. If one is not confident in oneself and one’s abilities, it is impossible to show others who one is and what one can do. One of the unemployed expresses this as follows:

A lack of confidence is not only related to problems with getting a job. If one feels very unhappy with oneself, it will probably influence all relations with other people and maybe even make it impossible to find a loved one.

From the interviews it also emerges how the unemployed try to deal with applying again and again when their applications are not even dignified with replies:

*It's really bad, almost nobody lets you know if you got it or not. [...]I've even gone around in town and submitted my CV in person and asked them to speak with the human resources manager and stuff like that, so I've met most people where I've applied, but I still haven't heard anything. At lots of places I've applied three or four times and I still haven't received an answer.*

Not receiving answers to their applications seems to have two effects on the interviewees. Firstly they experience a feeling of being unable to “let go” of the jobs they applied for (or of the potential employers) in order to continue. An application remains an incomplete affair which gives hope while simultaneously creating frustration. Secondly, the feeling that “companies treat you like rubbish”, as it is often described in the interviews, contributes to depression and in the long run it leads to decreased motivation to continue looking for employment.

The above is concerned with being treated with respect. We consider receiving negative replies, but from the interviews it becomes clear that many of the unemployed apply for jobs despite knowing that they lack the required qualifications. Nevertheless every refusal is experienced as an attack on one’s self-esteem.

The respondents feel that the jobs they are interested in and which they can imagine themselves doing often require training or qualifications they do not possess, while the jobs they would be qualified for involves tasks which they have difficulties with, undesirable working conditions and low remuneration or fail to offer enough intellectual stimulation. Yet it is clear from our data that the respondents imagine that a permanent job could change their situations and they say that they are prepared to take pretty much any job, as long as it is permanent.

#### ❖ *Resignation*

Resignation is a kind of lack of motivation, a feeling of giving up. Resignation may appear in different stages, depending on one’s personality and what one has

experienced in life. For an unemployed person who has lost self-confidence and is feeling shame over his/her situation it is easy to develop self-destructive life patterns, such as staying alone at home doing nothing instead of going out and meeting friends, or staying in bed all day.

Friends and family may encourage one to find a job, but it is also important to be aware of the negative influence they may exert. As we pointed out earlier, having many unemployed friends and/or family members may make unemployment more legitimate and cause one to give up one's hopes of finding a job – one resigns oneself to the situation. Assistance from family and friends may give one psychological support, but could also be destructive.

Most people, whether employed or unemployed, have a strong drive to be in control of their situations. One does not want to be controlled by society, one's family or one's employer. An unemployed person may easily feel that he/she is not in control of anything; one may feel as if one is watching one's life go by without being able to influence it.

### Rhythm of Life

One of the most important functions of work is the regularity of it. Work provides an individual with routines and a time structure for everyday life. Losing a job may lead to the loss of the basis for these routines; one seldom has something planned and it is easy to get bored. The *lack of routines* is quite obvious in our material and this may lead to passivity. One postpones things all the time and nothing appears to have meaning. The passivity can, for example, find expression in having difficulties in getting up in the mornings and in day-night reversal – sleeping during the days and being awake at night. Why should one get up early when one has nothing to get up for? The days just pass without specific goals. At first this “freedom” from routines may be experienced as a positive result of unemployment, but the longer the period of unemployment lasts, the more difficult it gets. It seems that not having anything to do is one of the most stressful consequences of unemployment.

Although unemployed people are aware of the passiveness of their lives, it appears to be very difficult to take initiative and make arrangements to (re-)organize their present situation. Staying at home doing nothing is common:

*It's things like sitting at home all the time. I've had periods, while I have been unemployed, when I've just felt, well, where am I sort of...felt that I'm not going anywhere, that I'm stagnating, that my development has stopped and that's extremely awful. I could spend eight hours doing nothing.*

For many unemployed people everything seems to function slower and to get tougher as time goes by. Planning is about rationing out tasks so that one has something to do each day and it seems as if some tasks are taken disproportionately seriously. This may perhaps be compared with the lives led by pensioners, where a short walk to the mailbox to collect mail may constitute the highlight of the day.

Trying to make up for this lack of routine by getting up in the morning, making the bed, getting dressed, cooking proper meals and eating at regular hours and exercising can make life appear more meaningful to an unemployed person and may get one out of the worst passivity. To play videogames and sit and watch television all day long may cause one to lose touch with reality. An unemployed person, whose life has veered too far from a structured routine, risks experiencing difficulties when he/she needs to adapt to a busy schedule at work again. Having to take care of children whilst unemployed seems to help provide a time structure when one does not have work.

Yet, we need to emphasize that the lack of routine is not always negative. Not having organized activities should not be a problem if one's social needs are met by supportive people and frequent interaction with friends. Since one does not have a schedule to keep to, different activities may be planned at home or with friends. If one manages to replace the functions of employment by something outside the working place, unemployment does not have to be so problematic. However, if one is too satisfied with being unemployed, getting a job could mean losing family time, being unable to plan the day as you wish and losing the unstructured routine that was introduced during the period of unemployment. This could be a cause for not wanting to get a job.

#### Plans for the future

People living in societies with high unemployment rates may experience a certain normalization of their situation as being unemployed, as described earlier. This normalization may mitigate the effects of unemployment, but may also weaken their will and ability to cope with the situation and their motivation to break the cycle of unemployment may decline. If there are many others in their social circles that are also unemployed, it is easy to lose faith in the future – how would I be able to get a job if nobody else can?

Being young and having the rest of one's life to find employment may also affect how one reasons. This may give the unemployed person a false sense of security that there is a lot of time left to change the situation in future. Unemployment may be viewed as a passing phenomenon which is unrelated to one's personal efforts. If one feels that one has control over the situation and the power to influence one's future, this leads to a feeling of security and self-confidence and one's lifestyle is not affected negatively. Such people feel that they are able to break the cycle of unemployment and find jobs. However, those that feel that they are not in control of their futures and are unable to influence their own situations run the risk of giving up without even trying.

As we described earlier, work fulfils many of our social needs. Through work we can obtain an income and our time is structured, but we also gain the status and identity linked to the collective we want to belong to or dream of taking part in. It is quite obvious that some of the unemployed have set relatively high goals or long-term targets for themselves – if not too high or too hard to reach. To give some examples: "I always wanted to become a lawyer", "I want to start my own airline", "my goal is to start my own business", "I'm trying to write a book", etc. Not all of these goals are impossible to reach, and it is good to have dreams and never stop believing in one's ability to reach them. It

motivates one to try harder. But if one's dreams and plans are unrealistic, they may also hinder one in getting a job or starting to study. Our material shows that it is quite common to expect the plans/dreams to get fulfilled in the near future, when in the reality it is clear that they are going to take several years to be realized.

Dreaming of a perfect job may also hinder one from being satisfied with the jobs that do not match one's perfect vision perfect employment. Having too high goals puts one in danger of never reaching them. However, even though the respondents dream of perfect jobs, the biggest dream of all is to escape from their situation. One example of this is Per, who starts off by describing the "perfect job", and ends at a completely different level:

*My dream job? Well, that would be as a game tester or developer, or to work for a good technology company or something, where you'd only need to, I don't know, maybe just go and say what you think and do some PowerPoint presentations sometimes for people, it works like this and this is how we work, yes, some kind of cruising job. Or that you, like I said, develop or test or... but actually I'd be happy with a job doing normal telephone support for some IT company or working as a service technician for an IT firm and fixing people's computers on request and build computers according to specifics and so on...I've no, I've no such extremely high plans for what I'd like to do, to have my own business or to be a boss or something like that, I'll be happy with being a normal worker, one of many...I'd like to do something I want to do then, that's the most important, and being satisfied with it, so that you can cope and don't have to be unemployed.*

The plans for the future that the unemployed have are not just expressed in more concrete thoughts, but also in more scattered, long-term thoughts. The concrete thoughts concern the immediate future, up to a year ahead, and often centre on getting a job. Here the respondents are talking about permanent, full-time employment – the type of job is less important than having a job and receiving a fixed income. The desire to get a job in a specific branch or profession is often present, as well as the wish to avoid certain types of jobs which the respondents associate with stress or humiliation. Yet, from the interviews it appears that these are only wishes that are subject to the desire to get a job. By getting a permanent, full-time job and a fixed income doors are opened that until now have appeared closed to the unemployed person, like living independently of one's family.

*Yes, my plan for the future is to get a job, my most important goal for the future is of course first and foremost to get a permanent, full-time position so that I can get out and integrate with people in general, and then maybe to save some money so that I can move out in any case, that would be nice, and then you can maybe get a driver's licence and then a car so that you can get where you want to be – and have money for the car – and then to enjoy the job you*

*have and to not be unemployed...those are my plans for the future for the moment anyway.*

Other concrete plans for the future involves further education, getting a driver's licence, or for the unemployed people with immigrant backgrounds, to gain a good command of Swedish, something which is directly related to the labour market. Not everyone shares a bright view of the future. There is a clear ambivalence, shifting between periods of hope, during which one feels that the outcome is determined by one's own responsibility for the situation, and a pronounced sense of hopelessness, which is connected with a long period of unemployment.

*At the moment the future seems pretty dark, because it doesn't seem as if I'll get a job. Of course you hope, you look for a job, but you don't believe as much anymore that something will come up, when you've come this far.*

The more long-term and often diffuse plans for the future fall into two categories. Those respondents who are in steady relationships name weddings or children as their most important goals, whilst those who are not in relationships speak about jobs. Here a strong desire to start an own businesses recurs, which is seen as a realistic plan for the future. More specialized, highly-qualified professions are also mentioned, such as being a helicopter pilot, something which is felt to be more difficult to achieve. Long-term plans for the future also involve living up to society's expectations of a "normal biography". The mere thought of not being able to fulfil these expectations, their own as well as those of society, seems to be painful and depressing.

Q. If you think further into the future, in five years' time, in ten years?

A. *I don't know, it feels a bit as if you don't dare think ahead. Instead one sort of thinks, yes but if I achieve this first, then I'm there. And then I can draw up a new plan. But actually you have a situation with a family, house, children, all those things are also there...then you begin to feel, no, it's getting, I'm going somewhere here. But then you still try not to pin it down, not to say you should have this here in so many years. Because ask someone to say where they'll be in a year – it's almost like you've got to decide where you will be in a years' time or else you are...otherwise it's over.*

Here we can observe another example of ambivalence, this time towards the labour market. On the one hand there is the chance of getting a job and actually achieving the dreams of following the 'normal biography' with a job, an income, starting a family and so on, and on the other, there is the fear of failure, of not meeting his own expectations, or that of his employer, of that of his social surroundings or of society. This fear is not rationally grounded and it is a question beyond winning and losing, but in this particular case, is an issue related to overcoming his own insecurity. The feeling of insecurity and the loss of self-confidence will be developed below.

## Unemployment and political exclusion

### Definition of politics

For the most part a definition of politics is concerned with verbalizing something which is experienced as bigger than and not directly related to the individual. Politics are associated with involvement and volition, but it is a close to boundlessly large sphere and therefore something which “others” engage with. Politics are also not directly related to questions concerning everyday life.

Q. You don't talk about politics with your friends?

A. *No, never. I suppose that's the way it is amongst today's young people, but there are also many who are involved in politics, but in my circle of friends anyway we haven't said the word politics in... not ever, really, I think. I've never discussed politics.*

In circles of friends and acquaintances which mostly consist of second generation immigrants, questions which relate to the position of especially young immigrants, as well as questions about housing and jobs, are often discussed. Yet these questions are not defined as “political”. The other characteristic way of defining politics concerns the discrepancy between rhetoric and practice, as well as the difference between politics and politicians. A strong distrust of the latter emerges from the interviews.

*I think there's a difference between politics and politicians. In fact, they've got nothing to do with each other (laughs). To me politicians seem to be...while there's a bit of that classical working class attitude with a politician talking for an hour without saying anything. And then gets a lot...and gets money for it. Not that I'd have anything against that, for that matter. Politics as such, on the contrary, is actually about, well for me it's about...trying to agree about the type of society you want to create.*

*The things they promise, as most people know, well yes, if it sounds good it's not going to happen.*

*I can't really immediately say that I trust in what the politicians say, you have to take it with a pinch of salt and then interpret it as you want to.*

It becomes apparent that politics on the one hand are coupled with difficult, abstract questions and on the other hand with (male) politicians, something which is clearly illustrated when “politics” are associated with “suits”.

### Interest in politics

The interviewees' interest in politics varies from complete indifference to great involvement. Not being interested in politics may result from the amount of influence a respondent thinks he/she has in society, the degree of interest expressed by parents or

other next of kin and previous involvement in politics. The following two quotes illustrate two different points of view:

*I'm on the whole completely indifferent to politics, but I feel that I want to...I want to vote in any case, otherwise I actually don't really give a damn about it. As long as somebody sort of takes care of everything, it's ok.*

*Yes, I think it's really interesting... if there's anything on, when you sit and watch TV or something...I don't do that very often, but...if someone else chooses a programme, like that, I actually enjoy watching it. And I'll be following the election very intensely...because I haven't really mind up my mind yet.*

At the same time our material shows that even when the respondents indicate that they're generally indifferent to politics, an interest in social phenomena has been expressed, although it is more focussed on specific incidences or areas of interest. A possible explanation for this could be related to the definition of politics. Politics are often associated with abstract questions, which at first glance do not appear to be related to one's current situation. Bigger incidences, such as political scandals, changes in the law or questions which concern areas relevant to the individual's life often generate interest.

The respondents are most engaged by different types of questions connected to unemployment, such as what is being done to create jobs and which measures are felt to prevent job creation, as well as the way in which the financial situations of unemployed are influenced by political measures.

*When you are interested in everyday issues...at the moment it's the support...I mean everything they do for unemployed people and for...for all the people in Sweden, or in society as a whole to reduce unemployment and to increase...well, I'm most interested in the work done to create jobs for young people.*

Other, larger areas of concern are also repeatedly mentioned, such as the lack of housing with reasonable monthly levies or the integration of immigrants, along with more specific questions such as, for example, security of information. Questions like these are often discussed in certain circles:

*Because I mean it is quite a...big...security...what do you call it, breach in...in your life, you know. I mean, they now have the right to check anything. They have the right to read your mail as well, and that is completely sick...it shouldn't be that way, even if it's good for some people, but then some sort of certificate should be required. Yes, a type of search warrant or something, they shouldn't be able to just check anyone. Then they later say it's of course only the military that's got the right to do it, but...if they let it come out, even if they only let slip what the military has done stuff will come out in*

*the open, irrespective of what they want. I mean it's about the human factor.*

The so-called IPRED<sup>19</sup> and FRA<sup>20</sup> laws as well as related questions about file-sharing are mentioned in several contexts and in relation to integrity. For the most part the young unemployed people do not believe that their personal integrity will be protected when these laws come into force. Information technology is today widely used by many people, especially the younger generations. As described earlier, the Internet is to a large extent used by the unemployed to maintain social contacts, but also as a source of distraction in the form of games, films etc.

Amongst the respondents an interest in political questions on local level is not common, something which may first and foremost be explained by the fact that the information disturbed in the media is less focussed on local politics. This leads to uncertainty, as well as to a less interest.

*I think that level just doesn't really get through. When it's election time everything is about the big questions, like about who will be prime minister and which party will win and... But almost nothing is said about the local issues.*

*I've never been aware of what's going on locally, so I just ignore it, because I don't know which [parties] are good and which are bad, or which persons are good and which ones bad. The local issues don't get as much attention as the rest.*

Instead, national politics and to a certain extent international politics dominate in the media.

### **Political participation**

Political participation is an important issue. Even though the respondents have doubts about the influence they have on the political outcomes, the data shows that voting is seen as a given. Here the young people see a chance to show what they think and to participate actively in the elections:

*I encourage everyone I know to vote too, because if you don't vote you have no right to complain either. You have to participate and influence matters as much as you can and this is the biggest chance a normal citizen has to influence things, by going to vote. If you*

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<sup>19</sup> IPRED (Intellectual Property Rights Enforcement Directive) is an EU directive from 2004 and its Swedish equivalent came into force in 2009. The IPRED law is concerned with intellectual property, i.e. that copyrighted material ought to be protected by making the distribution and uploading of such material on the Internet punishable by law and by allowing information about suspect Internet users to be made public.

<sup>20</sup> The FRA law has given the Swedish National Defence Radio Establishment the right to intercept internet traffic. Both these laws have been met with stark criticism from a variety of fronts.

*don't do it then you may as well know that it will go better for the others.*

Yet, voting in all three elections is not self-evident and the county council elections are seen to be of least interest. Here the difference between the local and the national level may be observed again; there is greater interest and involvement in politics on national level than in politics on local level, which is seen to be overshadowed by national issues. Our material shows that local politics are not only perceived to be more difficult to get an insight in, but also to be of less importance. This may be related to the questions which are of interest to the unemployed and which influence their current situations – questions which, at least in the media, are often treated on a national level.

*I usually take the ballot for...the national elections and stuff. You know, voting for a party, deciding who will be...who will rule and so. I don't always take all three ballots. [...] On a local level I'm not really that involved, but that's because you don't really read so much about local issues, it's much more about the whole country, so to speak. You know, all the debates and stuff focus much more on...who will form the next government, and then you sort of focus on that too.*

The respondents find themselves in a situation they have little control over, something which often leads to a degree of disorientation as regards many choices about possible further education or imaginable professions. Despite this there is no clear link between their political indecisiveness, as far as open list elections and especially the election of political parties are concerned, and being unemployed. Instead the results indicate an absence of a general overview and difficulties with distinguishing the different parties' political mandates from each other, as well as problems with understanding the consequences of these differences.

Political activity is neither associated with party political membership or being actively involved in a certain party, nor with external actions and visible activities, such as participation in demonstrations or taking similar action. The respondents remain informed through television and the Internet. A common way of expressing one's involvement is by writing letters to the editor or making contributions to blogs. Another example of political activity is the encouragement of friends and acquaintances to vote. This may be seen as a modest, yet important, contribution to democracy, particularly against the backdrop of the fact that political questions are often discussed with like-minded friends to avoid "meaningless conflicts". Other respondents do not discuss politics at all.

The results further show that party political allegiances have often been inherited, especially in the case of Sweden's two biggest parties (the Social Democratic Party<sup>21</sup> and, as in the following quote, the Moderate Party<sup>22</sup>).

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<sup>21</sup> The Social Democratic Party has dominated the political scene in Sweden for half a century and until the change of government in 2006.

*My parents have always voted Moderate, so I've done that too, and I've always thought that they have decent politics. And I've never liked the Social Democrats, because they are so horrible...well...I've always seen myself as upper class even though I'm not. I've never been part of the upper class and I've never had so much money, but I like to see myself this way...and I want to live like they think [one should]. Maybe not just for the money, but even for how their working conditions are and things like that. And therefore the Moderates have always seemed good, because they have that type of politics, they appeal to that class of people, and the Social Democrats are more focused on the poor and the middleclass. I mean that the Moderates are more middleclass to upper class, so to speak.*

The above quotation shows that the respondent has a deeply rooted vision of a better life. The actual class he belongs to is of less importance; instead it is the notion of prosperity and influence which is decisive for the respondent's party political sympathies. The feeling of not having any real influence on political and other societal processes seems to be an important factor as far as political involvement and activity are concerned:

*I've always thought like this: well, they look after it, it's not anything I can influence anyway, I suppose. I'm just one small individual.*

However, it is important to emphasize that there are no clear indications that this attitude is connected to unemployment. In fact, it may rather be related to the age of the interviewees. Today, as in the past, the younger generation often forms an overlooked group, whose views are not taken as seriously as those of older citizens that are more established in society. This leads many young people to feel that they have no influence, or that their voices are less important. Yet unemployment may be a contributing factor to this feeling.

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<sup>22</sup> The Moderate Party is a conservative party that has been the main party in the governing alliance since 2006.

## **Coping strategies**

The way in which a person experiences unemployment is based on whether one feels able to change the situation, whether one has access to social support, as well as the degree of self-confidence one possesses. Those who feel that they have control over their situations usually do better than those who feel that they are being controlled by the limitations of their surroundings. The feeling of being in control counteracts feelings of inferiority, depression and passivity and the person in question manages to handle the situation in an active, problem-solving manner. The feeling that one is being governed by one's surroundings and is not in control leads to insecurity and has a negative influence on self-confidence and one's lifestyle. Persons experiencing this tend to give up and feel that they are unable to influence their situations. Often they become more passive and manage their problems by avoiding them<sup>23</sup>.

We may observe the way in which long-term unemployment is often blamed on external factors, like the current labour market situation or employers. Everyone knows that it is hard to find employment and this may be used as an excuse for one's own unemployment. Simultaneously, it also provides one with a way of coping with the situation. If the unemployed person is able to shift the responsibility for this to someone else, he/she may experience less shame and guilt in connection to the situation. A degree of normalization of unemployment has also taken place. Young people living in a society with a high rate of unemployment may console themselves with the fact that there are more people of the same age and living in the same place in a similar predicament.

The feeling of not being in control of the situation is not alleviated by planning to attend further education.

Being dependent on the income of one's parents may lead to a prolonged state of adolescence, which prevents one from entering the working life and becoming an adult. One possibility is to rely on the financial support of family and kins: "Well it's [the money] either from her parents or from my parents or brother or someone else close to us".

## **Important issues related to unemployment**

It is important to note that not all problems experienced by the unemployed, and especially the long-term unemployed, result from their unemployment. Therefore those particular problems, such as neuropsychiatric disorders or mental illness, should not be exclusively associated with unemployment. However, these problems may be reinforced by unemployment and the experience of being unemployed may be influenced by these problems.

### *Positive aspects of unemployment*

There are also positive sides to unemployment. One is free to do what one wants to, one is able to sleep until one wakes up and take life as it comes. Unemployment may provide the opportunity to pursue occupations which one otherwise would not have time for, like studying

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<sup>23</sup> Rantakeisu, R., Starrin, B. & C. Hagquist (1996): *Ungdomsarbetslöshet: Vardagsliv och samhälle*. Lund: Studentlitteratur

Thoits, P.A. (1995): Stress, Coping and Social Support Processes. Where Are We? What Next? *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 35, pp. 53-79.

or exercising. Dreams one has previously not had time to realize may be realized during the time one is unemployed and long working days may lead to a lack of energy for other activities after work.

In comparison to a difficult working life, a period of unemployment may be experienced as a relief. In this way unemployment may involve positive feelings. A job without variation may be experienced as monotonous and tedious. However, daily life for the unemployed is often unchanging and boring and may cause one's spark of life and inner strength to disappear. A lack of variety in their working life, as well as in unemployment, tends to influence people negatively.

### Gender differences

Unemployment affects women and men differently, especially after having children. Mothers do not seem to feel the same pressure to work because they take care of the children and the household. Taking care of the children is prioritized and is seen to be more meaningful than work and therefore mothers do not blame themselves for not working. On the contrary, men want to provide for the family and therefore they experience greater pressure to work even when they have children. This may explain why men are affected more adversely by unemployment than women.

### The group of respondents from immigrant backgrounds

The immigrants with completed academic qualifications that were interviewed do not experience their unemployment in the same way as the Swedish-born respondents. The biggest problems experienced by interviewees with immigrant backgrounds are the Swedish language and integration with Swedish society. This group is confident about their futures and regard their unemployment as a temporary phase which will soon pass – an initial stage one has to get through. This group is busy expanding their social networks with new friends and acquaintances. The difficulties they experience with having fewer social contacts in Sweden than what they had been used to in their countries of origin first and foremost result from the fact that they have been living in Sweden for a relatively short time. Yet they have lived here long enough to be regarded as long-term unemployed. Although some of them experienced stressful financial situations which influence their day-to-day lives, this was seen to be manageable and of a passing nature. All of them had a husband/wife or partner to share their financial situations with, which alleviates the situation.

This group of interviewees emphasized the need for information and the need to get into contact with other unemployed people to discuss the problems they experience with looking for work and getting to know new people. They need to familiarize themselves with Swedish laws and rules and with the general way in which society functions. It may be hard to understand how the healthcare system works and it is difficult to take the initiative to find suitable employment. Internships are regarded as especially significant. For this group of job seekers it is particularly important to get an insight into the labour market, to get the opportunity to use and practise speaking Swedish and to see how the Swedish workplace functions.

### **Summary**

Employment is a central prerequisite for social integration, as has long been known. Our need for social contacts, regular activities, a time structure and participation in achieving collective aims are fulfilled by employment. Consequently, a loss of employment means more

than just losing work and income. Losing a job puts one at risk of being shifted to the edge of society or even ending up completely outside of it.

Social exclusion (isolation) may also be called a limited world of experiences. This limitation may be experienced in different spheres of life. Our results show that the problems related to or resulting from unemployment are connected to the very central elements of people's everyday lives: the spheres of the labor market, finances, social contacts, emotions, the rhythm of life and plans for the future.

The respondents in this study clearly express the importance of work. Through work one receives a regular income, status, identity and social networks. Not being able to present oneself as belonging to a certain profession is experienced as shameful and to be avoided as far as possible. Further, the extent of financial hardship one suffers will also influence the experience of being unemployed. A feeling of inferiority has its origin in the unemployed person's financial situation, which is described as the most straining result of unemployment:

We can clearly see that people miss having routines, activities and a social network when they are unemployed. All of our respondents described passivity and not having anything to do as problems they experience. It is harder to maintain a meaningful social identity without work, and one may experience difficulties in finding other meaningful social activities to participate in.

The experience of unemployment will probably be affected by the degree of emotional support one may get from friends and family, as well as by the kind of social networks one has outside the workplace. Coupled with a loss of social networks the situation may lead to social isolation, especially in combination with financial difficulties.

However, unemployment rarely leads to a total loss of social contacts or economic resources, yet limitations in these regards seem to be common. It is quite obvious that unemployment limits the everyday life experiences of the concerned. Any such experience of limitation on its own, or in combination with other experiences, may lead to a retreat from social life. When needs which are usually met by employment fail to be fulfilled in another way there is an increased risk for social exclusion.

The interviewees' interest in politics varies from complete indifference to great involvement. Our interviewees do not directly relate politics to questions concerning everyday life. It is apparent that politics on the one hand are coupled with difficult, abstract questions and on the other hand with (male) politicians. The respondents are most engaged by different types of questions connected to unemployment, such as what is being done to create jobs as well as the way in which the financial situations of unemployed are influenced by political measures.

Political participation is an important issue. Even though the respondents have doubts about the influence they have on the political outcomes, the data shows that voting is seen as a given, even though the county council elections are seen to be of least interest. Through voting the young people see a chance to show what they think. However, our material shows that local politics are not only perceived to be more difficult to get an insight in, but also to be of less importance. This may be related to the questions which are of interest to the unemployed and which influence their current situations – questions which are often treated on a national level.

There is no clear link between their political indecisiveness, as far as open list elections and especially the election of political parties are concerned and being unemployed. Instead the

results indicate an absence of a general overview and difficulties with distinguishing the different parties' political mandates from each other, as well as problems with understanding the consequences of these differences. It is important to emphasize that there are no clear indications that the interviewee's political indifference is connected to unemployment. In fact, it may rather be related to the age of the interviewees. Yet unemployment may be a contributing factor to this feeling.

It is important to note that not all problems experienced by especially the long-term unemployed result from their unemployment, and these particular problems should not be exclusively associated with unemployment. However, these problems may be reinforced by unemployment and the experience of being unemployed may be influenced by these problems.

It is also important to note that not all the unemployed people are to be considered as unhappy. There are also positive sides to unemployment; one is free to do what one wants to, one is able to sleep until one wakes up and take life as it comes, one has the opportunity to pursue occupations which one otherwise would not have time for, like studying. In comparison to a difficult working life, a period of unemployment may be experienced as a relief.

Further, unemployment may affect women and men differently, especially after having children. Mothers do not seem to feel the same pressure to work because they prioritize taking care of the children and the household. Taking care of the children may be seen to be more meaningful than work and therefore mothers do not blame themselves for not working. On the contrary, men want to provide for the family and therefore they experience greater pressure to work even when they have children. This may explain why men are affected more adversely by unemployment than women.

Finally, the immigrants with completed academic qualifications that were interviewed did not experience their unemployment in the same way as the Swedish-born respondents. The biggest problems experienced by these interviewees are the Swedish language and integration with the Swedish society. Compared to native Swedes, the everyday life of this group is conditioned in a different way: They are busy expanding their social networks with new friends and acquaintances even during their unemployment, due to a relatively short time in Sweden. Although some of them experienced stressful financial situations which influence their day-to-day lives, this was seen to be manageable and of a passing nature. This group reflected confidence about the future and regarded unemployment as a temporary phase which will soon pass. However, failing to get a job in the near future will probably influence their experiences negatively.

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## **National report Poland**

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***Ewa Bacia, Piotr Binder, Jerzy Holub***

### **Introduction**

This report presents results of analyses carried out under the Work Package 4 in Kielce. The analyses were based on 23 interviews carried out at a local level with the long-term unemployed town residents aged from 18 to 35 lat years. Interviews were conducted by a team of three researchers who cooperated at each stage - starting from the initial research concept, through the research tool development, data collection, their analysis and ending with structuring and writing the report. Fieldwork was conducted from late January until early October 2010.

Respondents' contact details were acquired using a database of the Scientific Research Department (Zakład Badań Naukowych, ZBN), which conducted surveys in Kielce, inter alia with the long-term unemployed people under the Work Package 3. ZBN provided a research team member responsible for recruiting interviewees, with contact information for persons who while participating in the previous survey gave permission to re-contact. The database included a total of 80 addresses.

In January 2010, when the researchers had to carry out pilot interviews to test their research tool, ZBN did not yet have any contact details that could be taken advantage of. For this reason a decision was taken to reach out to potential interviewees by contacting the Social Integration Centre (Centrum Integracji Społecznej, CIS), where the research was carried out under the Work Package 2. In this way the researchers were able to arrange and conduct three interviews during the pilot phase. These interviews proved to be a good way to test the tool (the interview scenario), but two of them could not be included as material for analysis within the framework of Work Package 4, because the respondents lived outside the city of Kielce.

The researchers were not able to recruit interviewees in accordance with strictly agreed rules, i.e. to ensure numerical equality of the four groups: 1. women in the age between 18 and 25 years, 2. women in the age between 26 and 35 years, 3. men in the age between 18 and 25 years, 4. men in the age between 26 and 35 years. Women and persons from the higher age group were in majority in the data base. And women more often agreed to the interview. So, younger persons and men were in minority in the contact details database. Secondly, when contacted, they more often refused to be interviewed. And thirdly, some of them agreed for the interview, but later cancelled the meeting or did not appear at an agreed place and time.

Attempts were made to contact all those listed in the database by telephone. In ten cases telephone numbers were outdated or, in spite of repeated attempts, nobody answered the phone. Several persons found a job after participation in the survey, and therefore were not eligible for further research. More than a dozen people refused to participate in further research, three persons admitted, already during the telephone conversation, that they did not look for a job (which excludes them from the group of unemployed people in accordance

with a definition of the unemployed person accepted in the research), a few others with whom the researchers contacted several times, each time said that they were out of the town and / or had no time to meet.

Finally 29 interviews were conducted. After analysing their contents the researchers excluded for various reasons six of them from the material taken into account as the basis for the report<sup>24</sup>. First two interviews, coming from the pilot stage, were meetings with people outside of Kielce. Two other interviewees were unemployed for just half a year (which means that they were included by mistake to the database of the long-term unemployed people). The fifth individual was a recipient of the disability pension and the last one admitted that s/he did not look for a job. It means that all those people were not classified as the long-term unemployed. To avoid such mistakes, potential candidates recruited for the next stages of the research were asked questions by phone to determine whether they were actually the long-term unemployed.

A group of 23 long-term unemployed respondents included 14 women and 9 men, 8 persons under 25 years of age and 15 persons from an older age category.

All interviews were carried out in the homes of those surveyed. In some cases members of the respondent's family were present during the interview, which hampered free conversation. Sometimes outsiders tried to answer the question for the interviewee, in other cases the unemployed person felt embarrassed by the presence of listeners. When possible, the researchers tried to intervene and ask outsiders to leave the room where the interview took place<sup>25</sup>. One of the interviewees did not agree to have the interview recorded<sup>26</sup>. In one case the researcher decided to turn off the recorder because he noticed that recording of the conversation adversely affected the respondent, who felt tense and gave hackneyed answers so long as the recorder was turned on. After turning the recorder off he talked more openly about his experiences. The researcher made the detailed notes from the rest of the interview. They were used as a basis for further analyses. An average interview lasted about one hour.

Interviews were carried out over 9 months, in the course of 10 research visits. Surveys' distribution in time was deliberate. After each research visit the three-person team of researchers met to discuss the material gathered and to arrange further procedures. First 10 interviews were subject to the detailed microanalysis. Other interviews were first analysed separately by each of the researchers, and then conclusions and potential controversial issues were discussed during joint meetings. The researchers also discussed on a current basis the need to amend the interview scenario. Such changes were introduced three times, and they were aimed at:

1. supplementing the scenario with additional questions, for example concerning respondents' access to computer and Internet, their understanding of the concept of "adulthood" or "optimism";
2. rewording of some questions so that they become more intelligible for the respondents.

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<sup>24</sup> However, all excluded interviews were treated by the researchers as a "theoretical sampling" important in the grounded theory method.

<sup>25</sup> In some cases it was not possible because an apartment consisted of only one room.

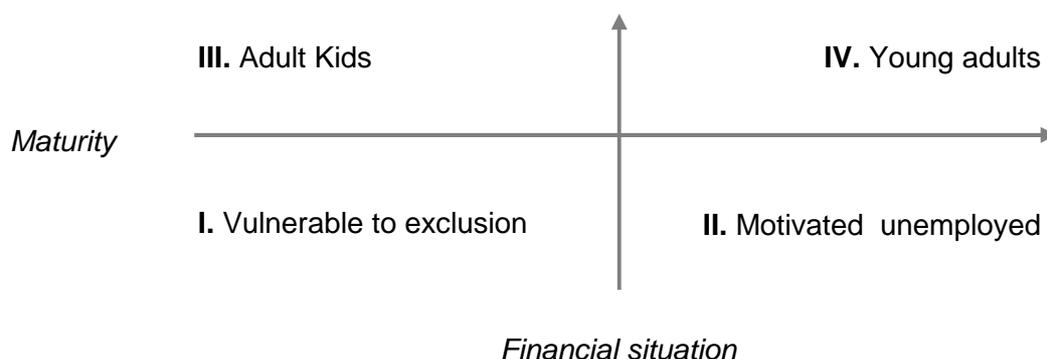
<sup>26</sup> It was one of the interviews, which for other reasons has been rejected by the researchers and excluded from further analysis.

The amendments did not change the nature and purpose of the research. They only adjusted the tool to the interview situation, resulting from the experiences of already conducted interviews<sup>27</sup>.

The report is divided into 5 parts. Introduction is its first part. In the second part we present a proposed typology of youth unemployment which is used to organise material in the further analysis. The third part presents an analysis of the collected material. In subsequent sections we describe: the perception of unemployment-related problems, as well as issues related to social exclusion and political exclusion of the young unemployed. The fourth chapter concerns earlier not described issues, which, however, are so important and surprising that they are worth mentioning in the report of the research. And the fifth chapter presents identified strategies of coping with unemployment.

### Types of unemployment situations

The typology proposed below is based on analysis carried out in accordance with the grounded theory methodology, using its rules, in the form described by Anselm L. Strauss and Juliet M. Corbin (Basics of Qualitative Research. Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1998), taking into account guidelines of Kathy Charmaz (Constructing Grounded Theory. A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis, 2007). This means that the researchers sought to move gradually from simple description of the data (which is, inter alia, characteristic of early coding phases) to more theoretical approaches. The purpose of the last coding phase is to identify the central phenomenon, being the focus of the analysis. The described below "maturity category" has become such phenomenon in this research. Thanks to its combination with a category of "financial situation" it was possible to create a two-axis typology which allows not only to systematise quite diverse material collected in terms of coping strategies used by those who took part in the survey, but also to try to answer to a question which of the below unemployment situations are connected with the highest risk of social exclusion.



Types of unemployment situations are a bit sharp, which was intentional. Therefore one cannot expect that all participants in the survey will be fully covered by one of areas of the

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<sup>27</sup> Such procedure was compatible with the premises of the grounded theory, which was the basis for the research, Cf. Charmaz, Kathy. 2006. Constructing Grounded Theory. A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis. London: Sage Publications and Strauss, Anselm; Corbin, Juliet. 1998. Basics of Qualitative Research Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory (2nd edition). London: Sage Publications.

proposed typology. However, a closer look at biographies of respondents allows to perceive that most of them are clearly leaning towards one of the distinguished types of unemployment situations. It seems important that the analysis of material collected in this way shows significant similarity between the life situation of people who often much differ in terms of age and education level.

**Maturity** – a place on the adulthood axis reflects the degree of internal steerability of participants in the survey and their ability to make rational decisions. The detailed analysis of interview records allowed to identify three primary categories, which gave a basis for this axis, and namely selfish vs. quasi-altruistic orientation of young respondents, the degree of their independence (focus on external assistance vs. own resources) and adaptability, in which special attention was paid to such elements as: sense of impact on reality, flexibility of expectations, or risk-taking ability as well as carried out actions (see: diagram 1).

**Financial situation** – refers directly to resources of young unemployed people, or resources that may be available in connection with support received from relatives / friends or institutions. Participants in this survey differed significantly in this respect. The situation of some of them was rather stable, which allowed them to make different choices - if they decided to take actions, but also gave them the comfort of abandonment or of postponing actions. Interviewees whose situation put them at risk of poverty and social exclusion were at the other end of this axis.

#### "Vulnerable to exclusion"

One of the most important characteristics of respondents covered by this type of unemployment situation was their strong predilection for nonfeasance, or for relatively quick withdrawal from already undertaken actions. Their social contacts are the least developed and are confined to the circle of family-friends, although in the case of our respondents these were mainly family members living in the common household. A key role for this type is played by a combination of two basic characteristics of this system, namely: infantile way of describing the world and rationalisation of own choices and difficult financial situation. In their stories they focused mainly on themselves.

The collected material shows that their situation is differentiated by strategies chosen by their parents (and in effect by households). It is interesting that the fragments of conversations on these issues show that wherever the researchers were able to collect more information in this field, the overall image of parents tended in the direction of "working poor" – taking up various types of non-registered jobs / grey market jobs, as a method to supplement family budget (in opposition to helpless and socially excluded people, basing on various sources of institutional assistance)<sup>28</sup>. However, irrespective of how difficult is financial situation of a household, young people in such unemployment situation base mainly on parents' support and are almost fully dependent on them.

In the job-seeking context, attention should be paid to such elements of stories told by these persons, which prove lack of sense of impact on surrounding reality (*I'm not looking for a job because I'll never succeed, they employ only their acquaintances*) and low flexibility of expectations (strong dislike for certain types of work, e.g. working with other people, work

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<sup>28</sup> Such interpretation of collected material would contradict to certain degree a thesis - present in the sociological literature - of inheriting some elements of attitudes, such as approach to hard manual work or attitude towards institutional support, in particular from public institutions.

connected with financial responsibility, working outdoors, jobs connected with physical effort or with having a direct superior), although - on the other hand - they have only vague ideas about the work they want to do. And here, once again, important seems their low ability to take actions aimed at acquiring new qualifications (such as training courses, new skills), and in consequence - at increasing their job opportunities.

These people are rather passive on the labour market. It is difficult to assess their actual efforts to find a job and a degree to which they only declare activities in this field. Such assurances are usually made in the initial part of the interview, when respondents are asked to estimate how much time they use to look for a job. However, quite often (consciously or unconsciously) they contradict these assurances in their later statements.

In effect, repeated lecture of interviews with such type of respondents urges a conclusion on their low adaptability.. In their stories they pay more attention to obstacles in finding a job (starting from those related to trends in the global economy and ending with the so called "cornerstones"<sup>29</sup> of a series of their life failures), than to their own work-related experience. Their actions are rather scarce, and they refrain from new activities by a risk category, both in the psychological dimension (understood as a consequence of another failure in finding a job), and in financial dimension (understood as financial effects of unsuccessful attempts, as for example investment in unsuccessful trip abroad to find a job), which in turn is particularly painful for people in very difficult financial situation. Experience of interviewees shows that the vast majority of jobs available to them belonged to the grey economy. Employment on such terms was associated - for some of respondents - with subsequent employer's refusal to pay for work done, or with the payment in amount lower than earlier agreed. Accumulation of fear, negative experiences and discouragement forced some of those vulnerable to exclusion to refrain from taking any action, and - as regards their future plans - to take so distant or so vague perspective that it significantly reduced the associated mental discomfort.

### "Motivated unemployed"

Contrary to people "vulnerable to exclusion", a distinctive feature of this type of unemployed people is their willingness to make further attempts to improve their situation. Their significant level of activity affects their social contacts, resulting in clearly richer networks of contacts and greater openness to them. And their methods of coping with the difficult financial situation were considered more mature, which is associated with their strong sense of duty towards their parents and household, as well as their aspirations to become independent.

In the job-seeking area they are characterised by significant level of activity. Job-seeking methods that they report do not differ from those mentioned by other respondents. But the key difference here is that when asked to describe in more detail their experiences with gainful employment, starting with the earliest ones, they have something to talk about. They are sufficiently motivated to undertake various jobs, but most often the low paid and non-formalised ones, which in their perception distinguishes them from the "real work" (where parties are bound by a signed contract / agreement).

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<sup>29</sup> In the course of microanalysis, such role was attributed to events recollected by interviewees in various moments in their narratives, which - in the opinion of respondents - were important, or were often mentioned as a kind of explanation for their life failures (e.g. an accident and long rehabilitation, bad choice of secondary school or learning profile, the unfortunate decision to stop learning, etc.).

Thanks to their well developed adaptability and overall resourcefulness, their actions are quite often characterised by effectiveness and the persons themselves are characterised by an ability to draw conclusions from failures before trying again. This significantly distinguishes this type from a group of "vulnerable to exclusion", because representatives of the first group are equipped with a sense of impact on surrounding reality.

They are characterised by considerable flexibility in terms of jobs that they would be able to take, and it is a broad spectrum of jobs. However, it does not change the fact that they have their own priorities in this regard and quite often specialise in specific jobs. Similarly as people "vulnerable to exclusion", they also recognise the risks associated with undeclared work (in particular in material dimension) and also for them it is a source of discomfort.

Although performed jobs are often not satisfactory for participants in the survey (mainly due to rules of employment and remuneration level), it does not stop them from taking subsequent jobs. In the light of the above proposed typology, presented motivations of carried out actions seem of key importance. And among them the following seem most distinctive: earlier mentioned sense of duty towards close relatives that they can rely upon and take advantage of their aid, as well as the wish to become financially independent and in perspective leave common household. Although the "motivated unemployed" met the definition criteria adopted in this research with respect to the long-term unemployed (registered as unemployed for at least 12 months and declaring job search), they may be considered as unemployed people only from the formal point of view. The fact that they regularly take non-registered paid jobs (starting from the short-term jobs of several days' duration, through seasonal works and ending with regular employment), and participate in paid traineeships, significantly differs their situation from other types in the proposed classification.

### "Adult Kids"

Like most participants in this part of the research, "adult kids " (aged 20+) still live with and are dependent on their parents, although formally they have already come of age. However, there is a significant difference in relation to the types discussed previously. And namely: although they do not work and do not continue education, their life style, their way of describing the world, the structure of their time budget, plans for the future - all is very similar to the characteristics of far younger people (metrical teenagers). They are distinguished by an element of well-developed social contacts, but first of all by their focus on own needs. This is evident when comparing their narratives with statements of other survey participants, and in particular with the "motivated unemployed" and "young adults".

Just as the "vulnerable to exclusion" they remain passive on the labour market and do not have special vocational experience. In adult kids' statements one may hear an argument on futility of efforts in finding a job (*they employ only their friends*). However, it is characteristic that - as narratives of our interviewees show - considerable limitation of activities aimed at finding a job is an effect of a conscious decision. Reports of respondents in this group of interviewees were very similar. They reported that they were making only minimum efforts in this field, confining themselves only to waiting for help, suggestions and even ready job offers from friends and acquaintances. In terms of flexibility of expectations connected with potential employment, and in fact its lack, emphasis is shift towards financial aspects. These young people do not argue that there are no jobs at all, they only say that there is no *worthwhile* job.

Their irrational attitude is interesting, because the long-term unemployment period and scarce vocational experience on the one hand did not reduce their financial appetites, and on the other hand - did not inspire them to improve their skills and thus to increase job opportunities. Although it is difficult to prejudge this issue, it appears that unemployed persons originating from this group of interviewees are able to ignore such relationships, as when talking about job that they would be ready to take up, they present a vision of relatively light job (without the need to exert oneself - which may mean both hard manual work or simply working long hours), which would be profitable to take, as previously mentioned.

As these narratives show, the risks associated with psychological costs of job search or the risk associated with taking up an undeclared job were not mentioned as obstacles in the way to employment, which can be interpreted as a consequence of the fact that these people rarely made efforts at finding a job and rarely suffered negative consequences of failure in this regard.

Therefore, the adaptability of this group of the unemployed should be assessed as very low, but it does not seem to be an effect of series of failures in the labour market. These young people clearly dissociate themselves from reality, particularly in areas related to adult life - and employment certainly is such an area. The statements of our respondents show that unemployment and dependence on their parents do not result in their significant emotional tension. They are not independent, they are aware of this fact, but it is hard to find in their narratives any elements proving that they aim to change this situation. On the contrary, their way of describing the world suggests rather that they are satisfied with their current situation, in which employment is replaced with: social contacts, sport, entertainment (computer, Internet), television, etc.

### "Young Adults"

Interviewees belonging to this group of unemployed persons are distinguished by relative financial stability, but first of all by their maturity. These are mainly fully independent people, which means that they have separate households, often have already established their own families and even have children. It does not mean that they do not take advantage of parental assistance in any area of life, but definitely they are not dependent on that aid.

In the research, this type of persons was represented most often by mothers of young children. This radically differs their perspective from that of other participants in the survey, because in their narratives they primarily focused on family and a sense of duty towards it is the main driving force of their actions.

Due to the fact of earlier vocational experience, unemployment in their case is defined as interruption in employment (a phase) rather than its absence. Moreover, in the case of mothers it is sometimes presented as an effect of conscious and in a sense natural decision regarding the pregnancy (although sometimes a bit earlier due to medical recommendations). As one might expect, in the case of young mothers the time of absence from the labour market was filled in with maternal and household duties. Thus, if respondents have a sense of some limitation of social contacts, it is due to their focus on the role of a parent.

These people actively look for a job but distinctly differ from the "motivated unemployed". Although their expectations are rather well defined, their relatively stable financial situation allows them to make informed and prudent choices. It may be assumed that as responsible parents, in a situation of necessity they would be ready to take a risk of undeclared job.

However, their aim is to find a "real" job, i.e. a job which - apart from earnings and satisfaction of consumer needs - includes elements of self-fulfilment and prestige.

Of course, this group of the long-term unemployed people also faces difficulties on their way to employment, which is proved by the very fact of holding a status of registered long-term unemployed person for a period of at least 12 months. Given the stable financial situation, the female survey participants when describing their job-seeking problems, first of all mentioned psychological costs associated with making further attempts, and then coping with dashed hopes of finding a job. Strong discomfort resulting from this situation could temporarily restrict their job-seeking activities, but - what is important - it did not restrain them for a long time.

## **Analysis of the material collected in the field**

### ***How do young unemployed people perceive / define unemployment related problems?***

One of the primary objectives of this research was to look at the experience of the long-term unemployment from the perspective of unemployed people. The interview scenario contained blocks of areas, such as: financial issues, family and social relationships, expectations towards aid institutions. We asked them about their dreams and life plans as well as emotions evoked in a situation of prolonging joblessness. We were interested if unemployment had also positive aspects for our interviewees. However, it was not our ambition to receive a detailed description of different aspects or problems associated with the long-term unemployment. The most important thing was not to lose sight of the perspective of respondents. First of all we wanted to see how they assessed the unemployment-related problems.

We have assembled a rich and varied research material. In narratives on employment-related problems we have observed several common themes.

Financial issues were predominant. Joblessness was associated with a decrease in, and often a complete lack of income. The need to reduce consumption was a difficult experience for respondents and also for their families. "As regards shopping or something ... one has to mull over.. to buy less or cheaper products, or simply put off until later" (9\_f\_30)<sup>30</sup>. When asked about unemployment effects, respondents very often focused mainly on financial problems. A conclusion that unemployment is associated only with incomes' reduction or lack, would, however, be oversimplified.. Interviewees felt discomfort not only due to the need to reduce the consumption level. Lack of personal income was also associated with a reduced sense of security and limited ability to decide on one's own future.

Financial problems directly affected respondents' sense of security. A phenomenon of lack of funds for the so called "rainy day" was often mentioned. Our respondents felt unprepared for crises involving the need to incur higher expenses, such as the situation of the disease in the family.

Due to reduced incomes respondents felt the reduced control over their own lives. They complained not only of the need to reduce consumption level and of not being able to plan expenditures. For many participants, particularly painful was the sense of dependence on

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<sup>30</sup> Interviews have been described in accordance with the following pattern: interview number in order of interviewing \_sex (m/f)\_age.

others. Lack of personal income forced them to take advantage of financial support from family members, friends, various types of loans. Lack of permanent employment, and thus of own regular income, was perceived as the main barrier in starting an independent, adult stage in life. Not having any employment, respondents are not able to move out of the house, do not feel ready to start their own families. Sense of dependence on other people was the second, most frequently mentioned, effect of joblessness.

*"If I had my own money, as they say, I would be the master of the situation, having my own earnings, my own money. If you are unemployed you must watch every penny, being aware that even if you have money today, you may have none tomorrow. When you're unemployed, you must unfortunately rely on assistance from the family."*

(1\_f\_29).

Exclusion from the regular labour market was an important aspect of unemployment. One of the most frequent strategies of coping with unemployment was to take up seasonal works, often in a grey sphere. This topic will be described in more detail in further part of this analysis. At this stage it is worth mentioning that respondents often felt "trapped" in the world of low paid, non-registered casual jobs. The longer the period of staying outside the regular labour market, the more acute is the problem of lack of documented employment history. A limited access to social benefits is a problem for respondents. Casual works were connected with additional risk that not all of our interviewees were ready for: employers were not always honest in relation to them. Respondents complained not only of problems with enforcing remuneration for work performed or problems connected with understating this work.

Joblessness was also associated with the sense of boredom. A daily rhythm was disturbed. Unemployed people felt discomfort connected with unclear time distribution between work and rest:

*"When you do not go to work, you do not have any rest too. When each day is free you do not know how to rest".*

(12\_m\_24).

Some respondents devised complex strategies of killing the time. We are discussing this phenomenon in more detail in Chapter 3.3.

We also asked our respondents to identify positive aspects of unemployment. When asked about advantages of the unemployment situation they reacted in a different way. Some of them were satisfied with having so much free time, which they could devote to own passions (such as visiting web forums, watching political programmes), recreation, or contacts with friends. Interviewees who have already established their own families, were often glad to have an opportunity to devote additional time for childcare and housework. Sometimes, however, our interviewees were not able to identify any advantages of unemployment, emphasising that joblessness had only a negative impact on their living situation.

In their stories about unemployment experience various emotions were evoked, among which anger, depression and fear prevailed. There were also reports of a sense of helplessness and resignation. Unemployed people did not speak directly about the feeling of shame due to the inability to find a job. However, it is hard to escape the impression that they did feel the shame. Many of them avoided job-search-related topics in conversations with friends or acquaintances. Unemployment issue was reserved for talks with close relatives.

*"This means that I talk about joblessness with parents, but with friends, well... these are my problems. They know that I do not work, that I am looking for a job, but that's all. Simply, I don't think that it is a topic for such conversations, because why should we talk about it."*

(3\_f\_34)

We observed large differences in emotional temperature of stories about experiencing unemployment: starting from very strong, dramatic narratives ending with interviews whose participants avoided emotions or claimed that unemployment did not involve any more intensive feelings.

As this short description shows, the respondents differed very much in their perception of unemployment situation. We had to deal with narratives where the long-term unemployment assumed the proportions of a central biographic experience, but it also happened that the long period of joblessness was not perceived as a serious problem, but rather as an occasion to "extend the youth". We faced the challenge of diversity and resulting inconsistency of collected research material. At the stage of interviews' interpretation we decided to use classification referred to in Chapter 2, based on two axes: maturity and financial situation. Again, it should be noted that the proposed classification is only of arbitrary nature. We are aware that this typology is neither exhaustive nor the only possible. However, we believe that the proposed classification will help to organise the research material and, thus, will help the reader to look at unemployment experience from the perspective of our respondents in Kielce. We present below four types of situations of experiencing problems arising from the long-term unemployment.

#### *"Vulnerable to exclusion"*

Description of perception of the long-term unemployment related problems is particularly difficult in the case of respondents from a group of people "vulnerable to exclusion". Interviewees classified in this group often had problems with talking about their experiences. It was partly due to a low sense of subjectivity, the impact on one's own fate. It also happened that interviewees avoided any reflections on the reasons for joblessness, or opportunities for the improvement of their vocational situation. An emotion of fear and sense of resignation dominated in narratives of those "vulnerable to exclusion". They had at their disposal only limited financial resources. And additionally they had a sense of small impact on the milieu. Thus they did not feel prepared to cope with problems or unpredictable events:

*"You never know. God forbid, if I slip and fall, or get sick, or something else happens to me, then I'll go and have some money saved for hard times. And now I don't have anything saved unless someone lends me money".*

(1\_f\_29)

Low level of activity of survey participants was accompanied with a very poor knowledge of the labour market. The labour market was perceived as hostile and unfair, while permanent employment corresponding to expectations of our interviewees seemed to be unavailable. In turn, casual or illegal jobs were associated, in their opinion, with too high risk of abuse by a dishonest employer. As a result, job-seeking activity was not considered as a necessary condition for improving their situation. Respondents' contact with the labour market was very limited: it often consisted in waiting for the dream job to appear.

Some respondents received social benefits, such as social assistance or family pension. Even in such cases respondents were to a considerable degree financially dependent on their parents. Questions about setting up own family, or about becoming independent were difficult for this group and often caused their discomfort. Respondents felt that a positive scenario of further vocational or life career was very distant from their current situation. This feeling, however, did not motivate them to take any action. Future, where a good life scenario would come true, was envisioned in a remote perspective of five or ten years. They assumed that by then their bad luck may yet be reversed.

### "Motivated unemployed"

Also the "motivated unemployed" gave priority to financial problems when speaking about unemployment-related problems. Interviews with representatives of this group clearly show that the lack of income has much wider implications than only effects in the sphere of consumption. Strong discomfort of respondents resulted from their dependence on other family members, most often parents. Respondents felt like a burden to their families. Taking advantage of the parental support was accompanied with feelings of guilt. The motivated unemployed considered that at this stage of life they should support their parents:

*"I wish I could be able to pay rent by myself, without my parents having to work. I would like to cover current expenses, pay for food, clothes, everything - all by myself. I know it would be very hard, but I would like to."*

(1\_f\_29).

Respondents in this group, similarly as those "vulnerable to exclusion" and "adult kids" shared the belief that lack of permanent employment was an obstacle to become independent. They did not, however, react by postponing plans for the distant future. Inability to move out from their parents, to enter into adult life, was a source of frustration for them:

*"You know, everyone would like to have a job, a good enough job to finally be able to move out from their parents."*

(18\_f\_26)

The need to address this problem was one of the main motivations to actively seek a job or to take some odd jobs.

Although the "motivated unemployed" were ready to take up an illegal work, their dream job, however, was a registered one. Not only instability of earnings and the risk of having to deal with a dishonest employer were their source of concern. The basic problem for them was that non-registered work did not give any rights to the old-age pension and to health insurance:

*"Well, you know, one day I would have to receive some pension and illegal work will not give me any entitlement. Insurance is also important."*

(4\_m\_23)

### "Young Adults"

In narratives of young adults there was no mention of problems with the daily management of the household budget. Their financial situation was relatively good. They were satisfied with the standard of living of their household.

*"No, no, at this moment we don't have such financial problems. Now my husband even earns more than before, so there are no such problems. We can afford everything, well everything that we currently need."*

(3\_f\_34)

However, this does not mean that financial issues were absent from conversation. Even in this group, respondents felt anxiety resulting from the reduced - in their opinion - security of family budget. It resulted from the fact that very often the household was based only on one source of income. Respondents were afraid of a situation where their partner would lose a job or would not be able to maintain the family for other reasons. The decision about returning to or entering the labour market was partly due to financial reasons: willingness to protect the family or raise the quality of life: implementing plans that require additional funding. What is important, in this group it was not, however, a prevailing motive:

*"Well, I'm not looking for a job just for money, but also to be able to go out and do something, achieve something. But there is also such a motivation that we want to buy a house, so it is a direct reason."*

(3\_f\_34)

As the main reasons to look for a job they mentioned the wish to develop and factors related to social status. Respondents did not feel well in the role of an unemployed person. They felt "a thirst for own vocational successes". They had a clearly defined idea of work which would allow them to satisfy their ambitions. They had no problem answering the question about criteria that a dream work should meet or the question about the type of work that they would refuse. Beside the "motivated unemployed" it was a group of people most active in their job-seeking efforts. Recruitment failures were particularly painful for them. Frustration, disappointment, anger and sense of injustice were often invoked in this context.

Respondents of this group often had their own families. Our interviewees appreciated the opportunity to devote more time to children and household duties. However, they assumed that if they managed to find a job, they would have no problem with reconciling professional and family roles.

### "Adult Kids"

Among respondents in this group negative emotions associated with unemployment were the most scarce. Adult kids were very often satisfied with their life situation. Money was no problem for them. With the support of parents they were not exposed to more serious financial problems, did not have to reduce consumption. They did not feel obliged to participate in the cost of household maintenance. Taking advantage of family support was considered as something natural. It did not arouse any shame or sense of guilt.

Does it mean that our respondents did not perceive any unemployment-related problems? "Adult kids" considered that the lack of their own income limited their ability to become independent, to enter into adult life. At the same time, however, "adult kids" felt fairly limited appetite for adulthood and independence. Starting a family was planned for a comfortably distant future of five, ten years. As in the case of people "vulnerable to exclusion", they assumed that by this time the unemployment problem would be already resolved, permanent job would "find them":

*"I don't know what I would do in ten years, I'll probably get hitched, live elsewhere, have two children, permanent job, something like that, won't I?"*

In the subsequent chapters we shall check whether the difficult unemployment experience translates into social and political exclusion. We shall also present the readers with the strategies adopted by our respondents in order to overcome the problems arising from the long-term unemployment.

***Is unemployment connected with social exclusion, and if yes, in what way?***

The problem of the long-term unemployment experienced by young people in the age at which they form their vocational careers brings about justified questions about its possible consequences in terms of elements of social exclusion. Hence the researchers were interested not only in the risk of poverty, financial problems and in coping strategies, but also in signs of potential restrictions on the exercise by interviewees of social roles or their use of public goods. The following comments are based on an analysis of respondents' narratives with particular attention paid to their relationships with the immediate social milieu, in particular in the dimension of their contacts with family members, friends and acquaintances as well as neighbours, or - to put it more broadly - representatives of local community.

In authors' intention issues related to social exclusion were to represent a major part of respondents' narratives. For various reasons - such as sensitivity of certain areas, language abilities of participants in the survey or their openness to the researcher, or else dynamics of conversation - those appetites could not always be met. Questions directly related to the closest family, situation of its members, their mutual relationships, as well as questions about unemployment experience in a family context and - similarly - with respect to friends and acquaintances, emerged mainly at the beginning of the interview. In this part of the interview there were also asked questions about the place where respondents grew up, a part of the city where they actually lived and their immediate vicinity. However, in a natural way statements concerning the above mentioned issues also appeared in other parts of the interview, such as an entire block related to financial issues and ways of coping with them (discussed in detail in Chapter 4 of this report), and in a part of the interview where summary questions about better and worse periods in the life, general life satisfaction and plans for the near and more distant future were asked.

Typology proposed in Chapter 2, based on the concept of maturity as a central phenomenon, appears to be a useful tool also when trying to analyse the closest and most intimate social relationships of people taking part in the research. Similarly as during classification of unemployment types it is worth to mention that although the accumulated material does not provide a basis for assessment of phenomena, statements of individual respondents, presentation of their life choices, life style elements, sometimes allowed to look closely at the condition of the relationships and the possible impact that unemployment may have on them. What is more, these observations formed a relatively consistent picture and were coherent with the typology referred to above.

Generally speaking, one may vividly say that in terms of contacts with parents about whom the respondents usually did not talk much, relationships of people "vulnerable to exclusion" are characterised by *close coexistence* (additionally strengthened with a practice of restricting and limiting external contacts to the functioning of the circle of family members); relationships of the "motivated unemployed" were characterised by - *cooperation with parents* resulting from their labour market activities and a sense of co-responsibility for the household; while for "adult kids" it was a kind of *escape from family relations* towards the peer group. Quite different were the relationships with parents in case of "young adults", i.e.

persons who have already established their own families , moved out of the house, and above all *have become independent*, bearing full responsibility for their own lives.

The picture of circle of acquaintances and friends, emerging from the interviews, seems well adjusted to the above proposed characteristics of relationships with parents and seems to complement them in a proper way. As the least active in social life there appear people "vulnerable to exclusion", who do not talk much about contacts with friends and do not especially expose these contacts, as well as "young adults ", i.e. people whose potential is absorbed first of all by the efforts connected with child rearing and with achieving life stabilisation. Although the "motivated unemployed" are limited by efforts connected with job seeking and with taking up various jobs, but not having their own families they are able to spend more time with friends and acquaintances. However only in relation to "adult kids" we may conclude that their life style is largely based on peer contacts of non-professional character.

In terms of relations with neighbours and representatives of local community, the collected material allows to draw up much less univocal conclusions, hence they will be presented jointly for all distinguished types of unemployment situations at the end of this section.

### "Vulnerable to exclusion"

First, it must be emphasised that people "vulnerable to exclusion" are as if "stuck" with their families due to the fact of living together; the same holds true for "motivated unemployed" and "adult kids". A typical Polish flat is a two-room apartment, the living space of which is less than 50 square meters. The fact of inhabiting such a small space with several other people is an important source of discomfort<sup>31</sup> The necessity of establishing good relations with parents and siblings is a difficult task for the participants in the survey. As mentioned above, they rarely speak openly about their relations with the closest family members. Moreover, they assess these relations as *average* or *so-so*; some of them, however, express full satisfaction:

*"I get on well with my family. I'm very close with my brother, which is probably because we live together"*

(2\_m\_29).

Two items characteristically suggest that the participants in the survey gradually retire into the immediate family. First, these are the statements concerning their usual daily routine, which is mostly about staying at home:

*"I spend time with my family or in front of the computer"*

(1\_f\_29);

or

*"I get up; then I go shopping (but not every day), or I watch TV [...] sometimes I surf the web [...] and the day goes by somehow"*

(2\_m\_29).

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<sup>31</sup> In two most extreme cases, our interlocutors have lived in a group of four in a one room apartment (10\_m\_28) or in a group of three in a room functioning as a bedroom, kitchen and living room, having to share the bathroom with their neighbors (24\_m\_19).

Some interviewees talk about performing their household duties, which are quite simple:

*"cleaning the house, but not necessarily every week, sometimes more often. And the dog; this is a duty. It's enough that you have to walk it for an hour"*

(9\_f\_30)

*"during the week... I go out for a walk, or I go to the city centre, then I come back and clean the house, cook a dinner, watch TV"*

(7\_f\_23)

However, it needs to be stressed once more that persons "vulnerable to exclusion" spend most of the time in tiny apartments with their parents who were often outside the labour market themselves (unemployment, pension, retirement), and thus they have lots of free time. Unemployment among parents is an important issue as it additionally hinders the financial capacities of their households, in which the adult kids remain financially dependent on them. In case of the participants in the survey, the total income is often sufficient to cover basic expenses ["I don't need much – I've got clothes, I've got food" (9\_f\_30)]. Still, such situations shall be treated as a threat of poverty and social exclusion experience.

It seems that the elements of the latter may be observed in relations existing between the participants in the survey and their friends and acquaintances despite the fact that persons vulnerable to exclusion, other participants alike, declared having at least one trusted person in their community, with whom they are able to talk openly. However, when asked about their acquaintances, people inclining towards the group "vulnerable to exclusion" did not elaborate their answers. Furthermore, it was difficult to get an impression that they care much about social life:

*"we meet from time to time, we can do this sometimes. I'm ill at the moment, so my friend did some shopping for me"*

(22\_m\_25).

However, the statements concerning the process in which those relations become loosen or broken were more frequent:

*"of course, I had lots of friends in college and at school [...] then, and it was kind of natural, the college ended and the friendships ended too... One may say so"*

(2\_m\_29)

*"well this relation is not as it used to be. It is so to speak, a little bit, almost... artificial"*

(9\_f\_30)

The process may be interpreted as follows: due to the scarce financial means at their disposal and most often due to the difficult housing conditions, it is difficult for them to maintain relations with people from areas other than the closest neighbourhood. The necessity of commuting to the city centre and going to an ordinary cafeteria is often beyond their financial capacities (not to mention going to a pub or club). As a result, they remain on the remote outskirts of social life.

### "Motivated unemployed"

As presented in Chapter 2, this style of functioning on the labour market is associated with young people only formally considered to be formally unemployed. They met all the criteria specified in the definition used in the survey, i.e. they were officially unemployed for the minimum of 12 months and declared that they were looking for a job, but at the same time they informally completed some tasks for which they were paid. This seems to be related to the discussed relations with parents as well as friends and acquaintances.

The straightforward questions concerning relations with family are not a good method of determining the differences between various groups of unemployed. This is because the answers are cursory or (in case of more detailed ones) assure about the good state of these relations, e.g.: "[...] the job and private matters, and I can rely on my family" (4\_m\_23).

On the one hand, this group was distinguished by the substantial activity of the young people:

*"You know, during a week, when I come home after work [unofficially employed in a pawnshop, attends a course for steam shovel operators – P.B.], and I finish at 6 p.m. sometimes at 8 p.m., I only tidy up a little, you know, so many things to worry about, I practically don't have time as I work on Saturdays to 2 p.m., and the only place we can go to if there's some free time is the allotment"*

(10\_m\_28)

On the other hand, they openly declare and highlight their pursuit of independence:

*"everyone would like to have a job [...] a job that would make it possible to move out from parents' house"*

(15\_f\_28)

Being financially dependent on parents makes them feel discomfort: "being dependent is annoying" (4\_m\_23). Thus, it is possible to assume that the appropriate attitude characterised by the sense of responsibility towards parental help and household expenses, like this:

*"I try not to generate my expenses. I use my parents' money, so when I have a choice to ride a bike or go somewhere on foot, I choose to walk"*

(15\_f\_28)

may, among others, result in proper relations with parents though it has to be stressed once more that the interviews provide little information on this issue.

The gathered data provide much more information concerning the relations existing between the "motivated unemployed" and their friends. It would be difficult to trace any instances of social exclusion here. Normally, they have many acquaintances:

*"childhood friends, neighbours, friends from school, colleagues from various workplaces"*

(11\_f\_31)

Even if their number is scarcer, the time spent on describing them as well as the way of talking about them suggests that they are extremely valuable for the participants in the survey:

*"it's a small group, you can count them on one hand, but these are the people I can always rely on [...] [we've known one another] since we were pupils but not from one school [...] and these are people of different ages [...] we share interests and we've known one another for a long time"*

(15\_f\_28).

Moreover, these relations are often described as mutual ones, which again suggests that this group is strongly involved in social life other than family life:

*"[...] my friends looked for job offers and sent me SMSes if they saw something for me. Then I made phone calls and inquiries"*

(20\_f\_21).

### "Adult Kids"

As mentioned above, adult kids are a group that despite the fact of living with their parents "escapes" from family into social life. The interlocutors associated with this group of unemployed also said little about their relations with their parents usually describing them as good or *very good* ["good, we don't argue" (12\_m\_24)]. Moreover, they could not say much about their parents' attitude towards unemployment:

Q. Do parents accept your decision to abandon the job search?

A. *No, they urge me to find one [laughter].*

Q. But do you try to explain them that the situation is as it is, and that it is difficult for you to overcome this problem?

A. *Exactly, this is what I do"*

(12\_m\_24).

It is difficult to assume that parents accept the fact that their adult kids, who do not study or work, remain financially dependent on them. However, they are successful in reaching compromise, which makes it possible to live together with their children.

The adult kids distance themselves from their parents' household, however, which may be exemplified by the following statement:

*"well I live and eat there, but I don't pay for that"*

(5\_m\_24).

This lack of interest in household affairs is sometimes reflected in their poor knowledge concerning their parents' professions, which is aptly illustrated by the following statement:

*"mom works for my uncle – a jeweller; dad works at the stonecutter's, they do something, I don't know, monuments maybe?"*

(12\_m\_24).

This seems particularly important as far as people financially dependent on their parents are concerned:

*"I handle it somehow [...] that is, I don't have a source of income, my parents help me"*

(12\_m\_24).

The pursuit of independence is the most important aspect of a category considered to be central one, i.e. of maturity. The adult kids, however, willingly accept being financially dependent on their parents – independence is not the most important goal even in a hypothetical situation of having a source of income:

Q. Imagine you started earning money; what would you buy first?

A. *I would spend more on clothes, I don't know, on trips. I would certainly put some money aside.*

Q. For something special?

A. *Well, for a car or something like that*

(12\_m\_24).

Their statements concerning a typical daily routine reflect their ideas about the importance of social life in an accurate way:

*"I get up, switch on the computer, read sport news, and, I don't know, I wait until my friends return from work, then we go out, talk, and so on"*

(5\_m\_24).

What catches attention is the fact that friends are placed in a central position, and the daily routine resembles the one of a student or a pupil on holidays:

*"I don't work. I do sport – I box, I go to gym [...] I'm in a gym starting in the morning to 1 p.m. [...] then I have a meal, go for a walk, meet friends from the blocks or play football"*

(12\_m\_24).

The interlocutors have a high regard for friendship. They trust their friends, with whom they share problems, unemployment being one of them:

*"with my friends – yes, with my family... not quite [...] you know how discussing it with a family looks like. But with my friends, with them I can talk about everything"*

(5\_m\_24).

Friends are significant to such an extent that they may influence our interlocutors' plans, causing them, for example, to give up their job:

*"I worked abroad, in England [...] I could have stayed there, but I didn't like the place [...] I missed my friends"*

(12\_m\_24).

It is possible to assume that the sphere of social life is a kind of compensation for failures in other areas of life:

*"what am I happy about? [...] well, I don't know, I've got lots of friends, it ain't that bad, right?"*

It is worth mentioning though that despite their lifestyle, adult kids do not consider themselves to be teenagers. They are aware of the passage of time, due to which their carelessness (for which they yearn so much) is fading away:

*"It used to be better in late 1990s, everything was so cool because we were young, had no worries or troubles"*

(12\_m\_24).

"Young Adults "

This particular group emerged as a result of empirical inspiration from the field research and the statements of individuals who had already managed to move out from their parents' houses and become independent. First of all, these are people who started their own families and focus on them while answering questions:

*"I've known my husband for 10 years, we've been married for four years, we have a son, he's 1 year and three months old. We'll have another baby in December"*

(16\_f\_29);

*"Majeczka is 8 years and six months old, Gucio is eight months old, my husband and I have been married for 9 years now"*

(14\_f\_35).

Contrary to the former groups of unemployed the "young adults" consider a wider family circle only while discussing their own parents, siblings, and their relations with relatives:

*"my parents, brother, husband's parents"*

(16\_f\_29)

*"if it is about my family, I can rely on my father, my mom passed away..."*

(14\_f\_35).

The interlocutors who met the typology criteria presented in Chapter 2 and could be classified as "young adults" were mostly female, married, and had children. Thus, it is not surprising that their daily routine is focused on performing family duties:

*"a typical day, well, we get up, then see one child to school and the other to kindergarten, then you have to do the shopping, cook a dinner, pick the children up, serve the dinner, wash the dishes, and do some unplanned things in the meantime..."*

(3\_f\_34);

*"the attention is focused on the baby [...] actually I sit at home [...] I send my child to school, I cook, clean, feed the baby, change a baby, then I feed him again, play with him [...] and this is how the days go by"*

(14\_f\_35).

The two statements above show at the same time the constraints on relations with friends and acquaintances. As for this type of relation, the interviewees and persons "vulnerable to exclusion" express a similar attitude towards it. Its role is namely insignificant; the reasons for this state of affairs are different, however. Thus, they shall not be treated as symptoms of social exclusion but at best as a (temporary) marginalization of social contacts on the list of priorities:

*"some [friends – P.B.] went abroad to work there [...] the ones who stayed here are busy working, so we don't see one another often, but I do have contact with some people, mainly with mates from college"*

(16\_f\_29);

*"we also meet other couples from time to time, but these are families who also have their own children and duties"*

(14\_f\_35).

Individuals differ as far as the ways in which they manage their social life are concerned. Thus, it is worth mentioning the statements different from the ones presented above:

*"we have a lot of friends [...] we know one another from school, we stick together"*

(3\_f\_34).

At first, the interviewees inclining towards the group of "young adults" seem to represent the most positive scenario (full independence, getting efficiently in maturity, etc.). However, the profile of the group, which consists mostly of young mothers, poses a need of taking into account the resulting potential for exclusion, which may be illustrated by the following statement by a participant of the survey:

*"our future, or my future to be more precise, is uncertain because the years go by, and I don't have a stable job. I really feel uneasy about it. The kids grow up, the expenses are getting higher, also because a new baby was born. In fact, this is my husband who is able to take care for our finance [...] and I'm unable to help as if my hands were tied. On the one hand, there's a child, on the other there's no reasonable job offer".*

Such people cannot be treated as excluded from the closest forms of social life. However, being dependent on one source of income and remaining outside the labour market for a long time under unfavourable circumstances may lead to social exclusion.

### "Neighbours/local community"

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, the gathered data are not sufficient enough for a detailed analysis of the relations existing between the participants in the survey and their local community. However, the rough analysis of the interview fragments devoted to this problem unveils two symptoms of gradual exclusion of some of the interviewees.

Immediate community such as a housing estate or a district plays a significant role for the people who presented themselves to the researchers as not particularly mobile, very attached to their place of residence, which in most cases was a place of their birth. In the interviews, they underlined the importance of contacts with the immediate community (*people from the same staircase, block, housing estate, from school*) characterised by durability and proximity. The same kind of relations with local community was typical for the majority of the young unemployed inclining towards the group of "adult kids" and for some "motivated unemployed". The elements of atrophy in this type of relations, in turn, were visible in the interviews with people "vulnerable to exclusion", which may be understood as a symptom of their gradual exclusion in this area partially discussed above.

Given all the data, the distinction "housing estate" vs. "the city" became clearly visible.<sup>32</sup> The more remote the place of interlocutors' residence from the city is, the more vivid is the distinction.<sup>33</sup> While the people in stable financial situation ("young adults") function in the

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<sup>32</sup> "Going to the city" means visiting the city centre.

<sup>33</sup> Obviously, this remark does not refer to the individuals who live in the city centre ; however, it is possible that due to the difficult financial situation their functioning in the public space (shops,

"city", the ones finding themselves in difficult circumstances (vulnerable to exclusion) *visit it rarely* in order to settle certain affairs, buy some items, or simply spend some free time there, *look at the people, do the window shopping*. There is a noticeable discrepancy between these two areas, and the harder the financial situation of the participant of the survey is, the less visits are paid to the "city", which is another symptom of exclusion, or spatial exclusion to be more precise.

***Is unemployment connected with political exclusion, and if yes, in what way?***

A block related to political life in the individual interview scenario, adopted in the research, contained questions from four different areas: interest in politics at various levels and in various areas, trust in politicians, involvement in activities of a political nature and participation in elections at different levels.

In terms of division into four ideal types proposed in Chapter 2, no differences have been observed between the representatives of these types as regards their attitude towards politics. For this reason, description in this part of the report is structured in terms of issues and not in relation to the categorisation presented in Chapter 2 of this report.

***The low level of interest in politics, lack of interest in local politics***

The vast majority of respondents are not interested in politics. Only three out of 23 respondents claimed that politics was an important sphere of their interests, while one in three admitted that s/he dealt with political issues only occasionally. For this group, television is the main source of information. Therefore their knowledge of politics at the national level is wider - although superficial - than that of politics at the local level. Only three persons expressed their interest in local politics. The first of them considered that local politics was important because decisions taken in Kielce directly translated into the quality of life of residents. The next was a young man identifying himself strongly with his local community, taking care of good neighbourhood relations and thinking about life in a pragmatic way. To him local politics is more important because it is "closer to the people". And finally, the third respondent who declared an interest in politics - it was a political science graduate of a local university, who readily discussed political topics. Other respondents either declared their total lack of interest in politics at the local level, or were interested in local politics only in so far as it was reflected at the national level, it means when the nation-wide television referred to local issues.

*"I am interested in the local level if it is reflected at the national level. If there is no such reflection, I do not care. In fact I don't deal with it at all. But, when there was Mr. Gosiewski (a deputy to the Lower Chamber of Polish Parliament), who nevertheless drew attention to Kielce at the national level, it was worth of my interest. And indeed it was worth it to get interested."*

(18\_f\_26)

Due to so small interest in politics and lack of activity in this area it is difficult to speak about political exclusion of people covered by the research. You may not call "excluded" someone who has never expressed any interest in a given field. Nor can we say that the

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cafeterias, clubs/pubs) may be similar to the one of young living housing estates remote from the city centre.

unemployment situation affects the political views of the unemployed. Most of them do not have any views in this area and other do not change their views. In relation to our respondents more adequate term would be "political neutrality" rather than "political exclusion". In this situation unemployment does not change anything.

As mentioned earlier, in the sphere of politics no significant differences may be observed between representatives of four distinguished types. However, one may consider various reasons for respondents' lack of interest in politics depending on their type. The first type - "vulnerable to unemployment" - includes resigned people with rather passive attitudes. It may be concluded that the lack of interest in politics is associated with a lack of belief in a possibility of changing anything. This distrust and pessimism covers inter alia a sphere of politics. As for the second type - they are active job seekers who in fact are all the time present in the labour market. The representatives of this group probably are more focused on their individual situation and on trying to improve it, than on political issues, which seem remote and unimportant, having a negligible impact on their lives. The young unemployed representing the third type live as teenagers who are rarely interested in politics, focusing on such organisation of time that would allow them to have fun and not worry about anything. Politics may seem too controversial for them, and thus rather unattractive. And finally - the last type - the "young adults" - are people with stable financial situation, most often involved in family life and drawing up plans for the future, in which there is no place for politics.

#### *The low level of reflection on political issues. Knowledge and opinions derived from television*

The majority of our young long-term unemployed respondents claimed that they were discouraged from politics and did not want to talk about it. The lack of interest translates into a lack of reflection on political topics. Some of them tried to address current issues in Poland, but their opinions were partly contradictory, showing a lack of knowledge and sophisticated political views of respondents. Knowledge derived mainly from television and hearsay gives in effect a flattened and false picture of political life. Many respondents did not know the mechanisms and procedures existing in political sphere, such as electoral rules, but they readily repeated what they had heard on television or from friends and family. Politics was not a frequent topic of conversations for our interlocutors - and if they talked about it, it was only on the occasion of more important events - for them most often some political scandals.

Interviews with several young unemployed people revealed an interesting phenomenon of strong emotions evoked by political topics with simultaneous declaration of the lack of interest in politics. It was characteristic mainly of persons who *watch*<sup>34</sup> politics from time to time, i.e. – keep track of political television programmes. One of female respondents, when asked if interested in politics, answered:

*"You know what? Sometimes, but after two or three days I'm fed up with it and I prefer not to watch, not to listen and not to lose my temper. (...)  
Sometimes I watch but then I get annoyed and stop."*

(3\_f\_34)

Another young unemployed woman described her frustration at low level of political debate, defined a parliamentary debate as a *cabaret*:

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<sup>34</sup> Many respondents, when asked whether they were interested in politics, replied that they were watching it, see for example 8\_m\_33: "And are you interested in politics at all? Well, I watch quite often various debates, not-debates etc., etc. ..."

*"(...) I mean here Sejm (lower chamber of Polish parliament), because for example if their quarrel and quarrel, all those politicians, I immediately turn off the TV. Because it's not possible to listen to it, politics is a cabaret, sheer cabaret. Yes, I was once watching, it was a cabaret."*

(7\_f\_23)

For a certain group of unemployed people watching politics on television becomes an entertainment, a method to spend time. One of the young men, as unemployed with a lot of free time, developed an interest in activities of inquiry commissions in the parliament, considering it a good entertainment.

*"It's something to laugh about, you know, a bit of comedy, a bit of horror in all this"*

(8\_m\_33)

- as this young man justified his new interest. Another respondent divided people interested in politics into the bitter and those who sometimes watch to laugh about. (10\_m\_28)

He himself sees his place in the latter group.

#### Low levels of confidence in politicians

Only single respondents declared that the chosen few politicians can be trusted. Most of interviewees perceived politicians as a homogeneous group which should not be trusted. Among people distrustful of politicians two groups may be distinguished: these convinced that politicians are alienated from real life and those who undermine the good intentions of the representatives of this group. Here is an example of an argument for the thesis of alienation of politicians and their lack of knowledge of the realities of life in the country:

*"they behave as if they were born yesterday or normally not on this planet. The minister of health who says that he is puzzled by bribery, and he is surprised that such a situation exists in our country, well, for me, I don't know where he comes from! After all, everyone knows that you do not go to a hospital with empty wallet. You must have something with you if you want to have everything at its place. If the minister of health speaks in such way, and I don't know, he wakes up and is surprised, well, no, for me it's paranoia!"*

(3\_f\_34)

People who think this way oppose a group of politicians to a group of *ordinary mortals*, showing the gap dividing those two groups. On the other hand, many respondents emphasise that in their opinion *politicians lie and think only about their own interests*. Our interviewees doubt if the politicians care about the welfare of citizens of their country or residents of their region. Politicians' work is badly or most badly assessed, as one of our respondents said:

*"They just sit, lie, take money, and do nothing more."*

(5\_m\_24)

Features attributed to politicians in this group include: laziness, egotism, self-interest, dishonesty, lack of good intentions and skills to work effectively.

### Lack of political commitment. Exception: participation in elections.

Due to lack of interest in political issues and low confidence in politicians, the young unemployed covered by our research in Kielce do not want to get involved in any political activities<sup>35</sup>. The only exception - which, however, relates to the majority of respondents - is participation in elections. More than half of them declare that they always vote, and the majority of the respondents define participation in the elections in terms of civic duty. Some people declare that they go to the polls but not always. These are the people casting their votes most often only in the presidential election, where they have a greater sense of impact on the final result and they feel that they know more about candidates than for example about candidates of political groups for the parliament. There are also people who go to the polls for social reasons, they treat it as an entertainment. In these cases it happens that their friends encourage them to vote ("It is yet to be seen if I vote or not. If I want, maybe I'll go." (19\_f\_21), "Some friends tell me: "Don't vote", while others say - "Go, put a cross in a box or two" (15\_f\_28)). Some people vote for family reasons ("well, sometimes I have to, because my dad urges me to go and vote, although it makes no sense because irrespective of how you vote, they will use a computer to select." (1\_f\_29)).

Since most of the respondents mistrust politicians, they do not also see good candidates to vote for. For this reason, negative motivation is frequent in elections, people choose *the lesser evil*, they take decisions by intuition, based on emotions rather than substantive arguments.

Generally speaking, our interviewees are convinced that politics is not a particularly important area affecting their lives. Many of them consider that Poland is not a country that would offer good perspectives, "if you do not have contacts and money" (19\_f\_21). Political elections do not change much and one has to cope by himself.

Curiously enough, the situation of unemployment seems to have only a slight impact on such attitude towards politics among our interviewees. They declare that their opinion of politics was the same when they were employed or learned. Being jobless has changed the situation only in such way that the unemployed have more time and sometimes, to spend the time, they begin to *watch* politics like watching movies and TV series.

### Profiles of interviewees interested in politics

At the end of this chapter we would like to present profiles of three people who - as the only ones - declared their strong interest in politics. They are so remarkable that none of earlier presented characteristics of attitudes of young unemployed people towards political life describes them. They do not fall into one of our distinguished types, therefore it is not possible (at least on the basis of carried out interviews) to claim that representatives of any of the groups are more often interested in politics.

The first of them (18\_f\_26)<sup>36</sup>, when asked what politics meant in her life answered:

*"Well, it is one of spheres of my biggest interests. Well, and also my favourite topic of discussion, and, God, something that has an impact on*

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<sup>35</sup> The only exception was a graduate of political science who sat regularly in the district electoral commissions (2\_m\_29) and a young woman who participated in electoral campaign of one of the politicians (18\_f\_26) - see page 28

<sup>36</sup> All quotations in the subsequent two paragraphs come from this interview.

*the fate of the state and fate of all of us, citizens. Therefore I think that it is an important area in life of every human being."*

It means that politics has double meaning for this young woman: first of all it is an interesting topic for discussion, and secondly, it is important, because it strongly affects lives of all people.

What interesting, more detailed questions proved that although the young woman was interested in politics, but her interests remain at a very general level and were based on information transferred in popular TV programmes. Her interests in politics at a local level are limited to issues that "find their reflection at the national level" - i.e. issues exposed by the nation-wide media. The young woman became more interested in politics on the occasion of the next to last self-governmental election when she was involved in electoral campaign of one of the candidates of a leftist party. However, since she does not remember a name of the candidate for whom she was working, it seems that her involvement was motivated by a wish to find a more original occupation and acquire new experience rather than by an attempt to change reality in accordance with the ideological line of a specific political party. The woman speaks about it directly:

*"I may admit that I wanted to see how it all looks like. It was not reflected in my ideological line. It was only a matter of getting experience."*

The interviewee considers that voting is necessary for those who want to have arguments in political discussions.

*"(...) how could I talk about political issues if I would not go to the polls? It would be in no way connected with something that I wish to say. I believe that, if someone is interested to a greater or lesser extent in politics, to be able to say something or even to criticise, for example government or the president, or anyone else, they should vote."*

To conclude, analysed statements show large emotional involvement in political issues, however connected with superficial knowledge of political life in Poland and in Kielce. The mentioned woman treats politics as a sophisticated entertainment, which provides her with topics for discussions with family and friends. She is ready to take up some political activities (such as involvement in electoral campaign), however she has no specific political views.

The other person, who is interested in politics, is a member of Jehovah's Witnesses, which considerably forms his attitude towards politics. Due to the adopted world view the young man in principle does not participate in elections at any level and is not involved in any type of political actions. Voting is prohibited for Jehovah's Witnesses because it means *recognition of someone else's power.*

*"Power should be symbolic because for us only the God has unlimited power and only He may in fact change everything in the world, not only in the country."*

(22\_m\_25)

For this reason Jehovah's Witnesses may not involve in politics. Our interviewee is however interested in political life, which is proved during the interview, when he analyses groundlessness of specific political decisions. The man explains his interests by saying:

*"Each human being is certainly interested in what is happening in the country."*

He is personally convinced of very bad general situation in the country, which is a consequence of "politicians dealing with rubbish". However, he claims that his participation in elections would change nothing, so it makes no sense.

After answering all questions, the interviewee came back to political issues. He admitted that there were some situations where citizens should show their involvement. It concerns situations where one should react if something wrong is happening, in particular at a local level.

*"However, a human being should interfere, i.e. should cooperate with the society, which means that if there is a problem of a local road, that something may be damaged, someone else's house may be demolished, we should react as the society. Perhaps it also concerns politics because everything is connected somewhere. One should reach some agreements and help other members of the community."*

The third interviewee (2\_m\_29) interested in politics - it was a political science graduate of a local university. For him, interest in politics is an important element of building his identity, also in the professional context, because he dreams of political career. However, his high political aspirations are combined with lack of self-confidence and go-getting energy, which - even in his opinion - is needed in politics. As a result, his interest in and dealing with politics mainly play the role of spending lots of free time. The interview shows that his interests have quite a superficial form – the man goes through popular Internet portals looking for the news from the world of politics.

An element of building identity seems very important here. The man is proud of his robust political views, which - in his opinion - is his private achievement and an element of building identity. He says that he wanted to involve in activities of one of political parties, but with no success. He is not able to understand why. He perceives himself as an expert in politics, at the same time accepting his position of an outsider in this world. He considers participation in elections as a privilege of a citizen, which however should be taken advantage of only by people who are able to make conscious political choices.

In the described case, interest in politics is for the unemployed man a basis for building identity and the main form of spending time in the unemployment situation. The man more readily talks about general, distant issues, such as disputes between politicians of various parties, than of his own situation of unemployment. His opinions of different political groups are more sophisticated than opinions of the local labour market. He devotes more time to reading about politics in Internet than to job seeking (even via Internet). What is more, when summing up his earlier life, he divides own biography into two parts: one before 1989, being a crucial moment in the recent history of Poland and one after this date.

### **Unexpected but important**

Some topics which have emerged in the collected material do not fit directly into issues described in earlier chapters. However they are worth discussing, because they enable better understanding of the situation and attitudes of those surveyed. The issues raised in this chapter are the topics that have emerged unexpectedly, were not planned, but they proved to be important. Furthermore, in many instances they may be surprising to people not living in Poland, who are accustomed to different models in their countries.

Basing an analysis of the collected material on the criterion of importance and specificity, three topics have been chosen, which are worth consideration:

1. special events in lives of the unemployed, which they indicate as crucial,
2. experiences with the Labour Office and interviewees' attitude towards this institution,
3. the role of non-governmental organisations as institutions which support unemployed people.

### Crucial events in the life

"Young adults " do not see any special, crucial events that would drastically change their past situation. Their life is stable, and emerging changes seem to be "natural". As regards young mothers who usually represent this type, birth of the first child resulted in their departure from the labour market, however this event is not assessed by them as any special turning point. Although maternity changed their living situation, inter alia resulting in their departure from the labour market, the respondents face those changes with calmness, as they mean for them an entry into the next stage in life and not a complete change of life. The interviewees emphasise that they may count on support from family, husband, parents or siblings.

People "vulnerable to exclusion" also do not perceive any crucial events in their lives. They often demonstrated a low level of reflection on their own lives, answering many questions: *I don't know, I didn't give it much thought*, etc. They did not discern any special, independent event which could inter alia lead to an unemployment situation. One of the interviewees expressed his surprise at finding himself in such situation.

*"I don't know, somehow I'm not able to grasp it. After all one is young, etc., etc, and is no weakling or something similar"*

(8\_m\_33).

Only one of people "vulnerable to exclusion" has a clear vision of reasons for his unemployment. This is a young man who after graduating primary school decided to start education in a vocational school, then complemented his education in secondary technical school, and now he regrets that in result he delayed his entry to the labour market by one year.

*"I could go straight to the secondary technical school, because then I would graduate higher school one year earlier."*

(2\_m\_29)

In this case, such reasoning is surprising, because the interviewee has never worked, so it is difficult to suspect that completing education one year earlier would change anything.

The "motivated unemployed" and "adult kids" do not speak about crucial moments in their lives although - as it seems - for different reasons. "Adult kids" live a carefree life, their life style or the way of thinking have not changed from the time when they were teenagers. They have no sense of responsibility in the context of unemployment and job seeking, and so they do not perceive special events in their lives which could lead to serious changes in their situation.

And the "motivated unemployed" take responsibility for their situation. They do not speak about crucial external events which sealed their fate, rather about events dependent on them which in result affected their current situation. One of the interviewees (4\_m\_23) admits that he has lost much because he did not learn diligently and low education impedes his job-seeking efforts. Other interlocutor (7\_f\_23) regrets that due to her attitude she has not been promoted three times to the next grade in the first year of the general secondary school.

Change in her life started when she changed her attitude and took responsibility for her own actions. But it is difficult to speak here about any crucial event. It is rather a process leading to development of mature attitudes. One of women representing the "motivated unemployed" type claims that pregnant women and women with young children are affected by labour market exclusion and that generally young women have problems with finding a job:

*"Because I have kids, it's my damage. If you don't have kids they won't employ you, because you can always get pregnant. When you have children, they won't employ you too, because you may take time off, because the child is sick, because anything may happen and there is always some reason."*

(23\_f\_30)

The woman does not regret that she has children, but points out that maternity has changed her life in various dimensions.

As a clear example of perceiving a specific event, which has completely changed the course of life, we should mention a case of a young woman who suffered a serious car accident 11 years ago, when she was 19 years of age, which resulted in her exclusion from the labour market. She considers that it is a tragedy for her, but on the other hand recovery is the most important moment in her life. "Well, everything happened because I had an accident and could not find a job. Simply due to my health condition. I had problems with my leg, with my spine. Now everything comes out, so I'm not able to find a job.

*"I had to resign of school because I was ill. It lasted four or five years."*

(1\_f\_29)

It seems that during the first years after the accident the woman was at risk of exclusion, but several years later, as she was recovering, she started to take active measures to improve her situation.

### The Labour Office

Generally it should be mentioned that the majority of young unemployed people covered by the research do not demonstrate demanding attitude towards the Labour Office<sup>37</sup>.

However, people "vulnerable to exclusion" are most dissatisfied with the activities of this institution and attitudes of officials. One of them even doubts if this institution is needed at all, since its maintenance cost is so high and it helps so small number of people.

*"I wonder if this is a profitable institution. Let's not kid ourselves, it's maintenance cost is high, and it functions in each city, doesn't it? A lot of money must be spent to keep it, plus of course offices, payments, salaries for employees, and so on... If we added everything that the budget has to pay - because budget it is taxpayers' money, isn't it? It's money of employed persons which goes to these offices, to these jobcentres all over the country, plus unemployment benefits. It seems to me that taxpayers must pay more than the profit labour offices bring."*

(2\_m\_29)

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<sup>37</sup> People "vulnerable to exclusion" are an exception - as described in further part of this chapter.

At the same time people "vulnerable to exclusion" are poorly informed about the offer of the Labour Office. Most of them have never taken advantage of trainings, courses or vocational guidance. They are aware that the Office has an offer for the unemployed, but they are not sure how they could take advantage of it. Some of them even do not know what vocational guidance proposed by the Labour Office means and what is its objective. When interviewed they expressed an expectation that the Labour Office would come to them with information and offer, which was unknown to them (an element of demanding attitude).

One interviewee formulated his opinion on this matter in the following way:

*"They should at least tell me if there are any opportunities, and to be honest, when one registers at the office, there is not much information about certain things, opportunities."*

(22\_m\_25)

Another young man, who has been punished several times for rejecting the job offer, accuses officials of not informing unemployed people in a sufficient way about regulations in force. He expects that the Office will come with an offer to him. Personally, he is not specially interested in such offer and does not look for information in this regard.

*"I don't know, because you know, I have never taken advantage of such forms, I had no such proposals, had I? Well, that I may be referred to a training or a meeting, well, organised by the Labour Office. I don't know, when I watch TV, all the time they "drone on" about those trainings and so on. But somehow, they are not able to reach me."*

(8\_m\_33)

Another charge against the Labour Office is too extensive bureaucracy and limited access to trainings. "I mean, one could say that not everyone has a chance at the Labour Office, although it is an institution designed for the unemployed." (9\_f\_30) Information exchange between various administration offices is also criticised, for example with the Social Security Institution.

"Adult kids" believe that the Labour Office has nothing to offer them, because there are no offers of sufficiently paid jobs, and proposed trainings do not provide job security. In their opinion the Labour Office cannot help in anything and its activities are ineffective. Taking this assumption they are not interested in the offer of the Labour Office and have no knowledge in this regard. In their opinion officials are *impolite*. If they register in the Labour Office as the unemployed and take advantage of some offers, they do it only to receive some *papers*.

*"You know, I participated in this course only to have a paper, I knew everything that they were showing during that course."*

(5\_m\_24)

The mentioned interviewee needed the Labour Office only to have insurance. "If not for the insurance I would need the Office for nothing."

The "motivated unemployed" would like to be able to better use the services of the Office but they understand that such institution has its limits. Visible is their belief that the Labour Office could help them and that in fact it helps some people, though it is not able to equally support all.

*"(...) I tried to register for a course, but every time I went there, I could not find my name on the list. Because first you must register and then*

*you must wait. (...) So, in my situation I did not get any help, but they think that they are trying to do something. All the more that as regards those courses, some people manage to participate in them, there are many such guys. I think that others are just lucky, but I do not have that luck."*

(1\_f\_29)

Officials' work is assessed positively.

*"Officials try to do their best, and the Labour Office does what it can to help the unemployed."*

(4\_m\_23)

An opinion prevails that officials are cultured, but there are no special expectations of them.

As in the case of people "vulnerable to exclusion", there is also an allegation of too complicated bureaucratic system, which makes it difficult to take advantage of assistance. The "motivated unemployed" people emphasise that one should stand up for one's rights.

*"One has to assert for one's rights, because otherwise ... I understand that they have confusion, they have a lot of people, it's not only me to serve, but it's true that there is also someone after me, isn't it? We are all standing in a queue, so it should function somehow, but it doesn't, does it? And that's the reason for confusion."*

(19\_f\_21)

The "motivated unemployed" expect the Labour Office to extend its offer so that a larger group of people, in particular those long-term unemployed, could take advantage of it.

*"I think that there should be more such courses, to place there the long-term unemployed persons, to give them priority. Those who registered only yesterday should not have any priority, but the long-term unemployed should. It seems to me that they should be given opportunity."*

(1\_f\_29)

On the other hand, the interviewees wish to receive more interesting and current offers, tailored to the needs of the unemployed.

*"Their offers are usually outdated or have been already distributed, but they appear on the notice-board - all the time the same ones."*

(21\_m\_35)

"Young adults" have specific expectations of employment which, however, are not met by the Office. Instead, they associate the Labour Office with bureaucracy, lack of professionalism and of friendly attitude of officials towards clients. The interviewees would expect more professionalism of officials, increased rate of customer service and better work organisation in the Office. They mention that in fact the main task performed by this institution is to register unemployed people. For this reason they are not looking for a job through the Office. They do not believe that the institution can help them in this field. As an example of Labour Office ineffectiveness they mention traineeships which do not create any employment opportunity and offer only minimum earning. The traineeships are worth a try only if someone

needs experience. In spite of directly expressed disappointment of this institution, "young adults", however, do not have a demanding attitude. They understand administrative limits.

*"One has to wait a long time, queues are everywhere, but I'm not surprised. Everyone has his errands to do."*

(6\_f\_28)

Due to the above mentioned limitations the Labour Office may help only those who care about it and are active.

*"if someone often comes to the Office and takes matters into his own hands, then he may benefit. Because, does the Labour Office help people by itself, altruistically? I'm not sure... But if someone is focused on job and really wants to find it: comes to the Office, meets with counsellors, I think that the Office is not disturbing. Yes, it is so: it won't disturb. But to help someone, to encourage them, I don't think so..."*

(18\_f\_26)

The above mentioned expectations for officials' professionalism also cover their interpersonal skills. Those who work in an institution based on permanent contact with the unemployed should develop their interpersonal skills,

*[should] "work on interpersonal contact with the client (...). I would definitely change the present situation to ensure that the contact with the office is not so difficult, that it is a normal contact with normal people wishing to help other people."*

(18\_f\_26)

### Non-governmental organisations

It is surprising that the young unemployed lack knowledge of and contacts with local non-governmental organisations. Whichever of four groups of interviewees we examine, only single persons have ever heard about any non-governmental organisations in Kielce, and even they need suggestions as to the names of specific organisations. In some statements NGOs were confused with public institutions, such as a regional diet or municipal centre for family assistance.

Only two "motivated unemployed" persons mentioned specific organisations that they knew and with whom they even cooperated. In the first case it was Caritas and the Polish Red Cross. What is interesting, the interviewee did not benefit from their aid by himself but tried to help some other people who needed more help.

*"I have recently visited Caritas because I had a lot of very expensive drugs and special equipment for asthma. I just left it all there, because it may be of use for someone who has not enough money".*

(10\_m\_28)

The next person works as a volunteer for the Volunteer Centre, although he does not define his activity in such way.

*"I'm not working as a volunteer but sometimes I go there to help them with some computer stuff. I'm there, helping them for free because they are my friends, yeah. . And so I go there to help my friends."*

(15\_f\_28)

In turn one of people "vulnerable to exclusion" (11\_f\_31) sometimes receives packages from Caritas.

Generally, however, people "vulnerable to exclusion" are not familiar with local NGOs, although one of them believes that such organisations are needed. This purely theoretical view, not supported by the experience of contacts or cooperation with any of these organisations, is probably due to the fact that this interviewee is a graduate of political science. Interviewed "adult kids" and "young adults" do not have any knowledge of local NGOs.

The only organisation mentioned as the one which addresses its activity directly to unemployed persons, is the Social Integration Centre. Two of them mentioned this centre. The first is covered by Centre's assistance and described this institution as the one which gave her a chance to improve her situation.

*"It is the only institution where I could simply cope with problems and I try to do all I can."*

(1\_f\_29)

Thanks to integration allowance received from the Centre, the young woman may buy needed medicines. Staying in the Centre eight hours a day helps her to return - after the long unemployment period - to the life style characteristic of an employed person.

*"My day schedule looks like that: I come to the Centre at 8 a.m. and stay there till 4 p.m.. Then I come back home. I spend time with my family or in front of the computer. So far I spend time like that. Plus my school on Saturdays and Sundays, in extramural system."*

Joining the Social Integration Centre seems an important step in the life of this interviewee, aimed at increasing activity and "taking matters into one's hands."

On the other hand we have a negative narrative concerning the Centre. One of people "vulnerable to exclusion" claims that this institution helps wrong people.

*"They supposedly take people from underclass, try to train them, place them in some enterprises, however these people, well (...) they will not repay them, these guys think that it's OK because there is work, but they will just do with this money anything they want, because they are as they are."*

(9\_f\_30)

The interviewee suspects that the Centre takes care of people who have recently abused alcohol and are not able to manage their money well, thus wasting allowances paid to them by the Centre.

Poor knowledge of young unemployed persons in Kielce of local NGOs deprives them of opportunities to get assistance from these institutions and on the other hand reveals a weakness of NGO sector in the city.

### **Identified coping strategies of young long-term unemployed**

Above we observed how young residents of Kielce define problems resulting from the long-term joblessness. In the next stages of our analysis we were interested in social and political

aspects of unemployment. In this part of the report we shall analyse strategies used by the unemployed to cope with encountered problems. What do we mean by the coping strategies? We shall not limit ourselves only to classical understanding of a concept of strategy: thus we are not looking for rational action plan to achieve goals at minimum cost. We are interested in wider dimension of this phenomenon. We shall focus just on "coping". In this approach, coping strategies are all cognitive and behavioural efforts to meet certain external and internal requirements, assessed by an interviewee as burdening or exceeding his or her own resources. Thus we are interested in any mechanisms used to solve or mitigate problems irrespective of whether and to what extent the interviewee takes conscious or rational decisions. We will look at coping strategies in three areas that the interviewees judged as the most acute in their circumstances: poor financial situation of the household, the lack of permanent employment and career opportunities, and a sense of boredom, too much free time.

We shall start our analysis with a problem that was most often indicated by our interlocutors as an effect of unemployment: difficult financial situation. People classified as "motivated unemployed" and "vulnerable to exclusion" most often complained of a need for more or less drastic reduction in consumption. Nevertheless, in all examined cases, the unemployed were forced to use the material support of the family. Our interviewees did not participate in costs of household maintenance, such as bills for power and gas or rent. They did not pay for food, domestic detergents, etc. They defined their situation as *living off one's parents*. As mentioned earlier in the analysis, this financial support from the family has been variously assessed by the respondents. For some of them (those classified as "adult kids"), family support was a natural situation, not connected with any discomfort. Others (the "motivated unemployed") felt ashamed of their lack of independence, declared willingness to participate in costs of maintenance of their family.

Much less than about the family support they talked about institutional aid. Actually, the only institution mentioned by our respondents were social welfare centres. Participants in the survey were beneficiaries of permanent and temporary allowances, family benefits and housing allowances.

*"Now we applied for the housing allowance, but they deduct it from the rent. My father also receives some support from the municipal centre for family assistance (MOPR), but he receives next to nothing. I think that only PLN150, but it's better than nothing".*

(21\_m\_35).

Only in isolated cases respondents mentioned the assistance in kind received from the Catholic charity - Caritas. Lack of mention about the contacts with other NGOs is striking. The third sector was invisible to our interlocutors in Kielce. We will describe this issue in more detail in following sections. At this stage it is worth noting that respondents' attitude towards social assistance was ambiguous. Participants classified as "vulnerable to exclusion" talked about taking advantage of social assistance in a neutral way, their narratives were not accompanied by any marked emotions. At the same time, some respondents dissociated themselves from the possibility of taking advantage of any institutional support. Social assistance was perceived as something stigmatising, demonstrating life clumsiness of the beneficiary. The respondents emphasised that they were resourceful enough to cope without the support of aid institutions:

*"I've never taken advantage of any such, of any allowances as housing allowance, because I believe that though now we deserve such assistance, there are people who need it more, who are in worse financial situation and I assume that if I don't need it now, why should I take it, well I simply cope with problems"*

(10\_m\_28)

Casual works, often illegal, were a popular coping strategy. What is important, freelance works (works based on a civil law contracts) were perceived by respondents as a coping strategy and not a way of acquiring vocational experience or as improvement of labour market opportunities. The world of casual and permanent work was clearly distinguished. Casual jobs were taken only occasionally by the respondents who assessed financial situation of their households as good ("young adults"). And the respondents who were working illegally did not feel that in this way they were coming closer to their dream registered work. Only permanent employment is a real work. It allows to document employment history for the purposes of insurance and pension benefits:

*"I'd like to have a real work at last, a permanent employment".*

(4\_m\_23)

As a result we have observed two crucial moments deciding on taking casual jobs by the respondent. Considering financial situation of the household as difficult was the first condition. The next condition - readiness to accept risk connected with non-registered work. Interviewees emphasised that employment without any contract puts a given person at risk of dishonest behaviours of the employer: non-payment of remuneration or reduction of agreed remuneration rates.

*"You know, if someone wants, he will find a job. But the question is: how much he will be paid, will he be registered or not, and is the employer solvent. Because there are many persons who will make promises, you will work for them and then you will have to go and ask for your money".(21\_m\_35).*

For many respondents, a wide network of social contacts is a condition for coping with the world of casual jobs. There is a double system of references. Friends helped to find casual jobs. Their opinions were also helpful to assess reliability of a potential employer.

*"I must admit that several persons advised me against work in this hotel, so I decided to resign. I've heard that its owners are not very pleasant. Not only demanding, but there were some stupid cases of misunderstanding on their part, so I preferred not to go there".*

(19\_f\_21).

Good contacts with colleagues were also a condition for enforcing overdue payments from the employer. Sometimes methods of settlement of accounts with a dishonest employer were contrary to the law. One of our interviewees told us a story of "requisition" of employer's car until he pays overdue remuneration.

*"When it came to payment, he had no money, and then he didn't answer the phone. We knew where to catch him. We've taken his car and he had to pay money. There were four of us and he owed PLN 3.5 thousand each; such money doesn't grow on trees. He agreed to pay, everything was OK".*

(21\_m\_35).

Other, less drastic methods of protection against employers' dishonesty, mentioned by our interviewees, include: taking advance payments and settling accounts on a weekly and not monthly basis.

Trips abroad were a specific form of casual work. Our interviewees did not plan a career abroad, they rejected a possibility of moving to other country for permanent residence. If there were any narratives or fantasies on foreign work, they related only to short-term employment (several months). The main barrier for departure was the longing for family and friends. . Reluctance to go there without any idea of what to expect was also important: a fear that no job will be found or that problems will arise with organisation of life in a new place. Only some participants in the survey had any experience of working abroad. Curiously enough, these persons did not exclude another departure abroad in the future. Attitude of young unemployed of Kielce towards migration for employment that we could observe during the survey certainly was not representative. It results from the fact that we interviewed people who, in spite of long unemployment period, decided to remain in Kielce.

In the next stage of the analysis we shall examine job-seeking activities of the interviewees and their strategies to increase labour market opportunities. We devoted much place to these issues in our interviews. We asked participants in the survey about job-seeking methods that they accept and those that they reject, about time devoted to going through offers and the criteria to be met by the work acceptable for them.

Interviewees clearly differed in time and efforts invested in job search. On the one hand we observed such attitudes as total disbelief in success of job seeking, which resulted in resignation and withdrawal ("vulnerable to unemployment") and satisfaction of having so much free time, as well as low motivation to change one's situation ("adult kids"). On the other hand we had such interviewees who had persisted in their efforts to find a job ("motivated unemployed"). Dissimilarity of attitudes was particularly visible when we were talking about job-seeking methods. In reaction to our questions, some respondents focused on problems with finding a job. As the main obstacle they mentioned lack of appropriate contacts. They were convinced that most of recruitment processes are carried out only pro forma. In reality employers have already chosen a candidate before making job announcement.

*"I rarely visit such websites. Some companies advertise only because they need it for some kind of... I don't know how to explain it.. they announce a job, although it is not vacant, they do it like that. And when you call them they say: "The job is no more vacant", well, it looks like that"*

(2\_m\_29).

Some interviewees put a lot of effort into job seeking. Most frequently mentioned sources of job offers were websites, press announcements and radio.

*"I mean, yes, surely Internet, and this is 70% of place for job seeking. There are also such portals which deal with head hunts, such as Adecco, MonsterPolska, and some other, like Gazeta.pl for example. . You know, it looks like that: you must log in, leave your CV, open - to let the employer read it, and you wait".*

(9\_f\_30).

A rejected form of looking for a job was visiting employers or calling them to ask for vacant posts. The majority of interviewees considered this job search method as rather ineffective and putting them in inconvenient situation.

One of the coping strategies was to reduce demands of potential employment. Flexibility with which participants in the survey assessed potential job offers, may be explained with the use of our proposed typology of attitudes towards unemployment. Interviewees classified as "motivated unemployed" were ready to considerably reduce their appetites and accept an offer which not fully met their expectations:

*"It depends on people's demands, because they always wanted to work behind a desk, as a manager or some other employee in an office, but in my opinion one starts from the lowest position and then is on one's way up. It's not difficult, if you want you will find something".*

(19\_f\_21).

At the same time this group was most interested in training courses offered by the Labour Office. When assessing Labour Office's activities they focused mainly on vocational courses' availability and transparency of recruitment rules.

Other interviewees rejected an opportunity to participate in training courses delivered by the Labour Office. As a reason they indicated maladjustment of thematic offer of trainings to a vocational profile of a job seeker. The need to change one's profile was painful for participants in the survey, the very decision on participation in a course was considered a life failure. One of the respondents, a graduate of political science, did not give up the dream of work in acquired profession. In spite of four-year unemployment he postponed a decision on registering for a course to indefinite future.

*"Well, courses are usually rather for manual work. I planned to go for a training, I thought about it, but the course somehow means retraining. And I want to look for a job suitable for me. But of course, I've been unemployed for the long time... so if I don't find work in one year or more I will surely decide to participate in some course".*

(2\_m\_29)

Many participants in the survey perceived the reason for problems with finding a job in wrong educational choices. Return to secondary school or acquiring higher education were perceived as effective methods to enhance one's value on the labour market. Survey participants classified as "motivated unemployed" often decided on such educational return. Some respondents of this group tried to develop their skills also in a situation when higher education was not possible for financial reasons.

*"I've got credits for three semesters of studies at the Technical University. Now, when the money ended I'm looking for a job to earn for tuition fee. And now I'm only learning by myself the Java script programming language. Well, I learn it for myself, because I know that it is wanted in the labour market"*

(15\_f\_28).

We asked our respondents about their motivations and barriers to take advantage of traineeships of several-month duration financed by the Labour Office. Do they perceive participation in traineeships as a method to improve labour market opportunities? Views of our respondents on effectiveness of vocational traineeships were divided. The fact that

employers are not willing to employ trainees after the end of the programme was a source of frustration for unemployed people. In their view traineeships were for employers a method to reduce labour costs. Irrespective of work results, after the end of traineeship companies look for new trainees financed by the Labour Office. Respondents classified as "motivated unemployed" while admitting that traineeships did not guarantee permanent employment, considered them as a good method to acquire new vocational skills.

*"A traineeship is no guarantee, it is only preparation for work. If I later start a job, I'll have in CV and information about a traineeship, I have something, some preparation for occupation, I've been already trained, learned something, I know what it's all about. Because, everyone knows that school - it is theory and practice is something different, isn't it?"*

(19\_f\_21)

For other respondents, the traineeship was a surrogate of permanent job, i.e. a "real work". Undergoing the traineeship was not perceived as a method of improving labour market opportunities, rather as a temporary escape from unemployment:

*"It looks like that, you participate in three-month traineeship, it means that you work for three months. Because you know, if someone wants to organise a traineeship, he does it, you end it and the next person comes. And if someone wants to employ you, he will do it. But there is no such option now."*

(6\_f\_28)

In this group a moment of completion of the traineeship was particularly difficult. The end of the traineeship meant return to the starting point, to a situation of the long-term unemployment.

The last area that we wish to examine in this part of our analysis concerns excess of leisure time. Boredom bothered only some participants in the survey. The "motivated unemployed" invested a lot of time in job search, they were also involved in casual jobs and education. Reports on excess of leisure time were sporadic in this group. And those who have already started their own families ("young adults"), devoted time to child care and housework. Among different types of the long-term unemployed young people that we distinguished, the problem of boredom bothered mainly "adult kids" and people "vulnerable to exclusion". Both groups used different strategies to cope with excess of leisure time.

"Adult kids" escaped into social contacts. Their problem was how to "kill the time" until friends return from work. "Adult kids" got up late and then spent time on surfing the web and watching TV:

*"It looks like that: I get up in the morning, switch on the computer, read sport news, and, I don't know, I wait until my friends return from work, then we go out, talk, and so on, sometimes I call on my girl, and during holidays, I don't know, we play a ball or go to a pitch, you know, such normal things."*

(5\_m\_24).

Social contacts of people "vulnerable to exclusion" were much more limited. Their accounts of social contacts were sporadic, which means that contacts with friends could not be for them a method of coping with excess of leisure time. Their coping strategies consisted in involvement in household duties, watching TV and spending time on the computer.

*"My daily routine: I get up; then I go shopping, although in fact not every day. Besides I watch TV, I like to watch politics. Now we have such channels as TVN 24, TVP INFO, such typically political channels. And sometimes I surf the web, I like political websites. And the day goes by somehow".*

(2\_m\_29)

The objective of our analysis was to allow the reader to look at the situation of the long-term unemployment from the perspective of young unemployed people in Kielce. We wanted to see how the unemployed define the long-term unemployment-related problems. We looked for patterns of social relationships and indications of potential political exclusion. We focused on respondents' fears, dreams and hopes. As a result of our analysis we provided the reader with four separate unemployment perspectives corresponding to four distinguished types of unemployed persons: "vulnerable to exclusion", "motivated unemployed", "young adults" and "adult kids". The participants in the survey belonging to each of the mentioned groups define their situation in a different way, have different motivations to look for a job and different plans for the future. And finally, each of the distinguished groups uses different strategies of coping with problems related to the long-term unemployment. Our analyses show that political exclusion issues were absent from coping strategies used by them. Politics was an insignificant topic for the majority of interviewees. It means that it was an area which did not fit into the unemployment typology that we had proposed.

A question of effectiveness of coping strategies remains open. This topic exceeds both the scope of the research and possibilities of used method of data analysis. After having listened to twenty three often very dramatic narratives on the effects of the long-term unemployment it is difficult to avoid the question about later fate of young unemployed people in Kielce. Let's hope that dreams of at least some of our respondents will come true and that they will be able to overcome barriers in finding a dream job.

## **Summary**

The qualitative analysis carried out in accordance with the grounded theory methodology leads to the two-axis typology being a combination of "maturity category" with a category of "financial situation". This typology allows not only to systematize quite diverse material collected in terms of coping strategies used by interviewees, but also to try to answer to a question which of the below unemployment situations are connected with the highest risk of social exclusion. Maturity means a place on the adulthood axis which reflects the degree of internal steerability of a person and his/her ability to make rational decisions. The detailed analysis of interviews records allowed to identify three primary categories, which gave a basis for this axis, namely: selfish vs. quasi-altruistic orientation, the degree of independence (focus on external assistance vs. own resources) and adaptability, in which special attention was paid to such elements as: sense of impact on reality, flexibility of expectations, or risk-taking ability as well as carried out actions. Financial situation refers directly to resources of young unemployed people, or resources that may be available in connection with support received from relatives / friends or institutions. Participants in this survey differed significantly in this respect. The situation of some of them is rather stable, which allows them to make different choices (if they decided to take actions), but also gives the comfort of abandonment or of postponing actions. Interviewees whose situation put them at risk of poverty and social exclusion are at the other end of this axis. The combination of these two dimensions results in the following typology of unemployment situation:

- I. Vulnerable to exclusion (low maturity, worse financial situation)
- II. Motivated unemployed (high maturity, worse financial situation)
- III. Adult Kids (low maturity, better financial situation)
- IV. Young adults (high maturity, better financial situation)

*Vulnerable to exclusion:* people in this type of situation of unemployment gradually “seal-up” into the immediate family as it can be inferred from their usual daily routine, which is mostly about staying at home. They spend most of the time in tiny apartments with their parents who were often outside the labor market themselves (unemployment, pension, retirement), and thus they have lots of free time. On the other hand unemployment of parents additionally hinders the financial capacities of their households, in which the adult kids remain financially dependent on them. Although the total income of interviewees is often sufficient to cover basic expenses, such situations shall be treated as a threat of poverty and social exclusion experience. In fact, from their interviews it is apparent that they remain on the remote outskirts of social life.

*Motivated unemployed:* a kind of a life style of young people who only formally considered being unemployed. Officially unemployed for the minimum of 12 months and declaring to look for a job, they informally earn some money. This group is distinguished by the substantial activity of the young people. On the other hand, they openly declare and highlight their pursuit of independence – financial dependence on parents makes them feel discomfort. The gathered data provide much more information concerning the relations of the "motivated unemployed" with their friends – one hardly can trace any instances of social exclusion here.

*Adult Kids:* they willingly accept being financially dependent on their parents – independence is not the most important goal even in a hypothetical situation of having a source of income. Their statements concerning a typical daily routine reflect their ideas about the importance of social life in an accurate way. Friends are placed in a central position, and the daily routine resembles the one of a student or a pupil on holidays. The interviewees have a high regard for friendship. They trust their friends, with whom they share problems, unemployment being one of them. The group of friends is so significant to “adult kids” that they may influence and in effect modify their work and life plans, causing them, for example, to quit their job. The sphere of social life may be also a kind of compensation for failures in other areas of life. It is worth mentioning though that despite their lifestyle, adult kids do not consider themselves to be teenagers. They are aware of the passage of time, due to which their carelessness (for which they yearn so much) is fading away.

*Young Adults:* people who started their own families and focus on them while answering questions. Contrary to the former groups of unemployed the "young adults" consider a wider family circle only while discussing their own parents, siblings, and their relations with relatives. The interviewees who could be classified as "young adults" were mostly female, married, and had children. Thus, it is not surprising that their daily routine is focused on performing family duties. Some of their statements show at the same time the constraints on relations with friends and acquaintances, the type of relations towards which the "young adults" as well as the "vulnerable to exclusion" express a similar attitude: they are insignificant, the reasons being different, however. Thus, a kind of deficit in relations with friends and acquaintances shall not be regarded as symptoms of social exclusion but rather as a (temporary) marginalization of social contacts on the list of priorities. Although the young unemployed people cannot be treated as excluded from all the closest forms of social

life, being dependent on one source of income and remaining outside the labor market for a long time under unfavorable circumstances may lead to social exclusion.

One of the main focus of the qualitative analysis were mechanisms used to solve or mitigate problems irrespective of whether and to what extent the interviewee takes conscious or rational decisions. Coping strategies<sup>38</sup> of young unemployed were analyzed in three areas that the interviewees judged as the most acute in their circumstances: poor financial situation of the household, the lack of permanent employment and career opportunities, and a sense of boredom, too much free time.

Difficult financial situation is a problem that was most often indicated by the interviewees as an effect of unemployment. People in this situation complain of a necessity for more or less drastic reduction in consumption. They are forced to use the material support of the family, do not participate in costs of household maintenance, do not pay for food, domestic detergents, etc. They defined their situation as living off one's parents. The financial support from the family is variously assessed by the respondents, however. For some of them (those classified as "adult kids"), family support is a natural situation, not triggering any discomfort. Others (the "motivated unemployed") felt ashamed of their lack of independence, declared willingness to participate in costs of maintenance of their family.

Attitudes towards social assistance are ambiguous: some of the unemployed ("vulnerable to exclusion") regard taking advantage of social assistance in a neutral way; their narratives were not accompanied by emotions. Others dissociated themselves from the possibility of taking advantage of any institutional support at all; social assistance is perceived by them as something stigmatizing, demonstrating life clumsiness of the beneficiary.

Casual works, often illegal, are a quite popular among unemployed, but perceived rather as a coping strategy and not a way of acquiring vocational experience or as improvement of labor market opportunities. The worlds of casual and permanent work are clearly distinguished for them. Casual jobs are taken only occasionally by those who assessed financial situation of their households as good ("young adults") and they do not feel to get closer to their dream registered work this way. Only permanent employment is a "real work". Another moment deciding on taking casual jobs by the unemployed (besides difficult financial situation of the household) is readiness to accept risk connected with non-registered work. It is obvious for them that employment without any contract puts a given person at risk of dishonest behaviors of the employer: non-payment of remuneration or reduction of agreed remuneration rates.

For many respondents, a wide network of social contacts is a condition for coping with the world of casual jobs. There is a double system of references. Friends helped to find casual jobs and their opinions help to assess reliability of a potential employer. On the other hand good contacts with colleagues are also a condition for enforcing overdue payments from the employer (even using illegal method of settlement of accounts with a dishonest employer). Less drastic methods of protection against employers' dishonesty are: taking advance payments and settling accounts on a weekly and not monthly basis.

Trips abroad are a specific form of casual work, however temporary – the interviewees do not plan their careers abroad and reject the possibility of moving to other country for

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<sup>38</sup> In this study 'coping strategies' are all cognitive and behavioral efforts to meet certain external and internal requirements, assessed by an interviewee as burdening or exceeding his or her own resources.

permanent residence, mainly because of the fear of the longing for family and friends. Going abroad without any idea of what to expect raises fear of no job and problems with setting in a new place. Only few have any experience of working abroad and they do not exclude another departure abroad in the future.

Another part of the analysis concerns with job-seeking activities and strategies to increase labor market opportunities. Interviewees clearly differed in time and efforts invested in job search. On the one hand one can observe such attitudes as total disbelief in success of job seeking, which resulted in resignation and withdrawal ("vulnerable to unemployment") and satisfaction of having much free time, as well as low motivation to change one's situation ("adult kids"). On the other hand there are the unemployed who persist in their efforts to find a job ("motivated unemployed"). Dissimilarity of attitudes is particularly visible in job-seeking methods and opinions on them. Some interviewees see the main obstacle in lack of appropriate contacts; in their opinion most of recruitment processes are carried out only pro forma, and employers have already chosen a candidate before making job announcement. Others put a lot of effort into job seeking mainly on websites or in the press and radio announcements. Not popular is visiting employers or calling them to ask for vacant posts – the majority of interviewees consider this job search method as rather ineffective and putting them in inconvenient situation.

One of the coping strategies is also to reduce demands of potential employment. The "motivated unemployed" are ready to considerably reduce their appetites and accept an offer which not fully met their expectations. They are also the most interested in training courses offered by the Labor Office. Others reject an opportunity to participate in such training courses, mainly because of misfit of training subject to a vocational profile of a job seeker. The need to change one's profile seems to be a reluctant idea and the very decision on participation in a course is considered a life failure. Many interviewees perceive some problems with finding a job in prior wrong educational choices. Return to secondary school or acquiring higher education is perceived as effective methods to enhance one's value on the labor market. The "motivated unemployed" often decide on such educational return; some of them try to self-develop their skills if they cannot afford a higher level of education for financial reasons.

The general aim of the qualitative part of the project was to understand better the situation of the young long-term unemployed from Kielce (Poland). The applied methodological approach – grounded theory methodology, allowed the researchers not only to select the core explanatory concept (in this case the notion of "maturity"), but also to construct the typology of four significantly different situations of unemployment. The set of analytical steps undertaken by the research team appears to be worth the effort, since the constructed typology served well as a starting point for the analysis of the spectrum of solutions considered by the research participants as "available", as well as for the comparisons between participants significantly different in terms of age and the level of achieved education. In view of the fact that part of the project was also quantitative research on representative sample the next step will be confrontation of the findings and further comparative analysis.

## **Concluding remarks**

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***Slawomir Nowotny***

The analysis of qualitative in-depth interviews conducted according the grounded theory methodology has provided substantial insights into the situation of young long-term unemployed people. It has been mainly focused on the impact of unemployment on social and political exclusion and on the ways young people cope with this situation.

The rich and differentiated material gathered in the six countries can hardly be summarized in a few statements. Nevertheless, some elements are apparent:

- The most important life problem raised by long-term unemployment are financial shortages. However, their scope differs.
- Almost all unemployed take advantage of various forms of material help from their families, friends and acquaintances. Not all beneficiaries accept easy this situation. They experience a psychological conflict: being a help receiver for a long time and being unable to pay back.
- Another source of financial support are public institutions of the welfare system. In some countries a substantial support is provided by charitable organizations, mainly connected with the Catholic Church. Some unemployed, however, feel uncomfortable (and even ashamed) of being dependent on the welfare system due to the lack of financial autonomy.
- Most of the unemployed more or less actively search for a job, looking for job announcements in newspapers, on Internet or in unemployment offices. Those who are more pro-active make phone calls, visit the enterprises (especially the small ones), enroll in temporary job agencies and on-line database, making spontaneous offers to work in enterprises seeking employees.
- Friends and relatives are asked for information about job opportunities in their workplaces, which shows that social capital is helpful in attempts to overcome the situation of unemployment. Another form of using social capital is exchange services with friends and relatives.
- A popular way of coping with financial shortages is taking opportunity of different precarious forms of job: temporary, casual, seasonal (often on the grey or black labour market).
- Other coping strategies are: reducing consumption needs, strictly control one's budget, lowering ambitions concerning the type of job, investing in training (either through the unemployment office or at one's own cost) or other ways of acquiring higher education, and going abroad for a job.
- Long-term unemployment has a rather limited and not systematic impact on social exclusion. Some unemployed experience a reduction of social contacts through lack of money and a resulting loosening of social networks. On the other hand, especially in some countries, family and friend ties seems to be based much more on cultural and habitual patterns.
- Young unemployed are very diversified in terms of their interest and participation in politics. In the majority of countries the interest in politics varies from complete indifference to great involvement. Qualifying this lack of interest in politics as a form of political exclusion may depend on more detailed analyses of its roots and background.