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Conclusions: Integrating perspectives on youth transitions and the risk of social exclusion

Sonia Bertolini, Vassiliki Deliyanni-Kouimtzi, Michael Gebel, Dirk Hofäcker, and Marge Unt

Most previous research in this area has addressed the drivers of youth job insecurity and especially youth unemployment. Gathering and implementing knowledge to prevent youth unemployment and support youth pathways out of temporary jobs is a highly relevant research activity. Moreover, there is also an urgent need to understand the consequences of such individual-level labour market insecurities, because unemployment along with extended periods of temporary employment, including a chain of mini-jobs, are a widespread phenomenon among youth. Likewise, policies need to be evaluated not only in terms of their ability to tackle youth labour market vulnerability per se, but also regarding the role these policies play in mitigating the consequences of labour market insecurity on other dimensions of young people's lives. This book extends the limited amount of previous European comparative research in this field (see, for example, Blossfeld et al, 2005; Gallie, 2013; Vossemer et al, 2018; Stasiowski and Kłobuszewska, 2018; Högberg et al, 2019a, 2019b; Hvinden et al, 2019; Täht et al, 2020). The chapters of this book do not follow the same line of analysis for all countries, but take more of a comparative approach providing systematic in-depth insights into the different consequences of individual-level labour market insecurities in Europe for the risks of social exclusion of youth. Starting from a shared multilevel theoretical model, the book approaches this research topic empirically from a multimethod and European comparative perspective. The aim is to promote comparative qualitative research by adding to the almost non-existent qualitative literature on young people's own perceptions of labour market insecurity from a comparative perspective.

Taking both a short- and a long-term perspective, this book examines the microlevel effects of young people experiences of labour market

exclusion in their early careers on a multitude of outcomes reflecting the risk of social exclusion: (a) the development of their health and well-being, (b) their chances of gaining autonomy by leaving the parental home and gaining economic independence from their parents, as well as (c) their economic situation in terms of risks of poverty, material deprivation, and eligibility for social security. It investigates the coping strategies and compensatory mechanisms available to young people who are having to deal with negative consequences on both the micro- and the mesolevels. On the macrolevel, it studies the role of *labour market, economic, family, housing, and social policies* in either aggravating or mitigating the negative effects of labour market insecurities.

This chapter reviews these findings against the background of the three main research questions, addressing the multifaceted consequences of labour market insecurities, coping strategies, and policies that are effective in mitigating the negative consequences. It summarises the findings and conclusions in response to each of these three questions. The final section offers a critical discussion of the limitations of this study and outlines potential directions for future research.

Research Question 1: Consequences of labour market insecurities

The first research question focuses on the multifaceted individual-level consequences of labour market insecurities for young people's risk of social exclusion. The following will highlight the main findings and conclusions structured along the three dimensions of risk of social exclusion: namely, youth well-being and health, autonomy, and socio-economic consequences.

Well-being and health

One central aspect of social inclusion is the subjective well-being of young people, and there is a growing body of research aiming to obtain a better understanding of how this along with youth's health is affected by labour market insecurities (Fryer, 2000; Thern et al, 2017; Vancea and Utzet, 2017). The present book delivers complementary findings and further insights into these effects. For example, the results of quantitative analyses in various chapters (Chapter 2, Nizalova et al; Chapter 3, Baranowska-Rataj and Strandh; Chapter 4, Lauri and Unt) show that unemployment and job insecurity reduce life satisfaction and happiness compared to being employed and in a secure job, with the effect of unemployment being stronger than the effect of

job insecurity. There is also variation in effects depending on which outcome variable is considered. Negative effects of unemployment and job insecurity are larger for life satisfaction than for happiness; and effects vary substantially across countries. Next to the negative effects on subjective well-being, Baranowska-Rataj and Strandh's findings (Chapter 3) reveal that becoming unemployed is also associated with significantly poorer self-rated health. These findings from quantitative analyses are in line with in-depth insights from qualitative analyses. For example, Schlee et al (Chapter 5) illustrate how being unemployed or in insecure jobs relates to the malaise, worries, and anxiety of young people.

The adverse effects of a lack of jobs may go beyond the individuals who become unemployed and also affect their closest family members – that is, their partners (Baranowska-Rataj and Strandh, Chapter 3). Analyses reveal that it is not only individual, but also partner's unemployment that is associated with statistically significantly poorer health in both women and men.

Interestingly, the analyses shed light on potential gender differences. The effect of unemployment on life satisfaction and happiness is stronger in young men, whereas the effect of insecure employment on life satisfaction and happiness is relatively stronger in young women. Put differently, the state of being unemployed seems to be more detrimental for the well-being of males, whereas having an insecure job is more detrimental for the well-being of females. Results also suggest that unemployment has a considerably larger effect on young men than insecure employment, whereas the difference between the two effects is much smaller in young women.

Gender-specific findings also reveal that while becoming unemployed is also associated with significantly poorer self-rated health for all, the transition into inactivity is associated with a negative effect only among men. Detailed analyses by Baranowska-Rataj and Strandh (Chapter 3) show that after controlling for unobserved heterogeneity, the impact of both unemployment and inactivity weaken but remain statistically significant among men but no longer play a major role among women. Regarding the spillover health effects, Baranowska-Rataj and Strandh (Chapter 3) show that the effects of partners' transitions into unemployment are stronger on women than on men, implying that the impact of unemployment on health in partners is gendered. That is, the association is stronger on women's health in the case of a male partner's unemployment, whereas the association on men's health when a female partner is unemployed is only half as large.

What are the drivers of loss of well-being in the case of labour market vulnerability? Investigations of the causal mechanisms by Nizalova et al (Chapter 2) via quantitative analysis highlight that the effects of unemployment and job insecurity on life satisfaction and happiness cannot be attributed to the loss of income alone, although this is theoretically one of the main expected causal mechanisms. Likewise, results reported by Baranowska-Rataj and Strandh (Chapter 3) show that the negative effects of a partner's unemployment on individual health still prevail, even after controlling for the change in household income. In contrast, controlling for a partner's health eliminates the effect of a partner's unemployment on individual health.

Partial and indirect insights into the causal mechanisms can also be gained from the qualitative study on the meaning of work (see Chapter 5, Schlee et al; Chapter 6, Roosmaa et al). Results show that young people still see work as an important source of identity and one young man even described it as '*the engine of life*'. Work has a manifest function as a provider of financial resources. However, next to a salary, almost all interviewed young people emphasised other aspects of work. Latent intrinsic functions of work such as an interesting, self-fulfilling job or having good relations with colleagues and supervisors are reported as well. Work is seen not only as a source of income, but is also associated with dignity, self-worth and stability, as well as autonomy in general and especially autonomy from parents. Being without a job for a long time is related to strong fears about the future in different institutional contexts. Moreover, young people in a context with low overall unemployment describe stigmatisation as a mediator between unemployment and well-being.

Autonomy: transition to adult life as a dynamic process

The chapters in Part II of this book scrutinise the process of leaving the parental home, which is traditionally a central marker of adulthood (Corijn and Klijzing, 2001). Housing autonomy is linked closely to but not coincident with economic autonomy. In line with previous literature (Blossfeld et al, 2011), the chapters in this book demonstrate that social exclusion from the labour market and job insecurity postpone the transition toward autonomy. However, it is also crucial to note that insecurity in the labour market not only postpones leaving the parental nest (Goglio and Bertolini, Chapter 7) but also renders it more complex.

Housing autonomy still carries a high value for youth. However, in respect to becoming adult, leaving the parental home is not universally

considered to be an important step towards adulthood – or, at least, not the only way to become an adult – in a time of economic constraint. Moreover, housing and economic autonomy are no longer coincident for young people's transition toward self-perceived adulthood (Chapter 8, Bertolini et al; Chapter 9, Meo et al).

Different modalities of becoming adult emerge from the qualitative insights. Vulnerable labour market conditions such as low incomes in Bulgaria, long spells of unemployment in Greece, and precarity in Italy, together with the fact that young people in these countries generally have no access to unemployment insurance (because of contributive systems in all three countries), have made prolonged cohabitation with parents the norm (Chapter 8, Bertolini et al). Young people can remain in the parental home for long periods, they can live in the same house but apart from their parents, they can return to the parental home in case of need, or form a family but still live in the same house as their parents. For instance, in Bulgaria, Greece, and Italy, young people usually believe that moving out of the parental home implies starting a new family. This is undoubtedly a very traditional notion of the transition to adult life which is still prevalent in these countries, at least perceived as an ideal life path. In reality, the lives young people live can differ dramatically from their aspirations. Due to economic constraints in Bulgaria, for instance, vulnerable young people tend to live with their parents even after they get married. Although young people in Bulgaria aspire to autonomy, they prioritise their well-being over housing autonomy, for example.

Thus, as a *consequence of labour market insecurity, housing autonomy is no longer so central*, especially for Mediterranean and Eastern European countries, and *new modalities of becoming autonomous and adult are emerging*.

The second dimension of autonomy, financial independence, is linked to self-perceived adulthood and is perceived as a desired outcome. Meo et al (Chapter 9) show how even if they gain a foothold in the labour market, young people do not attain financial independence. Their narratives demonstrate that economic autonomy is a fuzzy concept shaped by individual assessments of the balance between available resources and personal needs and goals. When young people are unable to support themselves and to provide for their own livelihood through work, they redefine economic autonomy creatively and diminish its scope. They see it as a capacity for self-determination while still living in the parental home. In such cases, interviewees define economic autonomy as the possibility of and ability to satisfy their needs within their own resources, by defining their needs mainly in terms of small personal daily necessities.

However, the interviewees perceived and represented themselves as autonomous, in that they were able to decide for themselves by defining their own training and work paths, by managing their daily lives, and ultimately by developing their own system of preferences, even though they had to remain economically dependent on their parents. As a possible consequence of increasingly scarce job opportunities, it appears that job uncertainty pushes them to dwell only in the present. For many young people today, being independent means having to deal with problems and decisions on a day-to-day or short-term basis and, from an economic point of view, being able to cover one's own leisure expenses plus a little on top. A process of *redefining the concept of autonomy* is taking place. Young people's definition of autonomy is increasingly limited in space and time.

As a consequence of the process of redefining autonomy, the findings presented in the qualitative chapters do not identify risks of social exclusion for young people in the traditional sense of the concept, but rather as *risks of exclusion from adult roles*. Young people in these countries do not feel themselves excluded socially in relative terms, because their situation is similar to that of their friends. However, they behave as if they were socially excluded. They feel excluded from policies and limited in their ability to stand up for their rights when working in insecure jobs, and this gives rise to further exploitation and uncertainty. Then they mainly use exit strategies, they find refuge in the private sphere and in the family of origin (Chapter 10, Meo et al; Chapter 11, Ricucci et al; Chapter 13, Figgou et al).

Socio-economic consequences

The underlying assumption in this book is that labour market insecurities (through both labour market exclusion and insecure jobs) may also impair the socio-economic situation of young people due to the absence of or fluctuations in income from work. Compared to youth in safe, well paid and continuous jobs, these young people are relatively disadvantaged in material and financial terms.

In the short-term economic situation, as Kłobuszewska et al's quantitative analysis (Chapter 12) demonstrates, the major detrimental consequence of unemployment is a lack of personal income. This translates directly into a deterioration of young people's financial situation and material deprivation, and it also manifests itself in a higher risk of exclusion from social life. Since the Great Recession, youth aged 16 to 29 who are not in education or training and cannot get a foothold on the labour market are twice as likely to be at risk of poverty

compared to employed young people. Unemployed youth assess their subjective economic situation as being fragile because they often have greater difficulty in making ends meet than employed youth. However, after controlling for household structure, the analysis no longer suggests gender-specific poverty is a risk among young people. It is the presence of children that increases both the objective and the subjective poverty risk, whereas living with parents or a partner mitigates it.

Following the dynamic life course perspective, Hofäcker et al (Chapter 14) extend the view to the long-term consequences of labour market problems in the early stages of young people's careers. The negative impacts of unemployment are not restricted to the immediate situation; unemployment also increases the future risk of poverty for young people. Chapter 14 highlights how, particularly in countries with high youth unemployment, public pension systems barely take account of gaps in employment or pension contributions when calculating future pension entitlements. The dynamic life course perspective is also important for accounting for differences in the short term and consequences in the long term. Whereas in the short term the socio-economic consequences of temporary employment are modest compared to unemployment, they are more detrimental in the long term. Savings behaviour is negatively affected for young people in fixed-term employment, and this is particularly harmful to their socio-economic situation in the long term. Fixed-term employees are rarely included in occupational pension plans, contributing further to a higher risk of poverty in old age.

Concern about the long-term consequences of current labour market insecurity is vividly expressed in the narratives of Greek and Italian youth (Figgou et al, Chapter 13) who describe their complete inability to engage in any type of financial planning. They see a pension and future financial security as impossible objectives to achieve. The institutional analysis of pension systems and expert interviews across Europe (Hofäcker et al, Chapter 14) demonstrate that until now, public, occupational and private pension pillars have not adapted to employment flexibilisation and increasing labour market mobility. Hence, results highlight a paradoxical situation for young people in Europe. In the context of recent reforms and developments, they will depend increasingly on additional income in old age due to cuts in public pensions; yet, the current labour market situation makes it increasingly difficult or impossible for them to contribute to other savings or pension schemes.

Research Question 2: Coping strategies

The second research question asks what coping strategies and compensatory mechanisms on the individual and mesolevel young people use to face the consequences of labour market insecurity. According to Schlee et al's qualitative analysis (Chapter 5), it becomes evident that the individual impact on well-being depends strongly on individual coping strategies. The coping strategies young people use include optimistic thinking and either ignoring or whitewashing the current insecure situation in order to avert the potentially negative influence on their own well-being (emotion-focused); or they search for jobs and write applications to counter uncertainties resulting from financial limitations or a lack of meaning in their lives (problem-focused).

Apart from individual-level coping strategies, family and social networks are very important moderators on the mesolevel. The family and social relations are used as a protective factor or to provide financial help (for instance, when formal support is not available or insufficient), and sometimes advice and emotional support. Next to the family, public services and various youth organisations also play a role. Generally, a number of coping strategies are combined in a latent or undifferentiated way. However, the mesocontext can also have detrimental moderating effects. For example, family conflicts and the dissolution of parental households exacerbate the situation for young people experiencing labour market insecurities (see Meo et al, Chapter 10). Shore and Tosun (2017) have reported negative assessments of public employment services by young people in Germany, although this country is often highlighted as an exemplary case for good youth labour market outcomes. The qualitative insights into youth experiences with and perceptions of public services illustrate some of the triggers for their negative assessment of public employment services such as the perceived bureaucratic ritualism, excessive focus on rules and regulations, and an impersonal approach which may further exacerbate the feeling of stigmatisation (Chapter 11, Ricucci et al).

Adjusting personal feelings of autonomy to the available opportunities and/or cohabitating with a partner are the most common strategies young people use to cope with the existing situation, especially those living in societies in which young people typically leave their parental homes early. The findings of Bertolini et al (Chapter 8) and Meo et al (Chapter 9) provide insights into the 'late-exit' countries, revealing that postponing housing autonomy is often used as a mechanism to help avoid the consequences of unemployment and to facilitate the process of gaining financial autonomy.

Regarding socio-economic consequences, and in line with previous findings, the chapters in Part II show that household composition is an important determinant of poverty and material deprivation for young people. Kłobuszewska et al (Chapter 12) demonstrate that living with parents or a partner/spouse protects against economic hardship whereas living with children increases this risk. Meo et al (Chapter 10) and Figgou et al (Chapter 13) shed more light on the interplay of coping mechanisms on the individual level by investigating the experience of receiving support from family, friends, and others to help them face insecure employment. For young people, parental resources and support are crucial in pursuing the path toward adulthood and counterbalancing the lack of job and income. Hence, the material situation of young people is closely related to the financial situation of the parental family. Broadly speaking, the biggest difference between unemployed and employed youth is their ability to participate in social life. Qualitative evidence reported by Figgou et al (Chapter 13) provides in-depth insights into the narratives of Greek and Italian youth and shows how unpredictable work schedules and varying income flows are constructed as having drastic and complex implications for social life, and how these relate back to heightened anxiety about the future. Vulnerable young people do not have sufficient resources to keep up with the lifestyle of friends who are better off. Although friends invite them and pay for them, such relationships are hard to maintain due to shame and, more broadly, a strong social norm favouring mutual reciprocity in social relationships. The forced withdrawal from friendships and social life is one of the mechanisms which contributes to a vicious circle, because friends – especially working friends – are an important source of information, material support, and emotional support; and without such support, it is more difficult to obtain a job. The second important mechanism contributing to this vicious circle is that young people in insecure and especially in informal jobs find it difficult to claim their rights – and this gives birth to further uncertainty. Young people are willing to make many compromises to get or keep a job, and this effectively silences their voices, even in extremely precarious work situations.

However, it is also important to describe the interplay between the meso- and the macrolevel in different contexts. For instance, in Greece and Italy, interviewees stressed above all the role of their parents given the lack of formal support, whereas in Estonia and Germany, many young adults in the sample combined formal (such as unemployment benefits) and informal (economic and other) supports to cope with their situations in times of job insecurity or unemployment. Indeed,

it appears clear that informal support and the parental family in particular play a role even in those contexts (such as Germany) in which institutions and formal support are widespread and deeply consolidated.

Research Question 3: Policies effective in mitigating the negative effects

The third research question addressed in this book examines which policies are effective in mitigating the negative effects of labour market insecurities for young people at risk of social exclusion. This question introduces the macrolevel into the multilevel model. Yet, in doing so, the interest is not primarily in the direct effect of macrolevel institutions on social exclusion (that is, an analysis of whether institutions directly influence the overall *degree* of labour market exclusion in European countries), but far more in the moderating effect of institutions –the ways in which nation-specific institutions strengthen or weaken the effect of unemployment and employment uncertainty on the different outcome variables examined in this book (health, well-being, autonomy, and socio-economic situation). This research question is approached in various ways: using broad comparative survey data, authors estimate multilevel regression models in order to identify the general moderating effect of specific types of institution through interaction effects. This focus is supplemented by small-N comparisons of countries purposefully selected to identify the effects of concrete institutional regulations more closely both quantitatively and qualitatively. Finally, qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) is used to better understand the effects of specific institutional constellations (rather than single institutions) in moderating the consequences of labour market uncertainty for youth. The results of this differential approach can be summarised as follows:

Nation-specific institutions matter for youth, because they moderate the consequences of labour market uncertainty in various respects. This is shown, for example, when Goglio and Bertolini (Chapter 7) demonstrate that even though experiencing unemployment generally delays youth transitions out of the parental home, the degree to which this negative effect on an individual's autonomy materialises depends on the type of labour market regulation. Particularly in countries with segmented labour markets (such as those in Central and Southern Europe), the delaying effect of unemployment is high. In a similar way, Lauri and Unt (Chapter 4) show that the negative effect of unemployment on life satisfaction is moderated by passive labour market policies (PLMPs) – that is, the degree to which life satisfaction declines depends on the

material support provided through state policies. Hence, negative effects of labour market uncertainty on the life situation of young people are not uniform across countries, but differ depending on nation-specific institutions. From a policy perspective, these findings inherently mean that *policies matter*, and that the repercussions of labour market uncertainty for youth can, in principle, be shaped through the implementation of policies.

In many cases, it is not single institutions that moderate the negative effects of unemployment and employment uncertainty, but rather the mutual interplay between different types of institution. In other words, institutional effects are those of institutional packages rather than single stand-alone policies. This finding stands out particularly in the QCA performed by Lauri and Unt (Chapter 4). They show that in many of the Nordic countries, it is the interplay of strong ALMPs and PLMPs (the so-called ‘universal route’) that may account for the more modest drop in life satisfaction for the unemployed. In Spain and Portugal, a similar effect is achieved through a combination of PLMPs and extended family support. In contrast, the reliance on ALMPs alone, as practised in the ‘capacitating route’ taken by liberal countries, cannot moderate the negative effects of becoming unemployed to the same degree.

The effects of policies are not restricted to those impacting on the immediate situation of young people, but are also linked to long-term social security programmes. As Hofäcker et al (Chapter 14) show, the negative long-term effects of unemployment and uncertain jobs on future social security savings can be mitigated by policies that foster employer-based social security (as in the UK) or integrate young people into state-governed multi-pillar pension systems (as in Sweden). Policymakers are thus advised to consider not only the immediate effects of political reforms, but to design more far-reaching ‘life course policies’ that also promote individual welfare in a long-term perspective.

Results also show that, in many respects, public policies need to be contextualised within their broader societal setting. This general conclusion applies in multiple respects:

First, public policies may not be seen as the only provider of welfare for youth. In providing for youth, it may be necessary to consider the entire welfare triangle of Esping-Andersen (1990) and additionally involve the family and the market. The previous section has already highlighted the contribution of family and private networks to diminish the effects of employment uncertainty. Hofäcker et al (Chapter 14), in contrast, also highlight that employer-provided occupation pension schemes – that is, support through the market – may help to mitigate the negative consequences of labour market uncertainty for future pension savings.

Second, the effect of welfare policies needs to be viewed in the light of more general economic conditions. As Nizalova et al (Chapter 2) show, a favourable economic situation, as reflected in high GDP, moderates the negative effects of insecure jobs on the health and well-being of youth. On the other hand, in countries with high unemployment, being in an insecure job may not be perceived as being as detrimental as it is in countries with low unemployment, because gaining employment of any sort may already be perceived as a relative success under difficult conditions.

Third, the effect of public policies does not depend solely on further structural factors such as other welfare providers or the general economic setting. It is also embedded in a broader cultural context. Baranowska-Rataj and Strandh (Chapter 3), for example, demonstrate that the negative effects of unemployment on a partner's health depend on the country-specific cultural context. Particularly in countries with a patriarchal culture manifesting in a male breadwinner norm, the negative effects of unemployment loom largest.

When considering the impact of policies, policymakers are thus advised not only to take into consideration the effects of policies 'in general', but also to be sensitive to their embeddedness in a broader cultural context.

The previous remarks already point to the more general conclusion that there are no easy 'standard' policy solutions to improve the situation of youth. As Ricucci et al (Chapter 11) highlight, young people themselves have little trust in 'standardised' institutional approaches, but prefer individualised approach to ensure that their situation will be treated with the necessary specificity. Hence, future policies will need to pay specific attention to the demands of youth, particularly of those affected most seriously by labour market uncertainty. Furthermore, there also seems to be no one single 'policy role model' towards which countries may orient themselves when developing appropriate policies. As Lauri and Unt (Chapter 4) show, even within the previously uniform social-democratic model of Scandinavian states, some have gone on to follow differential reform pathways in recent years. Hence, when trying to implement successful policies, policymakers will need to consider a complex set of contextual factors. Further research at the national and international level is needed in order to better understand the mutual interrelationships of these factors.

Limitations and directions for future research

Studying the aforementioned questions in order to understand consequences for young people often confronts researchers with

limitations in the *availability of longitudinal data* (Gebel et al, 2018). First, there are no truly pan-European comparative longitudinal data on youth. Very few European countries such as Germany, Sweden, and the UK provide good longitudinal data (either survey or administrative data). In contrast, Eastern and Southern European countries (for example, Estonia, Greece, and Italy) are often largely under studied due to a lack of recent longitudinal data on youth transitions and/or longitudinal cohort studies. Furthermore, comparative longitudinal analyses require longer term panel studies that focus particularly on youth on an internationally comparative level. Such data would allow better comparisons of life course trajectories and lead to a better understanding of how policy and labour market circumstances affect well-being, health, and other outcomes. Longitudinal data may also help in investigating long-term effects –for example, the analysis of young people’s future social security on which research to date is rather scarce. Such analyses may deliver innovative suggestions for truly life course-oriented policies that would increase the inclusiveness of society. When taking short to medium and long-term perspectives, it is important to identify future risks and opportunities and make *appropriate policy recommendations*.

Acting in the present has consequences in the long term and young people are not always aware of this. From a macro point of view, it is very important for policymakers to consider the long-term socio-economic consequences for youth. Temporary contracts have a considerably smaller effect on well-being and autonomy than unemployment. However, a slow and fragmented entrance into the labour market seriously hinders young people’s capacity to save and contributes to future inequalities in pension entitlements. These inequalities can be compensated by suitable policies and a responsive welfare state system. For these reasons, this book shows that it is important to design more far-reaching ‘life course policies’ that also promote individual welfare in a long-term perspective.

The findings also highlight the vital need to better integrate qualitative and quantitative data. The combination of these two kinds of data had allowed us as researchers to individuate new modalities of transition to adult life, both in terms of objective conditions and subjective perceptions of the process and decision making. Mixed methods research would benefit particularly from qualitative longitudinal data sets which can track agency and change in different aspects of well-being, autonomy, and socio-economic consequences over time and make a significant contribution to life course analyses.

The current COVID-19 pandemic, and the great individual and collective uncertainty about the present and the future associated with it, will certainly have an additional impact on young people. Many countries are already experiencing rising unemployment and decreasing labour force participation. However, the first wave of the COVID-19 crisis has been cushioned at least partially by strong fiscal responses from the EU and most European countries (Eurofound, 2020; ILO, 2020). The uniqueness of the situation generated by COVID-19 is that collective and individual uncertainty are strongly interconnected, and this leads to an escalating reinforcement of uncertainties. The health crisis is clearly affecting older cohorts more directly, whereas it exposes younger cohorts more to the economic and social crisis because joblessness and its consequences escalates faster for young people than for the rest. A recent blog by Eurofound (2020) shows that youth unemployment has risen more quickly and that young people feel that it is more likely that they will lose their jobs in coming months. The restrictions on social interaction have also been particularly detrimental to young people, as they were more at risk of depression than the rest of population during the lockdown in April 2020 (Eurofound, 2020). The collective uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 crisis is likely to impact on young people's already undermined ability to make long-term and binding decisions, on their ability to imagine and plan for the future.

It is too early for any concrete analysis, but it seems plausible to assume two possible outcomes of the COVID-19 crisis. On the one hand, rising uncertainties may mean that risks for youth as well as the social inequalities in facing these risks may grow even further – that is, there will be differentiated socio-economic impacts in the different European countries due to variations in the ability to prevent risks. Some recent trends point in this direction. In many countries, protection increased for those with permanent contracts through the extended layoff prohibition as a precondition for state support throughout the early lockdown period. The same did not take place for those who had temporary contracts or engaged in new forms of work like gig workers. In this way, young people and young adults working with this kind of temporary contract, especially in countries with segmented labour markets, face even higher risks of labour market exclusion.

However, the pandemic could also redesign new borderlines and new forms of social inclusion and exclusion. Throughout the early pandemic period, teleworking has been expanding as well as use of

digital technology. Moreover, the pandemic has highlighted the value of essential services that preserve basic societal functioning. This change could generate more negotiating power for those essential but undervalued workers and contribute to more overall equality in society. This change also has the potential to generate new opportunities for young people to enter the labour market, and to valorise their abilities to use digital technologies. However, such developments require political will, and in the case of digital working, they also require national governments to make major investments in education, lifelong learning and the digital infrastructure. Without such investments, international differences between countries, as well as inter-individual inequalities between young people with varying human capital in the affectedness by labour market uncertainties and their negative effects, may increase only further.

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