

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

Policy brief, November 2021

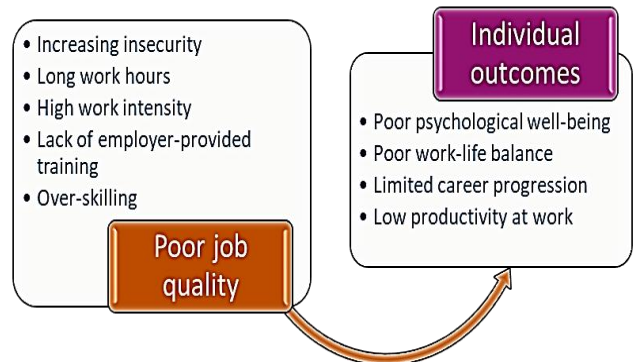
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YOUNG PEOPLE'S JOB QUALITY AND WELL-BEING IN EUROPE



Young workers globally have faced increasingly challenging working lives, even before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Employment and skills policy in Europe has tended to focus on reducing youth unemployment and getting more young people into work. While there are many negative consequences of youth unemployment, longitudinal studies show that transition from unemployment to poor-quality work can be worse for health and well-being than remaining unemployed (Chandola & Zhang, 2018). Since the costs of poor psychological well-being are both private (for workers and employers) and social (for families and taxpayers) (Cottini & Lucifora, 2013), this points to the salience of job quality in the youth context.



How poor job quality influences young people

Source: Authors' analyses of the European Working Conditions Survey (2015) and McGowan & Andrews (2017)

Recommendations for improving young people's job quality

Monitor job quality for young people

This data should inform future labour market and workplace interventions. Indicators of job quality which go beyond monetary factors include measures of intrinsic aspects of the job and working time quality, such as: autonomy, social interaction, work intensity and meaningfulness.

Encourage support from employers

Adapt organisational practices to make better use of young workers' skills and tackle poor-quality work.

For example:

- improve access to training
- tackle work intensity
- change hiring practices to reduce over-skilling.

Sources:

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

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Jose Ramos

OVERQUALIFICATION - WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Overqualification refers to the surplus of skills, knowledge, abilities, education, experience, and other qualifications that are required to do the job well (Erdogan et al., 2011).

It can be objective (i.e., normative job requirement) or subjective (i.e., based on perceptions) and is most commonly observed among young people.

Overqualification can be demoralising and demotivating, leading to poor performance, especially contextual performance (going beyond one's own job role to contribute to colleagues' or the organisation's effectiveness).

Overall, it implies a waste of personal resources and under-utilisation of the workforce, and is related to negative work-related outcomes, such as poor pay, job satisfaction, career development and employee wellbeing compared to those adequately employed (Ramos & Ramos, 2020).

A long-term career trap for young people

More than half remain over-qualified after five years of joining the labour market. Why is this happening?

The 'experience trap': Globally, young people's qualification attainment has been increasing (ILO, 2020a). Yet, young people lack work-related experience and associated skills and competencies. While young people will always inevitably lack work experience due to their developmental stage, paradoxically, work experience is commonly a pre-requisite for most entry-level jobs today.

'Stepping stones': Some young people accept being overqualified as a 'stepping stone' strategy or in exchange for other desired job features (e.g. gaining a qualification or experience, avoiding unemployment), with the expectation that this will lead to better jobs.

Recommendations: What can we do about overqualification?



Policy-level

Encourage 'high-road' to productivity with higher value added products, investments in R&D



Employers

Realistic job previews
High commitment HR practices
Intrinsically high quality work, e.g., employee empowerment, job control and autonomy, mentoring
Career and development opportunities



Education providers

Work-related skills development
Career competencies

Sources:

- Bashshur, M. R., Hernández, A., & Peiró, J. M. (2011). The impact of underemployment on individual and team performance. In D.C. Maynard & D.C. Feldman (Eds), *Underemployment* (pp. 187-213). Springer, New York, NY.
- Erdogan, B., Bauer, T. N., Peiro, J. M., & Truxillo, D. M. (2011). Overqualified employees: Making the best of a potentially bad situation for individuals and organizations. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 4(2), 215-232.
- Meroni, E.C., & Vera-Toscano, E. (2017). The persistence of overeducation among recent graduates. *Labour Economics*, 48, 120-143.
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Andra Tofan & EYPUK Employment and Social Affairs Committee

MAKING CHOCOLATE TEAPOTS: A QUEST FOR MEANINGFUL EMPLOYMENT

Young people risk having unrewarding entry-level positions, which, eventually, have long-term negative consequences on their health, personal lives, and passion.



The Scale of the Problem

Due to COVID-19, young people are already considered a lost generation, suffering from currently unknown long-term effects. For example, young people:

- accounted for two-thirds of job losses in the UK,
- are more likely to report depression and anxiety since the start of the pandemic, and
- suffer from age-related social stereotypes that depict them as lazy and unsuited for work.

Recommendations from the European Youth Parliament

Short-term remedies

To provide a boost of confidence and ensure security, young people need initial financial assistance. Some of our recommendations include for national governments to:

- subsidising young people's currently unpaid short-term internships offered by Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs);
- increasing funding towards job retention schemes and financially incentivising employers to hire young people until the youth unemployment rate improves; and
- financially reward high quality mentorship training programmes for employers.

Long-term improvements

To address the public's lack of awareness of 'good' youth work, the following are recommended:

- employment rights, the future of work and healthy working environments are included in school curricula;
- educational institutions provide increased physical exercise as well as confidential and tailored psychological support;
- governments publicly pressure employers to hire mental health advisers;
- invest in public information campaigns to eliminate age-related stereotypes; and
- employee representation in managerial board meetings.