

Making chocolate teapots* : Striving for 'good' youth work

Policy brief, November 2021

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THE YOUTH EMPLOYMENT CRISIS & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

The global youth employment crisis

The greatest challenges are youth unemployment, working poverty and young people not being in employment, education or training (NEET) (ILO, 2020).

Youth unemployment and underemployment are associated with multiple 'scarring effects' (McQuaid, 2017). For example:

- lower lifetime earnings
- unemployment and mental health problems later in life
- social exclusion

Key stakeholders include (but are not limited to):

- Parents
- Education/training providers
- Employers
- Third sector organisations
- Public sector organisations
- Careers practitioners
- Policy makers



Why do young people struggle to access work?

Lifespan development

Young people, by virtue of age and limited experience, lack key resources relevant for securing work, particularly human capital, social capital and career capital.

Young people are simultaneously juggling other developmental goals while trying to secure their first jobs. These include achieving financial independence, finding a partner, moving out of the family home, and starting a family.

From a lifespan development perspective, young people are in the process of developing career resources, and therefore have less bargaining power for accessing work and securing jobs that offer developmental opportunities.

Wider socio-economic context

Career transitions are always challenging. The challenges faced by young people during education-to-work transitions are amplified in the current economic climate, which shows stagnation of incomes and rising living costs; reductions in social welfare programmes (social safety nets against unemployment); and increasing social and economic inequalities.

Young people's jobs are also at the greatest risk of automation, especially for those with vocational training in areas where occupation-specific skills may become obsolete (ILO, 2020).

The transition from school to 'stable' jobs is likely to be prolonged by (ILO, 2020):

- persistently high unemployment rates
- decreasing labour force participation
- declining share of youth employment
- increasing enrolment in education
- challenges to job quality and increasingly precarious working conditions

Sources

ILO (2020). *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020: Technology and the future of jobs*. Geneva: International labour office.

McQuaid, R. (2017). *Youth unemployment produces multiple scarring effects*. LSE European Politics and Policy (EUROPP) Blog. Retrieved from: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/69950/1/blogs.lse.ac.uk-Youth%20unemployment%20produces%20multiple%20scarring%20effects.pdf>

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*phrase used by European Youth Parliament to describe a lack of purpose in poor quality jobs.

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COVID-19 AND GRADUATING IN A PANDEMIC

Young people's employment has been disproportionately negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in financial insecurity, housing instability and mental health challenges (OECD, 2021).

Key challenges include (but are not limited to):

- job losses and reductions in hours;
- a sharp rise in NEET rate;
- a decline in vacancies;
- a decline in opportunities for gaining work experience (e.g., through internships);
- lack of access to career guidance; and
- disruption to education and work-based learning.

Implications for employability

- Graduates from arts and humanities are more vulnerable to COVID-19 labour market effects than those from social science or science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) backgrounds.
- Health inequalities play a prominent role in access to jobs.
- Career competencies, particularly networking, are crucial for employability.



How can we support graduates?

- **Stakeholder co-operation** is key to correcting supply-demand imbalances in the recovery from the pandemic, while also safeguarding employability.
- **Facilitating development of career competencies**, particularly networking, is important for graduate employability.

In the COVID-19 context, while more organic and/or physical opportunities for networking have reduced (especially for arts and humanities graduates), there remain opportunities to use social networking sites, such as LinkedIn, for accessing vacancy-related information.

- **Fostering individual resilience** e.g., by encouraging development of coping strategies in the face of adversities.
- **Early policy intervention** to minimise the long-term scarring effects on youth employment.

Common policy solutions include (OECD, 2021):

- emergency income and housing support;
- job retention schemes;
- subsidised youth employment;
- expanding work-based learning opportunities; and
- youth mental health services.

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