European Research Area

EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF

YOUNEX Youth Unemployment & Exclusion in Europe

Youth, Unemployment, and Exclusion in Europe: A Multidimensional Approach to Understanding the Conditions and Prospects for Social and Political Integration of Young Unemployed

December 2009

SUMMARY	
Objectives of the research	The research aims at providing new knowledge on the causes, processes, and perspectives for change related to social and political exclusion of unemployed youth. It provides an integrated approach to the study of unemployment effects on youth exclusion from social and political spheres.
Scientific approach / methodology	The research has three main components: a multidimensional theoretical framework integrating different explanatory factors; a comparative design including countries with different institutional approaches to unemployment; an integrated methodological approach based on multiple sources and methods.
New knowledge and/or European added value	The findings show that precarious and unemployed youth have very different political opportunities, depending on the country they live in. In all countries, civil society organizations support the integration of young unemployed and precarious workers.
Key messages for policy-makers, businesses, trade unions and civil society actors	Unemployment and precariousness should be dealt with at all levels (international, national, regional), including all relevant stakeholders (policy-makers, practitioners, unemployed) and taking into account all related issues (unemployment benefits, social aid, labor market regulations, child care, education, etc.).

Objectives of the research

The research has three main objectives:

- To generate a new body of data on the personal life of young unemployed and precarious youth by focusing on: their perception of their situation; their life projects; their identity development; the intensity and quality of their social relations; their political participation; and their attitudes toward political institutions and society at large.
- To advance theory and extend knowledge on social and political exclusion of young unemployed and precarious youth.
- To provide practical insights into the potential paths for social and political integration of young unemployed and precarious youth. These findings could be used both by public authorities and non-state welfare organizations to improve youth inclusion in social and political life.

Scientific approach / methodology

The overall design of the research has three main components:

- A multidimensional theoretical framework that integrates different explanatory factors (public policies and institutions, organized civil society, and the situation of individual unemployment) while taking into account various dimensions of exclusion (political exclusion, social exclusion, and individual well-being).
- A cross-national comparative design that includes six European cities in countries with different institutional approaches to unemployment: Geneva (Switzerland), Cologne (Germany), Turin (Italy), Lyon (France), Karlstad (Sweden), Kielce (Poland).
- An integrated methodological approach based on multiple sources and methods: an analysis of state policies and practices towards unemployment, a survey of organizations active in the field, a survey on representative samples of young long-term unemployed and precarious youth, a series of in-depth interviews with young long-term unemployed, an analysis of EU policies and practices towards unemployment, and focus groups with stakeholders.

New knowledge and European added value

Unemployment and precariousness are not only a matter of unemployment benefits and social aid, but labor market regulations, civil society organizations, education, child care and other issues are part of the solution (or the problem) as well. Civil society organizations effectively deal with problems in this field and should be involved in the design and implementation of related policies.

Broader perspective needed

Unemployment benefits and social aid are certainly important when dealing with unemployment and precariousness, but they are only part of a larger picture, which also includes labor market regulations, wages, assistance from civil society organizations, and other issues such as education and child care. It is the combination of these elements which is crucial for the social and political inclusion of youth.

Some of these combinations are more effective than others. For instance, in Geneva a flexible labor market regulation is combined with an inclusive unemployment scheme. This means that young adults can be dismissed quite easily, but they are not left without financial resources. In contrast, the Italian model studied in Turin leads to the exclusion of youth, as they are not able to access a protected labor market with rigid regulations and they do not have access to unemployment benefits, leading to a long-lasting process of dependence from the family and higher risks of social and political exclusion.

Divergent conditions across Europe

Political opportunities for precarious and unemployed youth vary greatly, depending on the country they live in.

The differences relate to five dimensions:

- Unemployment regulations: access to unemployment schemes, extension of unemployment benefits and level of coverage, and public and private institutions working with unemployed.
- Labor market regulations: dismissal procedures and the development of temporary and flexible employment patterns.
- General political opportunity structure: access to government and institutions for both individual citizens and civil society organizations.
- Unemployment-specific opportunities: access of civil society organizations to public institutions dealing with unemployment at the local level.
- Opportunities in related issue-fields: education, child care, discrimination and others.

Unemployment regulations are highly inclusive in France and Sweden, highly exclusive in Poland and Italy (with Switzerland and Germany providing an intermediate situation).

Labor market regulations are flexible in Switzerland and Sweden, rigid in Italy (with Poland, Germany and France providing an intermediate situation).

The general political opportunity structure is highly open in Switzerland, highly closed in France, Sweden and Poland (with Italy and German providing an intermediate situation).

Unemployment-specific opportunities are numerous in Switzerland and Germany, scarce in Italy (with France, Sweden and Poland providing an intermediate situation).

Finally, opportunities in related issue-fields are numerous in Sweden, France and Germany on the one hand, scarce in Switzerland, Italy and Poland on the other hand.

Exploit civil societies' expertise

We found that civil society organizations are important actors in the field of unemployment and precariousness: they are essential partners for policy change in the field of unemployment and precariousness, they complement or substitute provisions of the state, and they have extensive knowledge about unemployment and precariousness.

Therefore, civil society organizations should be included not only in the implementation of policies, but they should already be involved in their design. They have field knowledge and expertise that are important for the creation of effective policies. The inclusion of civil society organizations in the policy-creation process should be implemented at local, national, and European levels.

Think European, act locally

Furthermore, a multi-level governance approach should be developed that includes not only regions, but also municipalities. The principle of subsidiarity should be implemented once the best level of collaboration or delegation is identified.

Problems stemming from unemployment and precariousness are often best solved at the local level. However, a closer collaboration between actors at the local, national, and European levels could yield a more effective approach to unemployment and precariousness of youth and improve the responses to their social and political exclusion.

How civil society organizations work

The organizational survey has shown that civil society organizations support the integration of young unemployed and

precarious workers in two ways: by fostering individuals' engagement and political or public awareness on specific issues like unemployment; and/or by delivering services related to welfare provisions.

We found that civil society organizations are important vehicles of people integration in case of unemployment and precariousness, because they fill different gaps. They provide services that a poorly developed or scarcely funded welfare state does not or cannot provide or, conversely, they are almost a component of the public welfare state.

Civil society organizations interact with local governmental levels to stimulate policy solutions via project proposals. Even where access to policy-making for civil society actors is restrained, their capacity to be active in liaison with local powers make them essential partners for policy change.

When one considers the organizations' perceptions about the motivations according to which people join them, one sees that civil society organizations offer also concrete opportunities for people engagement. By doing so, they increase people's awareness about their position and role, but they also foster face-to-face interaction yielding social capital.

Civil society organizations work for better social cohesion, and their work is influenced by their political and institutional embedding, by the local political and cultural tradition, by the type of relations they establish with their institutional counterparts or among themselves.

Key messages for policy-makers, businesses, trade unions and civil society actors

Unemployment and precariousness should be dealt with at all levels (international, national, regional), including all relevant stakeholders (policy-makers, practitioners, unemployed) and taking into account all related issues (unemployment benefits, social aid, labor market regulations, child care, education etc.).

National and local governments have very different ways to deal with youth unemployment and precariousness. In particular, they have very diverging unemployment and labor market regulations. While this is in part unavoidable given the peculiarities of each specific national and local context, it also points to the need to coordinate policies across Europe and to move towards a European-level approach to youth unemployment and precariousness.

All the actors involved can and need to contribute to improve the situation of young unemployed and precarious youth: policy-makers, civil society actors, and unemployed and precarious youth themselves.

Civil society organizations can contribute to reduce the social and political exclusion of young unemployed and precarious youth in various ways. As our findings show, this can take basically two paths: fostering individuals' engagement and political or public awareness on specific issues like unemployment; and/or by delivering services related to welfare provisions.

Better collaboration between policy-makers and civil society actors is required in order to improve the situation of young unemployed and precarious youth (particularly that of long-term unemployed youth). Policy-makers have the power to enact policies, while civil society actors have the practical knowledge of the field.

State policies provide important institutional opportunities for the social and political inclusion of young unemployed. In particular, they can offer channels for social and political participation to youngsters who feel alien to the political system and the society at large. This includes measures and provisions improving the organization of the unemployed.

Young unemployed and precarious youth themselves can become important actors on their own rather than simply being an object of state policies and interventions by civil society actors. They can do so in a variety of ways, including by participating more actively in politics.

	PROJECT IDENTITY
Coordinator	Marco Giugni, Université de Genève
Consortium	Universität Siegen Università Commerciale Luigi Bocconi Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques Karlstads universitet Polskie Towarzystwo Socjologiczne
Duration	May 1st, 2008 – April 30, 2011 (36 months)
Funding Scheme	Small collaborative projects
Budget	1'460'560 Euros
Website	http://www.younex.unige.ch
Further reading	Integrated report on institutional analysis Integrated report on organizational survey
Related websites	http://www.younex.unige.ch/Links.html http://www.younex.unige.ch/Products.html
For more information	younex@unige.ch