

## Project Description

### State of the art

Scholarly work has provided enough evidence to corroborate the worries about the risks entailed by the social and political exclusion of unemployed youth. Although this body of research offers important insights into the structural factors that give rise to youth unemployment and the nature and consequences of policies used to address them, it has so far remained relatively detached from an understanding of the feelings, attitudes, and behaviors of jobless young people. To be sure, work that addresses the motivational and attitudinal consequences of joblessness in a strict sense has been done. However, it remains marginal as compared to the bulk of studies dealing with the structural aspects of unemployment. Furthermore, systematic and comparative studies have been conducted in regard to social exclusion of young unemployed, focusing on various dimensions and processes of marginalization. However, we still have poor knowledge about the relationships between the individual, social, and institutional aspects of youth unemployment. In other words, we still know little about the interaction of the personal experience of unemployed, the presence and activities of various civil society organizations (e.g. interest groups, unions, and welfare organizations), and the policies implemented by state powers (at all administrative levels) to combat youth unemployment and its negative consequences. In order to better understand and predict the social and political consequences of youth unemployment, we need to know how factors located on different levels combine to produce youth social exclusion.

### Missing knowledge

Moreover, scholarly writing has remained somewhat detached from immediate policy-relevant deliberations. What is largely lacking is knowledge about practical experiences with consequences of youth unemployment and precariousness and with policies and programs directed at overcoming this kind of (perpetual) social marginalization. The lack of consistent policy-relevant deliberations between academics and practitioners is lamentable at this point of time, given the fact that government administrations in several countries of the EU have started to evaluate their labor market and social policies. These efforts are limited strongly to an assessment of activation measures, and remain strongly detached from the academic debate about forms and consequences of social exclusion in its broader orientation. Hence, time is ready for engaging in more systematic policy-relevant discussions, by developing empirical evidence on the effects of social exclusion on young unemployed and relating them systematically to established policies and actual initiatives in the policy domain at the level of individual EU member states and the European Union. Furthermore, in this proposal we intend to strengthen such empirical evidence by comparing unemployed youth with young precarious workers. In recent years, labor policies have heavily supported the diffusion of secondary jobs, especially among youth. Therefore, thorough labor policy evaluations cannot avoid an analysis of the differences (or similarities) in terms of social and political exclusion existing between jobless youth and those employed, but precariously.

## Understanding social and political exclusion

We examine the degree of exclusion of young unemployed by focusing on its social dimension, but at the same time taking into account its political dimension. The goal here is to give a broader picture of the situation of young jobless citizens with regard to their social and political environment as well as of their perception of and attitudes toward such environment. More specifically, we aim to understand how the social and psychological consequences of youth unemployment (e.g. loss of social bonds, social capital, self-esteem) relate to the levels and forms of civic and political participation (e.g. interest, attitudes, trust, behaviour). For example, is joblessness in its social and psychological dimensions associated with political apathy, radicalism, or intolerance among young people? We examine as well a variety of factors that may affect the integration of young unemployed. Unlike previous studies, which usually focus on a single set of factors, here we look at the institutional, social, and individual determinants of the exclusion of unemployed youth. We start from the assumption that to reach a better understanding of exclusion we must take into account factors located at the contextual (macro), organizational (meso), and individual (micro) level of analysis. This will enable us to study the relation between the political-institutional context (e.g. governmental policies to fight youth unemployment and social exclusion), the social-organizational context (e.g. the density and activities of organizations of the civil society which are active in the field), and the backgrounds and experiences of different groups of unemployed (e.g. social origins, personal life trajectory, work history).

## Social exclusion as a cumulative process

Social exclusion does not occur instantly, but it is a cumulative process that has its effect in the long run, both objectively and subjectively. From an “objective” point of view, such a process puts people in a situation of “social disqualification”. From a “subjective” point of view, young unemployed must undergo the “experience of unemployment” before they feel socially excluded. The same can be said of political exclusion. Accordingly, our focus will be on long-term unemployed youth (i.e. young people aged between 18 and 29 and being without a paid job since at least one year). In addition, given the increasingly structural feature of youth unemployment and the increasing number of young people who find themselves in a precarious situation or underpaid while having a paid job, it is important that we do not limit ourselves to young unemployed in a narrow sense. We also need to take into account those who go in and out the labour market, that is, those who do have a job but share a similar condition with young unemployed to the extent that they live under the poverty threshold or at the edge of it. Therefore, we include in our study precarious youth (i.e. young people going back and forth from having a paid job). The inclusion of this latter group of youth has specific policy relevance. In recent years, both at the EU and national level, labour policies have fostered the development of flexibility in the labour market, which has led to the creation of an important number of secondary jobs, most of which occupied by youth. We need to study how such policies have contributed to differentiate young precariously employed and unemployed in terms of exclusion and integration. For such labour policies to be considered “successful” we should find relevant differences between young precarious workers and unemployed in terms of inclusion in different social settings, but also in terms of life expectations and identity formation. Finally, in order to have a baseline to evaluate the exclusion of young

unemployed, we will compare these three groups to a control group of active occupied youth. While the main focus of the project is on young long-term unemployed, all three social categories will be included in particular in the individual survey.

