



Mapping youth transitions in Europe

Executive summary

Introduction

Young people in Europe continue to experience great difficulties in the labour market. While the youth unemployment rate has started to fall in a few Member States, overall 23% of young job-seekers aged 15–24 in the EU28 could not find a job in January 2014. The number of young people who were not in employment, education or training (the NEETs group) in 2012 increased to 14.6 million, representing 15.9% of the entire population of those aged 15–29.

The current economic outlook and the collapse in demand for young workers have hindered the chances of young people successfully moving from school to work. Finishing education should be an exciting moment in the lives of young people, as they set out to embark on a career after years of formal education. However, this transition is now fraught with insecurity, as getting a first job is a major challenge and can prove a lengthy process in some Member States. Moreover, the prolonged jobs crisis may have also forced young people to be less selective about the type of job they are prepared to accept. Part-time employment and especially temporary contracts are much more common among younger workers, with the risk that this may in some cases put on hold their plans for the future and their transition into adulthood.

This report analyses the labour market situation of young people in Europe, focusing in particular on the school-to-work transition, in terms of the amount of time it takes to start the first job after education, while also monitoring the more general transition to adulthood, the age at which young people leave the parental home. It also investigates the tenacity of many young people who against the odds continue to be employed during the crisis, as well as charting their transitions from temporary to permanent contracts. Lastly, the report analyses policy measures implemented by selected Member States in support of school-to-work transitions.

Policy context

Supporting young people's successful transition from school to work has become central to the European policy agenda. In 2012, the European Commission proposed a range of measures – the Youth Employment Package – aimed at combating the 'unacceptably high levels' of youth unemployment and social exclusion among young people. Acknowledging that cyclical and structural problems in European labour markets have contributed to making school-to-work transitions more lengthy and difficult, the Commission appealed to Member States to take action to help young people find jobs.

The Commission's proposal to the Council of the European Union to implement a Youth Guarantee in all Member States was adopted in April 2013. This is designed to shorten the transition period to employment and reduce prolonged absences from the labour market, education or training. While the debate is now focused on enabling young people to move into the labour market, the impact of this on other transitions to adulthood needs to be addressed.

Key findings

High cost of unemployment and disengagement

While people generally in all Member States have been badly affected by the economic crisis, young people have suffered the most in terms of employment prospects and the risk of disengagement. In the summer of 2013, unemployment for those aged 15–24 rose to over 23% in the EU28, one of the highest levels ever recorded by Eurostat.

Despite the huge variation in unemployment figures among Member States, 18 countries have recorded their highest levels of youth unemployment since the

onset of the crisis, including nine which recorded this maximum value in 2013.

Moreover, with 15.9% of the overall population aged 15–29 not in employment, education or training in 2012, the loss to European economies of having such a large proportion of NEETs was estimated at €162 billion – an increase of almost €10 billion in comparison with 2011.

Variation in school-to-work transitions

The impact of these statistics can be fully understood in the context of youth transitions. Although transitions are not easily measured, the report's macro analysis revealed that the different events in young people's transitions to adulthood, such as leaving home and becoming parents, are strongly associated with the economic independence achieved with a successful school-to-work transition.

Those countries with quicker and more successful school-to-work transitions are those where young people leave home earlier. In this regard, seven common patterns were identified among Member States. At one end of the spectrum, the 'Nordic' and 'Apprenticeship' (Austria and Germany) models are characterised by a more rapid transition to adulthood and a quicker transition from school to work. At the other end of the spectrum, in the 'Eastern European' and 'Mediterranean' models, difficult and problematic school-to-work transitions are associated with very slow and late transitions to independence and autonomy.

In general, countries with a higher integration of school and work, through apprenticeship programmes or through more young people effectively combining school and early labour market experiences, display a smoother and quicker transition from school to work.

Challenge for young people to stay in jobs

Once young people acquire their first labour market experience, they still need to gain a solid labour market attachment with good career prospects to complete their transition into adulthood. Unfortunately, the analysis reveals that during the crisis the ability of young people to stay in employment has worsened, with negative consequences for their chances of gaining permanent employment.

Moreover, the research found that young people employed on temporary contracts had a lower chance of staying in employment, with less than a quarter succeeding in getting a permanent contract in the period investigated.

Policy pointers

Member States have recently been particularly engaged in designing and implementing policy measures to support all young people in their transition from school to work. While it is often difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of these efforts, due to the lack of any systematic monitoring, the case studies for this report identify a set of key factors that contribute to the effectiveness of these policies and shed light on how school-to-work policies could be improved.

- When designing policies, it is crucial to recognise that young people are a very diverse group with different characteristics and often multiple needs. Policies, while sharing the same aim, should have different approaches and be tailored to individual needs, with personalised support from personal advisers who seek to optimise the match between the individual and any intervention.
- Full coordination of all those involved in school-to-work transitions is one of the vital determinants of successful programmes. However, such coordination is very difficult to achieve because of the different lines of responsibilities and separate budgets.
- In all but a few countries, there is no systematic monitoring of the results of these programmes in order to determine their success. There is, however, much more attention being paid to the need for this and more robust results can be expected in this field.
- Macroeconomic factors have a critical influence on the success of policies in this field, as they may restrict funding for services and job creation, as well as resulting in steeper competition among job-seekers.

Further information

The report *Mapping youth transitions in Europe* is available at <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef1392.htm>

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