



EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA

Socio-economic
Sciences and Humanities



*"Social inclusion of youth on the margins of society:
more opportunities, better access, and higher solidarity"*

EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY REVIEW
of a Youth Research Cluster on
"YOUTH AND SOCIAL INCLUSION"



‘SOCIAL INCLUSION OF YOUTH ON THE MARGINS OF SOCIETY: MORE OPPORTUNITIES, BETTER ACCESS, AND HIGHER SOLIDARITY’

Policy review of the Youth Research Cluster on Social Inclusion

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of the present policy review is to focus on situation of some specific youth groups in the European youth policy context, such as the homeless or those at risk of homelessness, migrant, ethnic minority youth and those young people with public care backgrounds. More specifically, **the objectives of the review** are:

- to provide an overview of the reasons for their precarious situations and to formulate the policy issues;
- to visualise the policy challenges needed to produce greater social inclusion through more opportunities and better access to education and the labour market within the framework of solidarity between these young people and the wider society;
- to highlight policy implications for cross-border policy transfer; and
- to contribute with research-based recommendations.

The present policy review is based on the findings of a cluster of five research projects on the social inclusion of young people, financed by the Socio-Economic Sciences and Humanities Programme (SSH) of the EU 7th Framework Programme:

- **YiPPEE:** ‘Young People from a Public Care Background: pathways to education in Europe’. (UK, DK, HU, SE, SP)
- **CSEYHP:** ‘Combating Social Exclusion among Young Homeless Populations: a comparative investigation of homeless paths among local white, local ethnic groups and migrant young men and women, and appropriate reinsertion methods’. (UK, PT, CZ, NL)
- **EUMARGINS:** ‘On the Margins of the European Community – Young adult immigrants in seven European countries’ (NO, SE, UK, SP, EE, FR, IT).
- **EDUMIGROM:** ‘Ethnic differences in education and diverging prospects for urban youth in an enlarged Europe’ (HU, CZ, DK, FR, DE, RO, SK, SE, UK).
- **YOUNEX:** ‘Youth, Unemployment, and Exclusion in Europe: A multidimensional approach to understanding the conditions and prospects for social and political integration of young unemployed’. (CH, DE, IT, FR, SE, PL, PT).

Altogether, research evidence comes from eleven old and six new EU Member States, which suggests that this policy-oriented review is based on a good coverage of the countries of the European Union.

The selection of the youth groups by the research teams has been meaningful because according to the main policy evidence from research, young people with disadvantaged backgrounds (lacking family support, who originate from dysfunctional, poor or socially isolated families and/or with low official country language proficiency), as well as homeless, in or from public care, belonging to an ethnic minority or a migrant group, and with low personal resources (drop-out from school, low aspirations for post-compulsory education, in need of welfare support) go through problematic transitions to independent living. Even if they have ambitious goals concerning education or professional life, as research has revealed, they can only achieve these (if at all) in the face of significant odds, because of **fewer opportunities, more limited access** and **more fragile solidarity** in the relationships between these young people, in comparison with the general youth population, and the wider society. Their career prospects will usually remain lower than that of the general youth population if their special transitional needs continue to be politically neglected (and more robust political attention will be best encouraged through credible academic research and appropriate statistically monitoring). There is considerable evidence to suggest that the life chances of youth with disadvantaged backgrounds are primarily dependent on the policy context (welfare policy

approaches in general, and employment, education, housing and other policy measures in particular) of the country where those young people live.

Chapter One gives a brief overview about the **EU youth policy context**. The European Union and Council of Europe have emphasised the importance of a knowledge-based approach to youth policy-making in their relevant political documents and strategies. The EU documents related to youth policies stress the importance of the creation of more opportunities for youth in education and employment; the improvement in accessibility to full participation by young people in society; and the development of solidarity between society and youth. The EU policy documents also emphasise the importance of youth work: it can play an important role in developing autonomy, empowerment and entrepreneurial spirit of young people in their transitions to independent living.

The research projects have revealed that **national policies differ**, in particular through the division of responsibilities between the individual, the family, the state and the market. They also differ in the extent to which welfare provisions, education systems, employment policies and migration politics support individual aspirations.

Chapter Two focuses on **national practices of youth policies** and reveals the **under-representation of some youth groups with disadvantaged backgrounds in policies**. In this respect the review highlights the need for agreement upon common definitions related to them. This will allow recognition of their educational, economic and political needs, as special transitional needs of these young people, who require additional institutional support in order to compensate for their disadvantages and to broaden their life chances. The collection of statistics annually at national and local levels using EU indicators both about the current situation of these groups, as well as about trends in the field, is essential for reflexive policy making.

The research also reveals **institutional weaknesses** of policies affecting young people – the presence of exclusive labour market, educational and migration policies, the underexploited role of the civil society and, last but not least, weak or missing links between welfare provision and education and labour market policies. The institutional weaknesses together with the political under-representation of those young people who are disconnected from family support put them at extremely high risk of social exclusion. The research points to the importance of studying integrated policy impacts as these may include unintended negative effects on youth with disadvantaged backgrounds; there may be a need to increase collaborative efforts between different institutions in order to produce more synchronised positive effects from both education and care systems, and from the welfare system in a broader sense.

The third aspect highlighted in this chapter concerns **normative approach in policy regulations concerning age limits**. In the case of youth with disadvantaged backgrounds, the transitional needs towards independent living start at earlier age and last longer when compared to the general youth population that relies on family support. As a result, the present age limits that exist in administrative systems are recommended to be revised in order to address the special transitional needs below and over the specified age limits of young people with particular characteristics and disadvantages.

Chapter Three dissects the **biographical disadvantages** of young people, such as low coping capacities within families of origin and the often poor connections between migrant or ethnic minority groups and society. The biographical disadvantages that the young people face create a glass ceiling preventing them from realising aspirations and achieving positive life careers. According to the studies, youth from public care and homeless young people often come from violent, non-supportive families with acute health or social problems or the premature death of a parent, which leave their offspring without adult support and guidance. The research illustrates that low social capital in families often leads to the poor schooling of children and low life career prospects. According to research on migrant youth, it is also a lack of bridging and linking types of social capital in migrant families, the closure of these communities, and a low solidarity between non-migrant part

of society and migrants that poses a challenge to the integration of young migrants and to their successful life careers.

The recommendations for **breaking the barriers** are around early-age prevention programmes and targeted interventions that can be used as functional tools for overcoming the biographical disadvantages of young people. Interventions should be directed towards ensuring access to and retention in education irrespective of the material resources of the family or their ethnic or migrant background. In the case of migrant youth, additional neighbourhood-based actions of informal and non-formal learning addressed to all ages and for both migrant and non-migrant community members, are suggested as means of broadening solidarity within society and for linking migrant or ethnic minority families with the wider community.

Chapter Four discusses the transitional needs of young people focusing on **educational systems and their impact on youth transitions**. The research confirms that the educational prospects after compulsory education have their roots in participation in quality pre-school education, and in early educational allocation systems which causes an educational divide among children and youth. Roma children, as well as children of migrant background and poor families, are usually highly affected by poor access to pre-school facilities and allocated to more disadvantageous segments of the education systems. Young people in and from public care are negatively affected by multiple changes of schools, and placement instability has a negative impact on their achievements at school and diminishes their prospects of continuing in post-compulsory education. The review stresses that open access to education for all children and young people from early age is their social right and thus needs relevant policy responses.

This policy review also touches the issue of the social comparisons that all young people tend to make but in the case of youth with disadvantaged backgrounds this phenomenon produces a negative outcome for them. In effect, they feel disfavoured, deprived, or “**the other**” among peers in school environment. The accompanying labelling of these children and young people by professionals – teachers, social workers, and others - results in confirmation of their low self-esteem and the undervaluation of the importance of education in the young person’s life. As an example, after leaving care, a lack of encouragement by the school and care professionals points young people from the care system towards ‘immature’ transitions to independent living, namely the prioritisation of financial independence through work over further education, which later limits their professional opportunities and leads to lower socio-economic positions. However, conversely, the research also indicates that many young people in care, homeless young people and those with migrant backgrounds fully understand the importance of education and are frustrated by the obstacles they have to overcome after dropping out of, or finishing compulsory education. They are in need of support from trusted adults who would be a stable point of encouragement and counselling and would broaden youth educational horizons.

The research revealed that even in the case of countries with relatively developed social services, the **potentials of educational and public care systems to reduce inequalities during the youth phase are underused**. Rather than creating or exacerbating social inequalities through educational segregation, the school environment can be used as a crucial space for overcoming them, notably by compensating weak family efforts in supporting the child in education and in his/her personal development. Moreover, according to the research, explicit legislation is needed to oblige local authorities and child protection agencies to provide support to young people staying in education after its compulsory stage in order to prepare them for better work careers.

Chapter Five focuses on **transitional needs of vulnerable youth towards financial independence, civic and political participation**, and highlights the **potentials of young people’s own agency and resilience**. Young people with accumulated disadvantages, after leaving home, care or education are in need of additional institutional support to compensate missing support from the family of origin,

or a lack of resources (individual, social, political) for transition to independent living. They first of all need more educational opportunities, employment schemes, housing and welfare services and presence of supportive adults – in conjunction with each other.

The research has, however, confirmed that young people's own agency displays **capabilities and resilience that could be empowered with political measures**. The promotion of access to social rights of civic and political participation can contribute to the promotion of equal opportunities and social inclusion. With the internalisation of these rights comes a sense of empowerment that can help young people to realise their potential, if institutionally supported. Civil society organisations uncover underexploited capacities to involve young people, and to develop subsidy schemes and scholarships for granting to youth who have been actively engaged. Political parties can consciously recruit migrant youth with the objective of developing relevant political issues and agendas and carrying out campaigns.

Chapter Six draws together the previously highlighted evidence and advances a future vision for **tackling multiple disadvantages and the social exclusion** of youth with disadvantaged backgrounds and low personal resources. Based on the numerous recommendations drawn from the research, the main conclusion is that the social divide of youth can be narrowed by political acknowledgement of their specific social, economic and political needs, and political attention to the early prevention of social exclusion and the elaboration of institutional measures supporting youth transitions to independent living. This conclusion refers to the need for a package of inclusive educational and labour market policies combined with supportive welfare policies, an activated civil society, and, last but not least, the empowerment of young people's agency from an early age by encouraging participation and citizenship in a supportive and respectful social environment. **In sum**, the main policy conclusions are as follows.

1. The research has revealed **two directions of policy challenges**: (1) the reduction of the risks of social exclusion for children and youth from an early age; and (2) the development of integrative measures assuring successful transitions into independent living targeted on youth with low personal resources and facing institutional and structural constraints.
2. An increase in institutional support, protection and formal and non-formal encouragement can open up **more opportunities** for the social inclusion of excluded youth. An opportunity-focused approach to the social inclusion of youth can be secured by strategic investment of financial (including youth-sensitive budgeting) and human resources (e.g. counselling, mentoring, and supervision).
3. The integration of policies and strengthening their inclusiveness can **improve the accessibility** to education and labour market of excluded youth groups. This conclusion calls for at least three sets of policy responses: (1) the development of reflexive policy-making through the critical evaluation of policy responses, (2) the elaboration of policy responses aimed at reducing educational allocations, and (3) combining different policies for securing successful and smooth transitions to independent living, taking into account politically recognised transitional needs of youth with disadvantaged backgrounds and low personal resources, and to proven institutional and structural barriers.
4. The promotion of citizenship and participation can **empower youth agency and encourage solidarity between society and youth**. This conclusion has two main implications for policy: (1) the elaboration of measures to support the personal resilience and human resources of children and young people to achieve their better integration in society through their individual capacities and social capital building, and (2) the creation of conditions for the democratic participation of young people with disadvantaged backgrounds that can lead to a sense of belonging and identity, within their communities and everyday life.

There are clearly limitations to this policy review. These flow, significantly and inevitably from the great variations in the policy systems in different European countries, the different problems of youth at risk of social exclusion which vary from country to country, the highly differing socio-economic conditions and cultural environments in those countries, and a great diversity in the scale of migration, ethnic minority, youth unemployment and numbers of excluded young people. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the ideas shared here will increase awareness of the particular social, economic and political needs of young people with disadvantaged backgrounds and will make their needs more visible in policy agendas.

Education, employment, equal rights and opportunities to citizenship, participation and solidarity between society and youth are the key areas where change is needed for the development and execution of **EU Youth Strategy actions** for the empowerment of young people's agency and for preventative initiatives against social exclusion, in support of the implementation of related and relevant policies at regional and national levels.

SETTING THE SCENE

The youth period is rich with life transitions. Young people are expected to be successful in completing education and / or vocational training, enter the labour market and, eventually, leave their parental homes. European countries differ from each other by the age the young people leave their homes of origin and how much they can enjoy both the familial as well as external support in the process of their transitions. In contemporary European societies an increased dependency by youth on their parents has become apparent. The various transitions – to working life, independent living and family formation – no longer follow a linear path and may go back and forth, especially in terms of periods of independence from and dependence on their families of origin as a result of a longer time spent in education and backlashes in transitions to working life. Bynner (2005) has estimated that young people today struggle to establish permanent employment until their mid 20s. According to Eurostat EU LFS data (Eurostat 2011), the youth unemployment rate in the EU-27 was more than double of the overall unemployment rate in 2009.

MacDonald (1997: 186) states that the institutions, arrangements and policies which structure youth transitions – in employment, training, welfare, education, housing, the family, and legislation – have themselves undergone dramatic restructuring in recent decades. As an effect of these reconstructions youth transitions become riskier and more insecure. Adolescence and young adulthood are key transition periods which highly impact on a young person's future life chances. Empirical studies have confirmed that people who fall into disadvantaged groups at these life stages are at risk of facing a lifetime of social exclusion (see also: Furlong & Cartmel 2007; MacDonald & Marsh 2005).

For the reason of 'not any more child – not yet mature adult' young people have few legitimate means in their hands to make their voices heard (Kasearu *et al* 2010). According to the critical observation by Barry (2005) many young people lack status, rights and power in society. They are constrained by poverty, their extended dependence on the family and state in the transition to independent living, and by limited opportunities available to them for higher education, employment, housing and citizenship, making them vulnerable to social exclusion. In most European countries young people have disproportionate difficulties on the labour market, thus compared to other age groups they carry the highest risk of unemployment along with socio-economic precariousness. The group of young people not in education, employment or training has been a cause for concern and a focus for debate about social exclusion from the 1990s (see: Bynner & Parsons 2002; Côté & Bynner 2008: 255; Williamson 1997). The economic recession starting from the late 2000s has worsened the process of young people's transitions towards independent living.

The objective of the present policy review is to focus on the needs of some specific youth groups, such as young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, migrant and ethnic minority youth, and young people with a public care background, in order to overview the reasons for their precariousness and visualise the policy challenges needed to produce greater social inclusion through more opportunities and better access to education and the labour market within a framework of solidarity between social actors. The present review will highlight policy implications and recommendations in two directions: (1) the reduction of the risks of social exclusion for children and youth with biographical disadvantages from an early age; and (2) the development of reinsertion measures into society targeted on youth with low personal resources, facing institutional and structural constraints. The review is organised around three domains: (1) families of origin; (2) educational pathways; and (3) youth agency – in the European youth policy context.

We are aware of the limitations of this review – there are great variations in the policy systems in different countries, different problems of youth at risk of social exclusion which vary from country to

country, highly differing socio-economic conditions and cultural environments and a great diversity in the scale of migration, ethnic minority, youth unemployment and numbers of excluded young people.

Education, employment, equal rights and opportunities for citizenship, participation and solidarity between youth and society are the key agents in the capacity of European youth policy to achieve improvement in the inclusion of European young people at risk. Securing their acceptance and support on the stages of national politics remains an important political objective. Our hope is that the ideas shared here will increase awareness about the particular circumstances and risks facing young people on the margins of society in their transition to independent living and provoke discussions on the policy challenges that would promote their active participation in the European labour market and civil society.

The research projects

The present policy review draws on the findings of a cluster of five research projects on the social inclusion of young people, financed by the Socio-Economic Sciences and Humanities Programme (SSH) of the EU 7th Framework Programme (see also the Methodological overview table in the Background information).

YIPPEE: *‘Young People from a Public Care Background: pathways to education in Europe’*. (Comparative evidence from UK, DK, HU, SE, and SP) The aim of the project was to find out how young people who have been in state care as children can be encouraged to stay in education beyond the age of compulsory schooling and to access higher levels of education. The researchers claim that care leavers with only basic education and no family back-up are at the greatest risk of long-term unemployment and social exclusion.

CSEYHP: *‘Combating Social Exclusion among Young Homeless Populations: a comparative investigation of homeless paths among local white, local ethnic groups and migrant young men and women, and appropriate reinsertion methods’*. (Comparative evidence from UK, PT, CZ, and NL) The study aimed to understand the life trajectories of homeless or at risk of homelessness youth populations in different national contexts, identifying risk, processes of social exclusion and points of reinsertion. Over a half of the sample were unemployed during the study.

EUMARGINS: *‘On the Margins of the European Community – Young adult immigrants in seven European countries’* (Comparative evidence from NO, SE, UK, SP, EE, FR, and IT). The aim of the project was to analyse the lived experiences of young immigrants and the interconnections in an individual life story between the processes of social inclusion and exclusion over time and in different arenas. By focusing on different life arenas, like work, school, participation, neighbourhood, family and peer groups, the project reveals how young adult immigrants experience obstacles in some settings, and opportunities in other settings. The study was concerned with identifying barriers and bridges to inclusion in different spheres of life and assessing whether particular national or broader European efforts are needed to address the gaps faced by immigrant youth.

EDUMIGROM: *‘Ethnic differences in education and diverging prospects for urban youth in an enlarged Europe’* (Comparative evidence from HU, CZ, DK, FR, DE, RO, SK, SE, and UK). The aim of the project was to study how ethnic differences in education contribute to the diverging prospects for minority ethnic youth and their peers in urban settings. The project has recognized the role of education in the processes of ‘minorisation’; how schools operate in their roles of socialization and knowledge distribution and contribute to reducing, maintaining or deepening inequalities in young people’s access to the labour market, further

education and training, and also in different domains of social, cultural and political participation.

YOUNEX: *'Youth, Unemployment, and Exclusion in Europe: A multidimensional approach to understanding the conditions and prospects for social and political integration of young unemployed'*. (Comparative evidence from CH, DE, IT, FR, SE, PL, and PT as the associated partner). The project focused on the social and political dimension of youth lives and investigated the effects of unemployment on the exclusion of young people from the social and political spheres, including their civic and political participation, as well as the consequences on their well-being. This multidimensional project adds understanding of the conditions and prospects for social and political integration of young unemployed in Europe.

These projects have made important contributions to a participant-oriented youth research. In tracking the implications of, for example, living in care, being homeless, or living without a legal status, the researchers established innovative approaches to qualitative research methods in order to ensure that the voices of the young people were heard. They tell of their longing to belong, while at the same time capturing the structural, legal, and institutional barriers constructed by the mainstream society and their excluding effects.

Chapter 1. THE EUROPEAN YOUTH POLICY CONTEXT

1.1. The European Union

The European Union and Council of Europe have emphasised the importance of a *knowledge-based approach to youth policy-making* in their respective political documents and strategies. The Member States, following the Commission's proposals in the 2001 White Paper *'A new impetus for European Youth'*¹ identified four priorities for cooperation in the youth field under the first cycle of the Open Method of Coordination: (1) young people's participation in the exercise of active citizenship; (2) enhancing the information addressed to young people and existing information services for young people; (3) promoting voluntary activities among young people, and (4) encouraging greater understanding and knowledge of youth. The White Paper was followed by several Council Resolutions on these four priorities, among them one on *'Common Objectives for a Greater Understanding and Knowledge of Youth'*².

The 'Youth in Action' programme (2007–2013) aims to inspire a sense of active European citizenship, solidarity and tolerance among young Europeans and to involve them in shaping the European Union's future. It promotes mobility within and beyond the EU's borders, non-formal learning and intercultural dialogue, and encourages the inclusion of all young people, regardless of their educational, social and cultural background. It supports youth exchanges and voluntary activities, and gives young people the opportunity to become involved in their societies and to gain multicultural experiences through their participation. A substantial number of initiatives are aimed at supporting excluded young people and those at risk.

In 2009 the Member States adopted the EU Youth Strategy, *'Council Resolution on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010–2018)'*³. The EU Youth Strategy acknowledges young people both as a most vulnerable group and as a precious resource in an ageing Europe. The EU Youth Strategy promotes a cross-sectoral approach, with short- and long-term actions. Its eight fields of action involve key policy areas: education, employment and

¹ Brussels, 21.11.2001; COM(2001) 681 final

² Council document 13511/04 JEUN 80 EDUC 194 SOC 485, of 15 November 2004

³ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/111514.pdf

entrepreneurship, culture and creativity, social inclusion, health and well-being, civic participation, youth & the world and volunteering. The EU Youth Strategy (see below) defines reinforced measures for a better implementation of youth policies at the EU level. Its main objectives are to: (1) create more and equal opportunities for youth in education and in the labour market; and (2) promote the active citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity of all young. These goals confirm the need for investments in research in order to promote the development of evidence-based policy in Europe. Youth research is regarded as essential in order to achieve the overall objectives of the youth policy strategy.⁴

European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship	2011	
European Youth Week		
Europe 2020 strategy and flagship initiatives	2010	
Council Resolution on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018)	2009	
Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering		
Agenda 2020	2008	
Eurodesk mission revised		
European youth week		
Council Recommendation on mobility of young volunteers		
Future challenges for young people		
European Youth week	2007	
Structured Dialogue with young people		
Eurodesk part of YIA Programme		
Youth in Action Programme starts		
Communication white paper	2006	
The European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCY) and Youth Partnership	2005	
European Youth Week		
European Youth Pacts		
European Youth Portal launched	2004	
Common objectives for youth information adopted	2003	
Open Method of Co-ordination adopted	2002	
White paper launched (consultation period of 18 months)	2001	

Table 1. Main stages of the European Union youth policy development since 2001⁵.

The EU Presidency, held by Hungary in the first half of 2011 developed further the issue of youth participation and active citizenship. Under the Hungarian Presidency the European Council adopted a Resolution on *'Encouraging new and effective forms of participation of all young people in democratic life in Europe'*⁶, which also concluded the first cycle of the structured dialogue with youth on employment.

The EU Youth Strategy also emphasises the importance of youth work. Youth work, as a form of non-formal learning, is viewed as a key mechanism for promoting the responsibility and accountability of

⁴ One of the tools of the strategic goals is "promoting evidence-based policy" through further development of the *The European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCY)*, see: <http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/ekcyp/index>

⁵ See also: <http://www.eurodesk.org/eddesk/YouthInEurope.do?go=3#1>

⁶ Council document 7060/11 JEUN 10 SOC 171, of 19 May 2011

young people by giving them an active role in safe, inspirational and pleasant environments, in which all children and young people, either as individuals or as part of a group, can express themselves, learn from each other, meet each other, play, explore and experiment. Youth work provides the opportunity for young people to develop a wide range of different personal and professional skills, free from stereotypes, as well as key competences that can contribute to modern society. Therefore it can play an important role in developing the autonomy, empowerment and entrepreneurial spirit of young people. In transmitting universal values regarding human rights, democracy, peace, anti-racism, cultural diversity, solidarity, equality and sustainable development, youth work is seen to have added social value because it can promote social participation and responsibility, voluntary engagement and active citizenship, strengthen community building and civil society at all levels (e.g. intergenerational and intercultural dialogue), contribute to the development of young people's creativity, cultural and social awareness, entrepreneurship and innovation, and provide opportunities for the social inclusion of all children and young people, especially through reaching young people with fewer opportunities ('A contribution to youth work and youth policy in European Report of the Belgian EU Presidency Youth' 1/7/2010 – 31/12/2010).

Erasmus for All is the new program proposed by the European Commission for education, training, youth and sport in November 2011. It would start in 2014 and would be based on the premise that investing in education and training is the key to unlocking people's potential, regardless of their age or background. It helps them to increase their personal development, gain new skills and boost their job prospects⁷.

1.2. The Europe 2020 strategy

In the *Europe 2020* strategy the Union has set objectives in five domains – employment, innovation, education, social inclusion and climate/energy – to be reached by 2020. Each Member State has adopted its own national targets in each of these areas. The *Europe 2020* strategy aims at building a competitive, knowledge-based and sustainable Europe developing the European Research Area (Researchers, Research Infrastructures, Knowledge Sharing, Joint Programming, International Science & Technology Cooperation and Excellent Research Institutions) for attaining beneficial impacts to the social dimension of the ERA⁸.

Part of the *Europe 2020* strategy is 'Youth on the Move' – a flagship initiative. The objectives of the flagship are to support wider learning and mobility opportunities for all young people in Europe, as

BOX

With more than 80 million people in the EU at risk of poverty – including 20 million children and 8% of the working population. The target is to reduce poverty and social exclusion by at least 20 million by 2020. Launched in 2010, the platform is part of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth identifying best practices and promoting mutual learning, improving access to work, social security, essential services (healthcare, housing, etc.) and education, better use of EU funds to support social inclusion and combat discrimination, finding social innovations and smart solutions in post-crisis Europe, especially in terms of more effective and efficient social support and new partnerships between the public and the private sector.

'European platform against poverty and social exclusion'

BOX

An important target of the 'Youth on the Move' flagship is to reduce the share of early school leavers from 15% to 10% and increase the share of young people with tertiary education or equivalent from 31% to at least 40% by 2020; it also targets the "right" skills of young people for the jobs of tomorrow.¹

⁷ <http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus-for-all/>

⁸ Commission Green Paper "European Research Area: New Perspective" of 4 April 2007 (8322/07). Council Conclusions of 30 May 2008 on The Launch of the "Ljubljana Process" - towards full realisation of ERA (10231/08).

well as supporting the modernization of education and training systems and the development of the youth sector, in particular through trans-national and international cooperation projects and networks.⁹ It proposes 28 key actions aimed at making education and training more relevant to young people's needs and encouraging more of them to take advantage of EU grants to study or train in another country. 'Youth on the Move' aims to improve young people's education and employability, to reduce high youth unemployment and to increase the youth-employment rate.¹⁰

One of the aims of European youth policy cooperation is to support the occupational integration of young people, improving training, education and counselling. EU Member States and the European Commission strengthened co-operation in 2009 with the *strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training* ("ET 2020"), a follow-up to the earlier 'Education and Training 2010 work programme' launched in 2001. The approach recognises that high-quality pre-primary, primary, secondary, higher and vocational education and training are fundamental to Europe's success. However, in a rapidly changing world, lifelong and life-wide¹¹ learning will be a priority. The long-term strategic objectives of EU education and training policies are: (1) making lifelong learning and mobility a reality; (2) improving the quality and efficiency of education and training; (3) promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship; (4) enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training. The EU level activities are on different levels of education and training from early childhood, school, higher, vocational and adult education including, for example, expanding opportunities for learning mobility and/or enhancing partnerships between education and training institutions and the broader society. Other actions are relevant to all levels of education, such as promoting multilingualism, innovation, creativity and the adoption of ICT (Information and Communication Technology).

BOX

At least 95% of children between the age of four and the age for starting compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education; the share of 15 year olds with insufficient abilities in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15%; the share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 10%.

Europe 2020 Strategy

The strategic framework of the *Europe 2020* initiative takes a holistic approach to education and training, one that explicitly links education objectives to social inclusion, improving young people's numeracy and literacy and reducing the number of early school leavers. European policies for young people related to education and employment make evident that social integration is an important goal.

1.3. The Council of Europe¹²

Since 1997 the Council of Europe had conducted international reviews of national youth policies in order to understand the breadth and depth of youth policy development and implementation throughout Europe. To date, eighteen countries have participated in this review process.

The Council of Europe has set the 'Developing European youth co-operation through youth policy, youth work and non-formal education/learning' programme in the youth sector (2010 – 2013) including (1) 'Human rights and democracy: youth policy and youth work promoting the core values of the Council of Europe'; (2) 'Living together in diverse societies: youth policy and youth work

⁹ Youth on the Move. An initiative to unleash the potential of young people to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the European Union, COM(2010) 477 final, p. 22.

¹⁰ See more http://ec.europa.eu/youthonthemove/about/index_en.htm.

¹¹ An effort to indicate that 'learning' does not take place only in formal teaching/learning, but also through non-formal education/learning, self-directed learning, informal learning, peer learning, etc.

¹² http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/IG_Coop/Agenda_2020_en.asp

promoting intercultural dialogue'; (3) Social inclusion of young people', and (4) 'Policy approaches and instruments benefiting young people and children'. This is otherwise known as Agenda 2020, launched by European youth Ministers in Kiev in 2008.

As a result of the new European strategies in the field of youth, a renewed forward-looking strategy for the EU-CoE Youth Partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Commission has been agreed for the period 2010–2013. The Partnership provides an added value to the programmes of the two institutions and their institutional partners, fosters co-operation, complementarity and synergies, and enhances the EU-CoE Youth Partnership's impact on youth related policies and activities in Europe and beyond.

1.4. The national policy contexts in Europe: notes from the projects

The research projects' findings have revealed a diversity of social and policy contexts as well as the diverse individual trajectories of young people with disadvantaged backgrounds who, due to high risks of social exclusion, experience problematic transitions to independent living. The life chances of disadvantaged youth are in a broad sense dependent on the policy context of the society where those young people live. The contexts differ, in particular, through the division of responsibilities between the individual, the family, state and the market. They also differ by the extent to which welfare provisions, labour force activation policies and education systems support individual aspirations.

With reference to EU FP6 project Up2Youth¹³, the CSEHYP project noted differences in the structure of welfare policies, education and training systems, labour markets, youth unemployment policies, gender relations and representations of youth across the EU27 countries. They highlighted a *liberal* (Anglo-Saxon), a *universalistic* (Nordic), a *sub-protective* (Mediterranean), an *employment-centred* (Continental), and a *post socialist* (Central and Eastern European) model of welfare provision including related youth transition regimes.

The **liberal welfare approach** relies on individual responsibility where young people face pressure to enter the workforce and to become economically independent as soon as possible. Although the labour market has a high degree of flexibility it also carries much insecurity for youth and considerable risks of social exclusion. Without extra key support they are socially excluded.

The **universalistic welfare approach** reflects the individualisation of life courses in the frame of integrated and comprehensive education systems. Young people are first of all regarded to belong to the education system and they are eligible for supportive education allowances for all over 18 years old. Also the labour market policies leave space for individual decision-making. The universalistic Nordic model carries the principle of equal opportunities. It relies on co-operation with families in creation of the equal opportunities however, according to YIPPEE no *specific* attention is paid to youth from public care with missing family support or youth with poor family backgrounds.

The **sub-protective (Mediterranean) welfare approach** lacks reliable training pathways into the labour market. That creates inequalities among youth depending on the resources of their families of origin. Long dependency on families leaves young people without formal position and status. Basing on data from CSEHYP and YIPPEE, the youth with disadvantaged family backgrounds are at a very high risk of unsuccessful or delayed transitions to autonomous life in these countries.

The **employment-centred (Continental) welfare approach** divides youth by the school system: different tracks in education separate pupils from age ten or twelve according to their performance. The two-tiered division of social security favours those who have already been in regular training or

¹³ see: <http://www.up2youth.org/>

employment, while others are entitled to stigmatised social assistance. For the youth with disadvantaged backgrounds this model is clearly exclusive and stigmatising.

Post socialist (Central and Eastern European) welfare approaches vary from country to country, through a variable welfare mix of socialist past and policies copied from the contemporary Western societies, with specific adaptations to the different countries' needs. This model is rather close to the sub-protective welfare states, with public structures often being experienced as totally unreliable.

From the perspective of the needs of the youth with severe housing problems, in the EU-27 only the most generous Nordic universalistic welfare regimes provide adequate or near adequate supplies of social housing for young families or young individuals. The Netherlands provide a supported route into tenancies in social housing for some young people, and UK provides long term supported housing with education, training and supported transitions to independent housing for some disadvantaged young groups (young mothers, unaccompanied minors, young homeless people). In some countries (e.g. Finland, Sweden and Denmark) welfare regulations give the possibility of free education to all young people but in some others (e.g. UK) young people's educational aspirations are discouraged through cost whilst employment cannot be undertaken because youth wages are too low to pay housing costs. These examples illustrate how diverging welfare and transition regimes relate to differing features of the risk of homelessness.

Within the context of six major city areas, YOUNEX focused on political opportunities for precarious and unemployed youth across countries. The project shows that unemployed youth face different political contexts across Europe in terms of unemployment policies and regulations. In particular, a crucial distinction has to be made between a socially inclusive model, shaping policy-making in countries such as France and Sweden, and a highly exclusive model shaping policy-making in countries such as Poland and Italy (with other countries such as Switzerland and Germany providing an intermediate situation). In terms of labour market regulations, YOUNEX shows considerable differences between political contexts promoting flexibility on the labour market, as for example in Sweden and Switzerland, and political contexts that are characterized by much stronger rigidity such as Italy (with Poland, Germany and France providing an intermediate situation). These differences have important implications for the social and political inclusion of unemployed young people as well as for their well-being.

EUMARGINS found in their cross-national analysis of the exclusion and inclusion of young immigrants in the labour market that two different categories of countries exist; those countries with poor rights for young immigrant workers with a more developed black market often open to illegal migrants and those countries with social protection. In comparing these categories, it can be observed that integration in the labour market is best achieved in the countries which provide social benefits and set out rules for accessing the labour market. Equal rights and access to occupational qualifications seems to be the only means to obtain stable jobs for young immigrants. Overall, work in any form is the primary means of social inclusion; it allows immigrants to form networks, and to incorporate themselves in the host society.

EDUMIGROM provides evidence of youth living in relatively impoverished, segregated communities in countries of post-colonial migration (France, UK). The recognition of ethnic distinctions driving these minorities to try to integrate in society and to break through the 'ethnic ceiling' often fails. Typical educational careers are confined to certain skills and vocations, rarely leading to higher education. However, as recent studies (Loury et al 2005; Modood 2010) show, there is a new tendency of upward mobility among better-integrated ethnic minority groups (e.g. certain Pakistani groups in England or certain Maghrebi groups in France). In countries of economic migration (Germany, Denmark and Sweden) the majority aims at 'Europeanizing' newcomers often through assigning distinct institutional and social spaces to them. The response frequently takes the form of

voluntary ethnic enclosure (especially by Muslim communities) – different immigrant groups form self-segregating communities, invariably for a range of both positive and negative reasons.

Chapter 1: Key messages

The European Union and Council of Europe have emphasised the importance of a knowledge-based approach to youth policy-making in their relevant political documents and strategies.

The EU documents related to youth policies stress the importance of the creation of more opportunities for youth in education and employment; improvement of accessibility and full participation of young people in society; and development of solidarity between youth and society.

The EU policy documents also emphasise the importance of youth work: it can play an important role in developing the autonomy, empowerment and entrepreneurial spirit of young people.

The life chances of youth with disadvantaged backgrounds (those who are homeless, in or from public care, with missing family support, and belonging to an ethnic minority or migrant group) are foremost dependent on the policy context (welfare policy approaches in general; employment, education, housing and other policy initiatives in particular) of the society where those young people live.

Chapter 2. BLINDING EVIDENCE: MISSING LINKS AND GAPS IN KNOWLEDGE BUILDING AND YOUTH POLICIES

The whole of Europe has ratified the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child and in most countries there is a Commissioner for Children and Young People. Despite this, there are **many differences in legislation on youth and also interpretations about children's and young people's rights** across countries. The following discussion, based on the findings from the projects that were listed above, focuses on **national practices of youth policies** and highlights the **general policy issues** from the perspective of the **youth with disadvantaged backgrounds**.

2.1. THE POLICY ISSUE: Lack of statistics and political recognition

The research revealed the **under-representation of youth with disadvantaged backgrounds in policies**. Their invisibility is reflected in missing domains in policy agendas, and a lack of intervention practices, research and relevant statistics. The researchers express the need to **be cautious when reading the published statistics, especially concerning the population groups whose particular circumstances have not yet secured enough political recognition**. The available statistics may fail to reveal the full picture of the processes of inclusion and exclusion among e.g. young immigrants. The unemployment rates can be lower for immigrant young people than for indigenous young people, according to official statistics because immigrants often work in the informal sector where they have fewer rights and are thus excluded legally. Political participation of young migrants may be modest not merely because of their lack of interest in political participation as such, but because their interests have not been reflected in the policies or they are legally excluded e. g. from the right to vote. In addition politicians and decision makers often lack information about the needs of this potential interest group.

The projects' findings revealed that even if some social challenges are recognised as a policy issue, **youth may stay excluded from consideration in relation to that policy challenge**. As an example, though efforts to tackle homelessness date back to 1980s – early 1990s, *youth* homelessness as a

specific policy issue has routinely been overlooked. CSEYHP referred to the UK where youth homelessness was briefly a policy concern in the early 1980s, then dismissed as a policy issue from the mid 1980s to the late 1990s, then re-established as a policy issue by the Homelessness Act 2002. The political understandings of homelessness as well as service provisions vary from country to country and from one municipality or country region to another. This gap may be caused by a **missing official definition of homelessness** (e.g., Czech Republic, according to CSEHYH), or even by variation in definitions on the municipality level, thus leaving out some groups of people with housing problems, including vulnerable youth. Besides political under-representation, the issue of youth homelessness commands very limited public attention. Homelessness as a social problem is seen predominantly as an issue of the mature adulthood period and not the problem linked to youth housing transitions. Youth homelessness only tends to become interesting (e.g. for the media) if it also involves violence, drugs, crime or prostitution as its negative outcomes.

YiPPEE showed that children in care have neither been identified as a group – mostly from the perspective of the risks of educational failure with much reduced chances of accessing higher secondary and tertiary education. A clear picture emerged from the research **that, in most countries, young people leaving care are an overlooked and neglected group in policy terms** with a clearly reduced chance of succeeding in education or accessing stable and rewarding employment.

The policy challenge: Recognition in policies and reflexive policy making

Reflexive policy making needs evidences from practice. As a rule, in the case of the invisibility of a phenomenon there is little or no research in this field to provide policy makers with accurate data and critical reflections from practice. According to CSEHYH, in most countries no studies have been undertaken, for example, of hidden homelessness in relation to a young person staying with friends and relatives, or of the risks of insecure renting. It is therefore difficult to count or estimate the number of young people with housing problems.

The availability of statistical data combining information about education and the problem areas of young people (e.g. missing family support) is a challenge to make their particular circumstances, needs and opportunities related to education visible. EDUMIGROM highlighted the **need for regular monitoring, information gathering and ongoing assessment in policy development in the complex field of education for minorities.**

The researchers also see the **unused potential in the existing social monitoring of vulnerable youth groups, mostly done by the civil society organisations.** This is the case in relation to young people with a migrant background, whose discrimination by employers through field experiments and annual surveys is not studied enough, whereas immigrant organisations and NGOs working with young people are not involved enough in order to provide specific data to which they could have daily access. This especially concerns the lack of data about the situation of the second generation immigrant young people who face ethnic penalties in the labour market in spite of being educated and socialised in the country. Therefore a deeper insight into the complex interrelationship of social disadvantages and a lack of biographical resources is needed.

The policy challenge, with reference to the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy¹⁴, *is making societies more inclusive through encouraging critical reflections on them. To meet this challenge, the political understandings of the specific circumstances of youth with disadvantaged backgrounds should be developed, monitored and improvements assessed.*

¹⁴ http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/documents/EKCYP/Youth_Policy/docs/Cohesion/Research/2007_Social_inclusion_young_people.pdf

Policy implications: Social monitoring and comparative statistics

The positive exception among the groups of European countries under the study of YIPPEE was England where young people leaving care have been a matter of government concern for over ten years. Since 2002 detailed annual statistics have been published on the educational attainment of children in care, comparing them with the general population. These show that among 16-year-old young people in care only 14% achieve the target standard in education compared with 54% of all youth. The latter demonstrates the use of social monitoring by visualising the need for policy intervention addressed to youth in care.

Recommendations

Agree upon common definitions related to politically neglected but vulnerable youth groups like homeless young people, and those in or from public care. Recognise their social, political, educational and economic needs as special needs springing from the necessity of extra institutional support to relieve their biographical disadvantages and broaden their life chances.

Reduce statistical invisibility of young people with disadvantaged backgrounds by creating EU wide indicators (e.g. the number of young persons in public care for 12 months or more at age 16–18 years, their placement type, educational qualifications, etc.).

Collect comparative statistics annually at national and local levels using EU indicators both about the situation as well as monitor the developments of policies in the area; suggest improvements in the existing legal schemes.

Support qualitative research that gives young people at risk a voice and enables them to reconstruct their resources and coping strategies and to improve the understanding of their struggles for social inclusion (visualise them as active social actors).

2.2. THE POLICY ISSUE: Missing links and contradictory policy approaches

Williamson (2007) writes about the human cost of social exclusion to disadvantaged young people and their communities, and warns about the danger of social inclusion policies that may “hit the target, but miss the point”. The researchers from the projects on which findings the present review is based revealed institutional weaknesses – the presence of exclusive labour market and educational policies, the underexploited role of the civil society and, last but not least, a weak or missing link of welfare provision with education and labour market policies.

Sometimes ambiguous regulations and rules concerning the sharing of **responsibility between the state and the family** cause a problem: who is responsible for educational achievements of children and young people in care in this case? The universalistic Nordic welfare approach relies on family support whilst being state-centred at the same time: a young person without family support is at risk of being left without the necessary learning development, thus facing the risk of exclusion. In the Mediterranean countries, young people stay longer than ever, and longer compared to other European countries, with their families, and the **political invisibility of youth disconnected from family support promotes extremely high risks of social exclusion** particularly in these countries.

As reported by a key-worker in the CSEHYP project, unemployment amongst their young clients in the Czech Republic is not a problematic issue (data from 2009). The issues of most importance are their **lack of qualifications**. This affects the **quality of the employment they are able to secure and their ability to maintain their employment**. The low salaries that these young people receive because they are in **poor quality employment leads them into a housing crisis**: they cannot afford adequate housing and are living in squats, or on the streets, in poor quality hostels and other types of temporary accommodation.

In the case of migrant young people, the **citizenship laws are essential preconditions that determine their access to education and the labour market**. Illiberal citizenship laws in some European countries form a major restriction on the capacity to benefit from public goods, like attending school or entering to the labour market. The legal status of young people born outside the EU who migrated to England often claimed this as a major issue affecting their educational plans in interviews. In most of the East and Central European countries, the registration of students' ethnic identity is forbidden by law for protection of personal data. EUMARGINS cites the Italian case as an example of a controversial law that is **particularly discriminatory towards young adult immigrants**. According to the Bossi-Fini law in 2003, the eligibility for a residence permit is based on the fulfilment of certain criteria that link the legal right to residency with the ability to satisfy an economic self-sufficiency principle. All individuals over the age of 18 must apply for their own residence permit even if they are living with their parents. This has severe side effects on access to further education among non-Italian students residing in Italy, and on the quality and level of attainment in higher education. Several interviewees from Italy reported facing this situation and thus were forced into lower (working class) positions due to this law. The Bossi-Fini law also forces young adult immigrants to work in order to remain in the country, thereby not allowing them to continue their education. It means that low unemployment rates are not always illustrative of the successful inclusion of migrants into the host society because either young people may be forced to work due to specific laws or that they may be working in sectors that offer minimal rights or in the black or grey labour market.

The policy challenge: Improve the links between different policy sectors

The researchers are critical of how policies are coordinated, since it remains **a policy challenge** to improve the **links between different policies while keeping youth at risk of becoming disengaged in focus**. The welfare services, if adequately linked and co-ordinated with educational, housing and other policies, show considerable potential for compensating young people's reduced biographical resources e.g. inadequate or missing family support, or drop-out from compulsory education. They can also open the way to post-compulsory schooling and prospects for better jobs. The linking of policies that aim at supporting youth with special needs in education (e.g. children and youth from migrant families with low official language proficiency) should start from an early age.

At macro-level educational policies vary in different welfare state regimes. There are connections between structural reforms in education and the principle of equal opportunities in primary and secondary education. This needs **political coordination** based on the **foundations of multiculturalism in national and sub-national policy making**. It also requires **governance systems** in which schools can conceptualise and develop equal opportunities and acknowledge the heterogeneous and differing cultural and social backgrounds of all pupils.

YiPPEE is critical about how the **links have been created between the welfare support measures to young people in care and educational policies**. According to the researchers' observations, this usually means that welfare professionals do not give sufficient priority to educational participation and achievement in their work with young people in care and that education professionals rarely give children in care adequate support in schools. This leads to low readiness for post-compulsory education.

The policy challenge lies in linking educational, labour force, welfare and housing policies in a sensitive way, which allows improving social inclusion and at the same time avoids stigmatising and labelling when enabling young people to build their career.

Policy implications: Multi-agency approach in supporting youth

YiPPEE cites as a case example from England the impact of multi-agency Education Support Teams for children in care. These date back to the early 1990s and aim to mediate between schools and social

workers to prevent school exclusion, and improve attendance and identify unmet educational needs. They were given fresh impetus by the new duty in the 2004 Children Act for local authorities to promote the educational attainment of children they look after. At the same time social work and education responsibilities within local authorities (municipalities) were merged into Departments of Children's Services, identified by all YIPPEE studies as a positive move. The actions led to a positive increase in educational outcomes for looked after children by 2007. After three years, the number of those students who continued into higher education had tripled. The scheme of the support personal advisor was extended to age 25 in 2008.

Schools in England are required by law to appoint a teacher with responsibility to improve the educational achievement of children in care who attend that school and to act as their champion. Most local authorities have also appointed a senior teacher, called the 'Virtual School Head' who is responsible for the education of all children in care in that local authority area as if they were attending a single school (Berridge et al 2009). Another positive practice is the entitlement to a £2,000 bursary for those going to university and local authority support for living and study expenses. These developments, combined with other measures, have contributed to a 200% increase in the proportion of children in care achieving the expected level of education at age 16 and a threefold increase in those continuing into higher education between 2003 and 2008.

In Northern Europe interventionist programmes have been developed, designed to structure case work with hostel dwellers (e.g., the Netherlands '8 Step' programme) and prevent youth homelessness among those at risk through a cluster of local services, e.g. the 'Safe Moves' programme in England.

Paradoxically connectedness to the public care system may itself become a resource of transition to independent living after a young person has left care. As an example in England, young people for whom the local authority does have a duty (because of the fact that they were previously under state care or were an unaccompanied minor) do gain political attention: they continue to receive education and housing support.

Recommendations

Take into special consideration the needs of youth with biographic disadvantages (those without any or with poor and limited family support, young people in or from public care, those with ethnic minority or migrant backgrounds), when drawing up social inclusion, education, youth, family and childhood policies.

Evaluate and assess the joint policy impacts in order to detect unintended negative effects on youth with disadvantaged backgrounds.

Synchronise care and education systems and encourage collaborative practice so that they work together to provide maximum support and encouragement to children and youth with poor or missing family support (such as those in public care, or those who are homeless).

Link care and education system under the responsibility of the same administrative arrangements at both national and local level.

Improve collaborative efforts of schools, welfare agencies, vocational training and labour market institutions, NGOs and the families of youth with the aim of reducing their yo-yo effect (dropping out of school, college course, and training).

2.3. THE POLICY ISSUE: Excluding age policies

The political under-representation of youth with disadvantaged backgrounds challenges the treatment of young people according to politically set age limits (most often this concerns the legal age) and not according to their particular needs, challenges, risks and circumstances. In the case of **youth leaving public care, young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and migrant youth, all those who possess low personal resources (family support, personal motivation, language proficiency, etc)** this kind of a normative approach results in non-entitlement to some welfare provisions due to a **lack of social investment** that is intended for these purposes.

There are also opposite cases where the welfare support ends with reaching the legal age. The major problem for young people is the **break in social support at or around the age of 18 years** and the sudden expectation of financial self-sufficiency, as illustrated, for example, by the Dutch social system. Non-entitlement to services or lack of specific services leaves young people in need invisible, such as youth below the legal age who are homeless or living in temporary places (with friends or relatives, and in dormitories, shelters, caravans and elsewhere). In the Netherlands labour force participation or being locally registered as unemployed is the basis of eligibility for housing. The young person leaving care needs to find a job first or signal the intention of doing so; only then can he or she start applying for housing.

There are also age limits other than the legal age which can have impact on young people's situation. In the Czech case, as reported by CSEHYP, this is age 15. At this age compulsory education ends. All children under 15 and those over 15 but still going to school are not allowed to work. Yet only young people who have worked in the past three years are eligible for unemployment support – thus automatically excluding from support those who do not get a job on leaving care or compulsory education. Furthermore, social protection in relation to housing support is dependent on an individual already owning or renting a flat in which he or she can be permanently registered – thus excluding youth who are homeless or those who leave the public care and are without an autonomous housing. In the case of the Czech Republic services for homeless people are still undifferentiated and there are no specific services available for young people aged below 25 years. Temporary housing services for the homeless (easy-access day centres, dormitories, asylum homes and half way homes) are directed at clients over 18 years old, thereby excluding youth under 18 years old.

There need to be clearer and appropriately overlapping links between the age at which compulsory education ends and the age when the young person is allowed to enter the labour market. In the case of early home leavers, after dropping out of school or ending compulsory education, not having the right to start to work creates dependencies but often without the right to any welfare. The research showed that **welfare provision is linked to families and the right to individual application for and receipt of welfare support starts only after reaching the legal age.**

The policy challenge: Political recognition of the specific needs of young people irrespective of age thresholds and restrictions

The normative fixed-age approach legitimises the lack of support for those young people who do not fit into the age groups defined for particular roles. Instead of accepting the real needs of young people it concentrates on formal requirements entitling youth to receive support. For youth leaving home early, unequipped for an autonomous life, **external support from adults (professionals, agencies) and welfare services are the most essential preconditions for successful transitions to independent living.** Political regimes and national and local policies differ in excluding practices of these groups of young people from society but equally, however, they all have the potential, given the political will, for improving the social inclusion of young people.

The policy challenge lies in increasing political awareness of the accumulated and cumulative disadvantages (individual, social as well as political) amongst socially excluded youth and the recognition of their special transitional needs to independent living. These are not reflected in many age-related thresholds and restrictions on eligibility for the support they need.

In order to meet this challenge, the currently limited or denied access to education, welfare services and to the labour market needs to be addressed.

Policy implications: Limits revisited – diversified age politics

According to data from YIPPEE, in Hungary and Spain young people in full time education can stay in residential care up to age 25. This removes some of the anxiety about accommodation and living expenses and enables them to concentrate on studies. They often form close, supportive relations with social educators and pedagogues who continue assisting them after they have left the children's home or other residential establishment.

Recommendations

Reconsider and revise the age limits that exist in administrative systems in the light of the changing situation of young people (for example, extended time in education, the growing importance of tertiary education, an increasing dependency on parents, the precariousness of the labour market).

Study the conflicting or inadequate age limits across policies that might hinder active youth participation in the labour market or in education. Find the gaps in 'normalisation efforts' of policies.

Highlight the particular needs of young people with disadvantaged backgrounds who are below and over different legal thresholds, yet who need more institutional support during transition periods towards independent housing and financial self-sufficiency (when, for the majority of young people, this support is given by their families of origin).

Chapter 2: Key messages

National policies are framed by the political systems they are embedded in and thus hide the system-specific disadvantages and opportunities for youth.

Youth with biographical disadvantages and weak personal resources can be under-represented in policy-making and not made sufficiently visible in national youth policies; there is the need to make them visible through research, monitoring, policy responses and assessment of improvements.

Reflexive policy-making needs regular information and comparative statistics about disadvantages that impact on youth transitions, and the policy achievements that may alleviate them. Statistical visibility can be assured through a set of EU-wide indicators used both nationally and locally. However this needs to be complemented by increased qualitative data and knowledge building.

Policies are often structured in ways that have excluding effects on youth; efforts to bind policies together should be increased. Introducing multi-agency coordinated approaches can lead to more targeted efforts and a more efficient use of resources.

Policies relating to young people are often constructed on age boundaries (most often at, or around, the legal age of 18) and not to the special transitional needs of young people; policy endeavour should be disconnected from age thresholds and restrictions and connect more directly to the particular needs facing more disadvantaged young people as they navigate various routes in their transitions to adult life.

Chapter 3. BAD STARTING CONDITIONS: CARRYING ADULTS' BURDENS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The groups of young people studied in this research cluster (**the migrants/ethnic minority groups, the homeless and those at risk of homelessness, those from public care**) face a glass ceiling in their efforts to realise their potential aspirations and positive life careers due to their **biographical disadvantages, combined with legal and institutional barriers**. In order to understand **the particular 'social condition' of these groups of young people** and to open up pathways to social inclusion, their troubled (and sometimes troublesome) transitions need to be unravelled and translated into policy terms. In the following chapter, the major biographical disadvantages that have been revealed from the research, such as **low coping capacities of the families of origin and poor efforts in linking the migrant and ethnic minority groups to the wider society**, are cast into focus.

3.1. THE POLICY ISSUE: Low coping capacities and social capital of families of origin

According to the studies, youth from public care and those who are homeless often come from violent, non-supportive families with acute health or social problems, or the premature death of a parent, and leave their **offspring without adult support and guidance**. Some homeless youth come from homeless families.

Both phenomena are closely related: those from public care are at risk of homelessness while the young homeless often have a public care or migration background. However, the Czech case revealed that various types of institutional care are **not always related to inability of the parents to provide care, but to persistent poverty**. Due to inadequate financial resources, these families, besides problems of economic survival, also experience housing problems. **Poor families may often be associated with the poor schooling of children**. In the Portuguese sample of homeless young people or those at risk of homelessness, several reported that they had to leave school early, against their will, because of family poverty. Consequently, lack of intervention and institutional support for an individual wanting to continue education may result in **family coping problems taking precedence over young people's educational aspirations**.

Young people from migrant families with diverse cultural backgrounds often have supportive family and kinship networks. However, as shown for example in the British study by both YIPPEE and EDUMIGROM, these networks form mostly a bonding type of social capital (even in the case of the second generation immigrants) which is not enough for being socially included in a broader sense. **The migrant families lack bridging and linking types of social capital which are the engines of integration. The situation is influenced and perhaps exacerbated by low solidarity between the non-migrant part of society and migrants and the resultant closure of the latter communities.**

The policy challenge: External support that complements or compensates for poor family efforts

Low coping capacities of the family of origin can sometimes be compensated through the wider kinship support. The traditions of kinship support vary from country to country and are more traditionally sustained in the Southern parts of Europe while the Northern parts experience looser family networks and thus people in need are more reliant on welfare support to a greater extent. The wider kinship support is also dependent on the level of separation between family units and the resulting diversification of household structures, both having the potential to weaken kinship networks and the possibilities they provide for offering support in case of need.

Although over a quarter of the questioned (at risk of being) homeless youth had care experiences, the CSEHYP findings highlighted that another quarter would have liked to have had social services

intervention when they were growing up (54% overall). Those who had experienced care episodes would have wanted **more social services intervention**.

In the case of migrant youth, the migration from underprivileged regions of the world to countries with higher living standards may be a success in the young person's life career but **the need for societal solidarity to link and better integrate the families of newcomers to their new environments** is most evident.

The policy challenge lies in the elaboration of services to complement or compensate for the weaknesses of the families of origin where the young people live.

Policy implications: Early intervention and targeted services

CSEHYP noted early intervention and targeted services as functional tools in working with homeless or at risk of homelessness youth. Early intervention programmes can either be targeted services provided by one voluntary sector agency or they can be provided as a cluster of services provided by the local municipal authority and the voluntary sector. An example of a targeted service approach is a homeless agency working in a school. Homeless agencies provide training in schools that can offer young people the conflict resolution skills to deal with family and peer conflict in order to reduce the prospect of becoming homeless. Alternatively, homeless agencies can provide lessons about the experience of homelessness and at these sessions give young people the opportunity to approach an agency worker.

Young people with public care backgrounds can appreciate the use of being in care as a resource for paving their way to independent living that the families of origin could not have provided. According to them, the residential centre "... gives you stability, contrary to what your family does; studying is your choice, and they offer it to you." Being in care can be an escape from a dysfunctional or poor family setting and may provide young people with the means of getting closer to the distribution of necessary social and economic resources.

Recommendations

Develop active intervention practices (e.g. risk assessment to identify children at risk, family mediation and support to improve the family situation) at an early age in tackling the negative impacts of the family malfunctioning on the offspring; in very difficult family situations, placing in care or alternative housing can be carefully considered.

Establish an effective partnership of key institutional agents (education, justice, social services) to support children and youth with weak or missing family support.

Direct interventions (e.g. in the form of scholarships and allowances) to influence the decisions and paths of young people by including financial support as part of early intervention strategies in the family group in need, and keeping the child in education.

Focus and develop family education (education of adults together with education of youth) with the aim of broadening the social networks and bridging social capital of the families with ethnic minority or migration backgrounds.

Promote integrated family support, not only financially, but also working on the relational aspects that constrain school attendance and/or school achievement.

3.2. THE POLICY ISSUE: Poor cultural integration of migrant and ethnic minority youth

While the first generation migrant groups might have lost many kinship ties from their country of origin, in the case of the second and subsequent generations of migrants the solidarity in the family

groups and in their communities remains strong (e.g. in Muslim groups). This **bonding type of social capital among migrant communities is supported by an identity of the 'other'**, and in-group norms and values, if too strong, may isolate and exclude these migrant groups from the broader society (and, in extreme cases, this may lead to maladaptation, disloyalty and ethnicity-based conflicts). However, this is **not only the process of self-exclusion but also a result of a lack of solidarity from the broader society**.

A key precipitating factor in social exclusion is the **absent or low proficiency of the country official language**. There may be huge efforts made to give language lessons to minority groups, but if these are carried out too late or use ineffective teaching methods, the linguistic disadvantage among children and youth with ethnic minority or migrant backgrounds will feed the accumulation of disadvantages in education and work prospects. However, even for those who have the required level of language proficiency, such groups face wider **disadvantages involving housing problems and weak or absent family support, especially in those cases where young people are unaccompanied minors**.

The policy challenge: Empowerment of the neighbourhood

Proceeding from the evidence drawn from the research projects' findings, the disadvantage based on belonging to an ethnic minority or a migrant group challenges the **neighbourhood and community interventions** to integrate the migrant or ethnic minority families and children and youth into society. Neighbourhood social space in an urban setting has major relevance here, with its potential for engaging youth in activities and collective and community action beyond the family and ethnic boundaries. Also, educational policies have the challenge to help in certain school contexts to overcome structural inequalities. EDUMIGROM points to the importance of **access to education for migrants and ethnic minorities, in particular to early childhood education** which is conducive to improved performance at school. The connections of structural reforms in education and the principle of equal opportunities in primary and secondary education play a significant role here.

The policy challenge lies in policy interventions addressed to neighbourhood and community with the aim of opening and strengthening access to multiple forms of education and the broadening of the bridging social capital of ethnic minority and / or migrant families.

Policy implications: Multiple learning options in the neighbourhood

With post-colonial political practices such as those that prevail in France and United Kingdom, elaborated forms of co-existence with minorities can be witnessed: ethnic feelings are more diffused and the ethnic ceiling has lowered. However, ideas of multiculturalism are often still put to the test.

The research reveals that early childhood education greatly helps with language and other skills, and also promotes evidence of European thinking. The research projects' findings (e.g. from EDUMIGROM) demonstrated that early childhood education should be realised by neighbourhood-based actions of informal and non-formal learning.

The education practices which proved to be successful were integrative efforts through non-formal learning. For example, heterogeneous groups with several adults in the classroom engaged in interactive groups, improvement of reading skills through dialogic literary gatherings, and homework clubs where parents and children learn together as a form of family education. Another positive example was the addition of a Roma teacher in the classroom if Roma children are involved. Other positive practice from Romania has demonstrated the benefits arising from the extension of learning time (e.g. afternoon classes).

Access to early childhood education is a good start for integration into the mainstream community mostly by provision with dominant language proficiency, and other life skills through involvement in peer activities; it also confronts low self-esteem and supports inclusion, according to one positive

case from Norway. Neighbourhood-based services and early language education courses are successful practices giving families and children a community identity.

Recommendations

Promote comprehensive early language programmes among children from minority ethnic backgrounds, starting in kindergartens and pre-schools; computer-assisted tools for language training are recommended as a comparatively new development that merits investment and evaluation.

Develop family education (education of adults together with education of children and young people). Improve the basic reading skills of the ethnic minority family groups through the implementation of learning programmes for parents.

Promote social integration of migrant and ethnic minority families through multiple education options in informal and non-formal learning within a framework of cultural navigation: e.g. learning programmes of an intercultural character with the participation of members of both migrant and non-migrant communities.

Encourage and empower young people to create new learning spaces within the community and develop youth work potentials, e.g. through giving access to micro-community grants for integrative projects on the grass roots level.

Support the creation and participation of ethnic (cultural, religious, linguistic) minority NGOs and ad-hoc advocacy groups which are consulted by the municipalities and involved in the assessment of policies impacting on their communities.

Chapter 3: Key messages

The groups of youth with disadvantaged backgrounds (the migrants/ethnic minority groups, homeless, those from public care) face a glass ceiling in relation to their potential aspirations and positive life careers due to their biographical disadvantages – low coping capacities and often the poverty of their families of origin; the ‘closed’ nature of local communities and lack of proficiency in the host country’s language amongst migrant families.

The impacts of biographical disadvantages on youth are combined with legal and institutional barriers and low social solidarity.

Early-age prevention programmes and targeted interventions can both be used as functional tools for overcoming the biographical disadvantages of young people. Interventions can be directed towards ensuring access to and retention in education for such children and young people irrespective of the financial situation of the family or their ethnic or migrant background.

Neighbourhood-based actions of informal and non-formal learning addressed to all ages and for both migrant and non-migrant community members can broaden the solidarity of society and link migrant or ethnic minority families to it.

Chapter 4. EDUCATION – POTENTIAL FOR INCLUSION

4.1. THE POLICY ISSUE: Limited access to pre-school education

Educational prospects after compulsory education have their roots in pre-school education. The impact of pre-school education is threefold. First, it prepares children for compulsory schooling; second, it gives opportunities for children from dysfunctional homes to find relief from potentially harmful consequences of their families; and third, it offers a good start for a child with a migrant or

ethnic minority background to enter the mainstream community. **Limited access to pre-school education limits the developmental horizons of youth with biographical disadvantages from an early age.** Despite the fact that they need and would profit most from nursery schools and early childhood socialization, **Roma children, as well as children of migrant background and poor families,** are usually significantly affected by **poor access to pre-school facilities,** even if attendance at such provision could later positively affect school performance and inclusion.

The policy challenge: Multiple use of involvement in pre-school education

Childcare facilities prior to school age vary due to distinctive family, gender, and welfare policies in Europe. In many EU countries, for example in Sweden, Germany, France, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, pre-primary education is not compulsory (though in some of these countries it is common). **Children from socially disadvantaged families cannot attend the nursery schools because of payment requirements, physical distance, discriminatory enrolment, and mutual suspicion between management and parents** (though not in France where attendance of public pre-school from 3 to 6 year olds is close to 100 per cent).

The policy challenge is to foster access to pre-school education for children from poor and/or dysfunctional families and from the families of ethnic minority or migrant groups. For the latter groups the main challenge is obtaining proficiency in the dominant language and making links to the neighbourhood community.

Policy implications: Wider access to pre-school

Both the Netherlands and England have targeted pre-school children as well as school-age children in order to reduce educational disadvantages whilst in Portugal education support is concentrated on children aged 6–18. In the Czech Republic, high rates of educational engagement have led to policies that provide financial support for the poorest rather than policies to introduce general educational intervention.

Recommendations

Recognise access to pre-school institutions as a children's rights issue, as well as a way to help mothers to be active at the labour market.

Promote wide access to pre-school facilities for children with migrant and ethnic minority backgrounds as well as for those from dysfunctional and/or poor families.

Raise social awareness of positive outcomes of pre-school education.

4.2. THE POLICY ISSUE: Segregation in the compulsory education systems produces an educational divide

The notion of 'compulsory education for all' is more an ideal than a reality. The research projects' findings show that **compulsory education in Europe segregates mostly the children with biographical disadvantages: from poor families and those with minority ethnic or public care backgrounds.** The earlier the tracks of separation occur, the higher the probability is that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are allocated to more **disadvantageous segments of the education systems** (i.e. lower quality schools).

The educational divide starts early and is determined considerably by limited competence in the language of instruction at school when it is different from their mother tongue. This can cause some young people to be **inside school but outside learning.** The school environment can even become the basis for institutional discrimination. Roma, minority ethnic and migrant children are often

directed to special schools for students with learning disabilities, irrespective of their actual mental condition.

Children and young need stability in their developmental years. **Multiple changes of schools and the multiple placements of children and youth in care have a negative impact on their educational achievements and** thus they are worse prepared for the youth transitions to independent living and future life careers.

In the EDUMIGROM study, four types of inter-ethnic school environments were found: majority schools (schools/classes where the proportion of minority ethnic students is less than 10%); schools with a dominance of minority ethnic students (over 75%); mixed schools; and schools where there is a clear separation of students by ethnic background into parallel classes ('within-school segregation'). **Ethnic minority and majority students perform poorly in schools where segregation is prevalent and practised** either because the vast majority of students are 'visible' minorities or because parallel classes are composed of different ethnic groups. The performance of students is higher in 'Roma schools' and in 'Muslim schools', where sole or dominantly ethnic minorities are present than in schools where ethnic separation is an outcome of varied practices of streaming and internal segregation. Academic **expectations of teachers in segregated Roma schools are considerably lower than in regular schools**, coursework grading is more flexible and permissive, and the curriculum is comparatively less demanding. The groups most vulnerable to disappearance from compulsory schooling, according to Huttova *et al.* (2008), are the children of refugees, internally displaced people, nomadic groups, and illegal migrants. In some EU countries, for example in Romania, **authorities could deny access to schools to those who do not have birth certificates**. This is quite usual among Roma.

The policy challenge: Reduction of educational inequalities

The research revealed that even in the case of countries with relatively developed social services, the **potential of schools to reduce inequalities during the youth period is underused**. There are exclusionary practices, instead of supportive interventions, which, even if developed, are not sufficiently accessible to the vulnerable groups of young people. YIPPEE draws attention to the necessity of planning the **capacity building of the educational system** with the aim of improving the educational support provided to children in care. However, this also concerns children from poor families, and those with ethnic minority or migrant backgrounds.

The impact of ethnic segregation or separation in school affects students' performance, self-esteem and aspirations towards further schooling and labour market participation differently, according to EDUMIGROM. The comparative analysis revealed a divergence between the new and older Member States of the European Union. In new EU Member States there are significant differences between ethnic minority and majority students studying in the same environment. As an example, the inter-ethnic peer-group relations of students attending segregated schools and classes in the new Member States also differ a great deal from students in ethnically mixed or majority environments; such differences do not exist or are relatively minor in the old Member States. In old Member States, ethnic background plays a role in forming friendships for a small fraction of students, and there is no difference in this regard between ethnic minority and majority students. In contrast, in new Member States, almost one-third of the students mentioned in the survey that ethnicity played a role in forming friendships. Old EU Member States are not homogeneous but these relationships are generally not so pronounced as in the new EU Member States.

***The policy challenge** is to tackle the early educational divide in the pre-school and compulsory education systems. The challenge for schools is to compensate weak family efforts in supporting a child's education and use school environment as a space crucial for overcoming social inequalities, not creating them by educational segregation.*

Policy implications: Practices against early educational divide

In England children in care and those missing family support were routinely allocated to low prestige schools. It required **government action** to change this by making it mandatory to give children in public care priority for admission to high-performing schools even when they were technically full.

Taking into account all aspects investigated within the EDUMIGROM project, an **ethnically mixed school** and classroom environment seems best to meet the needs of both majority and minority ethnic students. They provide students who perform well with opportunities to continue a suitable education, and they also assist with the healthy development of students' self-esteem and interpersonal relationships. This association is particularly strong in new EU Member States, according to the study. Both ethnic minority (the Roma) and majority students from ethnically mixed or dominantly majority student populations plan to continue education at a significantly higher rate than students attending segregated schools. The internal separation of ethnic minority students seems to be equally de-motivating for students in all parts of Europe.

However, **at schools in which ethnic groups are 'voluntarily' separated** (e.g. Muslim schools in Denmark; the 'Ghandi' Roma secondary school in Hungary), students perform well and have high aspirations about continuing their education. The faith schools in general enjoy intense support of the ethnic and religious community in their surrounding context, and strengthen students' ethnic and religious pride and self-esteem.

Recommendations

Recognise the inequality of educational opportunities as a children's rights issue and intensify efforts to reduce differences in the conditions and quality of schooling for children with disadvantaged backgrounds.

Consider establishing recruitment rules for schools that will reduce inequality related to a student's family background.

Postpone formalised streaming and tracking until the later phase of compulsory education, and make sure that children with different backgrounds (e.g. minority ethnic, in care, without family support) represent a fair proportion in all specialised formations.

Reach out to children of illegal migrants, unsettled groups, and undocumented Roma families who currently face the greatest risk of staying out of the education system.

Promote multicultural content and forms of teaching and socialisation; provide incentives to schools' management, teachers and support staff to cope with ethnic diversity in order to encourage equal recognition, mutual respect and friendly inter-ethnic relations in schools.

Reconsider the practice of multiple placements of children and youth in care which in turn means multiple changes of schools and causes lower educational performance by these learners.

4.3. THE POLICY ISSUE: The 'otherness' in youth diminishes good prospects in adulthood

Young people make **comparisons** between their successes and the social advancement of their reference group (their peers). Their subjective perceptions are mediated by personal as well as normative social standards. Negative self comparisons to normative expectations and peer achievements lower the aspirations to continue education or find a job amongst those with low personal capital (such as weak family or kinship support, lack of financial resources, or low or missing language proficiency in the cases of the migrant youth). **Low self-esteem sets the ceiling to one's personal aspirations and leads to self-exclusion from potential opportunities.**

Minority ethnic students often experience **conflicts between the values, norms, and practices of their home environment and the school**, thus producing distrust in parent-school relations. The values, norms, and curriculum choices of majority children may develop a sense of inferiority, irrelevance, alienation and resentment for Roma, minority ethnic and migrant children. Frustrations stemming from experiences of discrimination and segregation lead to **high drop-out rates** which can be regarded as the primary source of marginalisation.

YiPPEE highlighted the so-called '**professional paradigm**', reflecting the focus of intervention in care that put emphasis on young people's wellbeing without advancing their educational values and aspirations. This behavioural pattern causes the **labelling of children and young people by the professionals** – teachers, social workers, and the others, resulting in **low awareness of the importance of education in the young person's life, including** after leaving care. However, the perceived social exclusion is not only built on stigmatisation and labelling, but also on the poor financial situation and the sense of belonging to a particular disadvantaged group. Similarly, EDUMIGROM results show that **the stigma** generates fear from the otherness and, for example, it hinders inter-ethnic mixing, as it gives rise to the need for **separation and ethnic enclosure**.

Young people with disadvantaged backgrounds feel being 'the other' is also determined by **negative media representations**. The media stigmatising effect on migrant youth is quite widespread across the countries (e.g. Muslims in UK related to the London bombings; Russian minority in Estonia related to the Bronze Night riots in Tallinn). However, the media has the power to highlight success stories as well and prospectively lift an individual's self-worth through their internalisation of the positive cases – unfortunately this is rarely done, probably due to the expected 'commercial thresholds' that the news have to overcome.

The policy challenge: Intercultural sensitivity and support

Quite understandably, poverty and various social problems in families of origin or the stay in public care or being homeless or keeping 'uncommon' values and norms due to one's ethnic background, make these young people feel 'different'. Some of them, on account of home poverty, are unable to attend peer activities (not affordable), are unable to bring friends to their homes (because they are poor, untidy, violent, isolated and different, or because they are separated from home) or miss 'necessary' things (do not meet the cultural standards set by peers).

Schools have a lot potential to help children and youth dismiss the feeling of 'otherness'. First, through a policy of **equal access to schools for all**; second, through **individual help from teachers to students**, and third, schools can provide a place where children and adolescents with disadvantaged backgrounds can **feel like their peers**, not having to reveal existing problems in their families of origin or in their public care setting. Schools need to promote **intercultural education, teacher training**, and the **collaboration of citizens** (parents and others) on various projects within school environments and beyond. Public talks in the media can raise awareness about the problems of social exclusion in youth, can break the stigma and reveal discriminatory practices. EUMARGINS demonstrates the considerable potential of the media as a positive challenge in activating civil society when it initiates **social dialogues between different policy interest groups** in society.

The policy challenges lie in the development and implementation of support measures that soften the biographical disadvantages of youth, providing them with access and opportunities to feel equal with peers, stay in education and allow them to realise their educational aspirations.

Policy implications: Break down stigma and cease labelling

YiPPEE refers to the attempts in Sweden to make young disadvantaged pupils experience schools as 'normal places' by helping them to overcome the feelings of being deprived or excluded. To be

positively noticed by a teacher and a carer, to receive encouragement on his/her capacities and enjoy educational achievements is highly meaningful for a child from a disadvantaged background.

The media can bring to the public success stories of young people with disadvantaged backgrounds who have broken through the glass ceiling and realised their aspirations. Positive examples of migrant youth are found in Norway where the media has highlighted several success stories of youth with migrant backgrounds: a Somali girl aspiring to a doctoral degree, or a Japanese youth who is doing very well in a Norwegian school. These cases encourage migrant youth to internalise the successes of others and can lift their own subjectively set 'glass ceiling' of perceived opportunities.

Recommendations

Develop school and community based counselling services to give young people with problematic family backgrounds an opportunity to voice their problems and seek support to avoid ruptures (e.g., runaway, school drop-out) and the aggravation of psychological problems.

Recognise young people with disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g. Roma; neglected by family) in schools; provide individual tutoring and support thus helping them to catch up with their peers and to remain in education.

Develop teacher education and in-service training towards the application of innovative methods of competence-based teaching and competence in dealing with disadvantaged groups and multicultural settings in schools; offer to teachers in-service courses of intercultural and anti-discrimination training.

Facilitate informal and non-formal learning (e.g. out-of-school teaching and training programmes) addressed at youth with biographical disadvantages through being involved in sports, leisure or unpaid volunteering arranged through the local community or NGOs' actions.

Provide platforms or arenas for open dialogue among young people from the range of backgrounds together with school counsellors or other professionals who have regular contacts with children and youth and their families (e.g. teachers, administrators, youth themselves) and invite the media to attend.

Provide obligatory training for parents and carers of children and youth attending multi-ethnic schools, so they will be prepared to support their own offspring in the education process.

4.4. THE POLICY ISSUE: Low prospects for post-compulsory education

Post-compulsory educational participation is becoming a norm and, simultaneously, is **becoming more costly** in Europe. Since the 1970s, participation in education after the compulsory phase has increased three-fold, according to YIPPEE. Moreover, in the EU 84% of 15–19 years old youth are in education, as are 25% of the age group 20-29 years. In spite of the fact that education is high on the political agenda of the European countries, the wide participation in education is not a fact among all groups: young people in care stand out particularly in this respect (e.g. in the case of Denmark 66% of young people in care do not have any post-compulsory qualifications).

Young people with public care backgrounds prioritise **financial independence through work, not further education**. The YIPPEE data from Hungary show that among those living in children's homes only 14% wished to go to university, compared with 50% living with their families of origin. The carers and support persons (including teachers, social workers, child protection workers and other professionals) have low expectations related to education and establish unambiguous objectives instead: **work, roof, food**. As a result, young people with public care backgrounds are in general under-prepared for continuing in learning after compulsory education and are left **without continuity of adult support after leaving care** which might have allowed them to continue studying.

This issue is both ideological as well as disciplinary, but there are also indications that some countries are beginning to prioritise investment in education in preference to pushing young people into low-paid unskilled jobs, which are increasingly unavailable.

Besides the personal problems of those young people, there **are** multi-dimensional **institutional barriers they have to face**. Many young people in care, the homeless and with migrant backgrounds fully understand the importance of education and are frustrated by the obstacles they have to overcome after finishing compulsory education. EUMARGINS found that the barriers varied considerably depending on the national context. Some included **migrant legal status, financial status** or **language skills**, limiting the choices for young adults with migrant backgrounds to continue a pathway through higher education.

The policy challenge: Support for educational aspirations

Years spent in education have extended across the EU-27 except for the most disadvantaged groups. YIPPEE revealed that even in the case where young people have had the support of highly motivating and supporting adults (such as teachers or social workers) whilst in public care, breaking the contact after leaving care limits the young person's prospects to continue in education or to find a job.

The care professionals interviewed in the YIPPEE study emphasised that besides raising aspirations and expectations, supporting young people is crucial to further success. They also stressed the need for **outreach programmes** from higher institutions, with university students acting as mentors to individual children in care. Youth from care are in need of **early intervention**, motivating them towards education; then, after leaving care, they need adult **emotional and motivational support**. Even so, some young people continue to carry the low educational ambitions of their families of origin.

Those who live in ethnically diverse environments often come from lower-status backgrounds, and have parents with limited education and low labour market status. The **value of good educational performance** is largely conditioned by anticipated **future rewards in the labour market**. No single desegregation policy will sufficiently improve educational outcomes for students with an immigrant background if they perceive that their qualifications are not acknowledged by employers who practice various discrete forms of discrimination.

As the policy challenge, explicit legislation is needed to require local authorities and child protection agencies to support young people to stay in education after its compulsory stage. Otherwise, workload and budgetary pressures are likely to cause attention and resources to shift to the next cohort entering the care system, with the older group left without the backup they need, which other children usually receive from their families.

Policy implications: Make concentration on learning possible

YIPPEE suggested that the British welfare system acknowledged the vulnerabilities of young people; it has been concerned with care and education, including higher education. It has stressed the importance of personal relationships and individual care. A major reform initiative called 'Care Matters' was launched in 2007 and appears to have had some effect in raising educational attainment opportunities, although the gap between children in care and others still remains wide. At country level there are positive developments: in Denmark, for example, a personal advisor and a support worker are appointed to a young person after leaving care.

EDUMIGROM stressed recognition of equal opportunities in education for example by strengthening language support for removing language and cultural barriers for immigrants and having their voices heard, educating immigrant parents about the education system, and supporting learning for after-school time and summer holidays to compensate for the lack of family resources.

Recommendations

Define 'care' for children in public care and on welfare as 'educationally oriented'. Schools and child welfare agencies should deepen cooperation and award education a more central and prioritised status for young people with disadvantaged backgrounds in relation to their staying in education during and after compulsory education.

Invite labour market institutions to participate with care institutions in extracurricular activities for their young people, which would give young people up-to-date knowledge of the value of education, training and the contemporary labour market situation, as well as perhaps encourage their entrepreneurship.

Develop a system of targeted, individual counselling for young people, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds, guiding their decisions concerning educational pathways (on issues such as choice of type of school, and type of specialisation).

Engage trusted adults (teachers, social workers, youth workers, health professionals, police and employers) as complementary support agents in the provision of advice, information and counselling, who, in partnership, could encourage young people to invest in education, and assist them in school or other learning environments.

Define high quality vocational training at the secondary level as a valuable professional option for those who cannot afford to stay for long years in education.

Chapter 4: Key messages

Access to education for migrants and ethnic minorities, in particular to early childhood education, is conducive to good performance at school and breaking the ethnic isolation of the family; for children with a dysfunctional family background access to pre-school may relieve the level of harm experienced. Guaranteeing early childhood education to all children is important.

Ethnically mixed-schools are the best environments for pupils, leading to positive development and high performance, while educational segregation leads to downgrading expectations and performance, and reproduces inequalities. When ethnic separation into Roma or Muslim schools happens on a voluntary basis, it may have positive impacts on education and self-esteem of students.

The potentials of school and neighbourhoods as spaces to reduce inequalities can be more actively used. Intercultural activities (events, training, learning circles), if encouraged and funded, can engage both ethnically mixed audiences as well as actors from all groups (children, parents, teachers, administration).

There is the need for improvement in equality of opportunities in the educational system for in-care and after-care young people as well as homeless and migrant youth. Young people with biographical disadvantages are in general under-prepared for continuation into post-compulsory education and need external support.

As the labour market demands even higher qualifications for many jobs, the prioritisation of post-compulsory education is necessary. Young people need the support of trusted adults (such as teachers and social workers), who can be a stable point of encouragement and counselling for young people with disadvantaged backgrounds, and contribute to broadening their educational horizons.

Chapter 5. TRANSITIONS TO INDEPENDENT LIVING – POTENTIAL OF INCLUSION

5.1. THE POLICY ISSUE: Leaving home, school or care early – young people are unprepared for independent living

According to life course theory (Clausen 1991; Hunt 2005; du Bois-Reymond & Stauber 2005 and others), the impact of life or career transitions is determined by the time at which they take place in an individual's life: the age at which the young person leaves home, completes education or vocational training, enters the labour market, and forms his or her own family. Non-participation in the key activities that are expected from a young person according to their age produces **troublesome transitions and identity problems**. Moreover, **inequalities in the opportunities** to follow pathways to an independent living compared to the general population lead to **poor life chances in the future**.

The findings on youth with public care backgrounds showed that in most countries the age of leaving care is much lower than the average age of leaving home for their peers. A very similar group are the early home leavers. These two groups of young people cannot rely on the family's support and they have to focus on questions of **economic survival and accommodation at a much earlier age, with little room left in their lives for education**. As a result, they are much more likely out of education, employment and training and stay homeless. Other similar groups include national and ethnic minorities, particularly Roma, immigrants and refugees.

The YOUNEX project shows that **long-term unemployment not only leads to financial difficulties**, which creates a predictable need to borrow money more often than the employed young people. Long-term unemployed young adults also face **more anxiety and are less happy** than regularly employed ones. Partner support, and also to some extent family support, may help to reduce anxiety and unhappiness. However, young people from public care or the young homeless (YiPPEE, CSEHYP) most often cannot rely on the family's support and sustain a high risk of **lasting dependence on welfare** if the latter is available and the young person is eligible, in addition to the risks to individual wellbeing and health.

The policy challenge: Integrated support of transitions to independent life

Young people in Europe who are at risk of, or experiencing homelessness, leaving care, or who come from migrant families carry a double burden of pressures – low personal resources (money, educational level, work) *and* the lack of family support. Low personal resources, lack of opportunities and constrained access to education limit the chances of having stable and well-paid jobs and becoming socially integrated. They face more difficulties in making successful transitions to independent living compared to the general youth population and thus are in **need of additional societal resources to compensate for their disadvantages**.

The policy challenge in the case of young people with accumulated disadvantages, after leaving home, care or education is to compensate for their low resources (individual, social, political) in order to ensure more normative transitions to independent living. Above all, they need more educational opportunities, employment schemes, housing and welfare services and the presence of supportive adults.

Policy implications: Personal advisors and extended institutional support

A young person, when leaving care or compulsory schooling, needs continuing support from adults, such as key support workers, or foster parents, who prioritise post-compulsory education over 'short transitions' into low-skilled and low-paid jobs. The research projects revealed the importance of face-

to-face interventions by care workers. The researchers also highlighted the positive achievements of multi-agency engagement with young people where teachers play a moderator's role between school and the person in transition to independent living, or into post-compulsory schooling. Working face-to-face in residential settings is good practice in Spain, Denmark and Hungary and the multi-agency approach has gained success in England.

Support and encouragement also involves, besides key-workers' formal support, addressing other weaknesses that youth face in their transitions to independent living. Namely, they need **compensation for the financial support missing from their families of origin** to extend their financial access to education. Good examples are free access to education (e.g. in Sweden) based on an equal opportunities approach, and the availability of loans, scholarships and benefits (e.g. in France and England). Different types of accommodation should also be available for different types and ages of 'early-leavers' from the family of origin (including the homeless and those at risk of homelessness), from education or from public care.

Recommendations

Postpone early labour market integration trials of early leavers from home, school or care and focus on keeping them in education in ways that are equivalent to the general youth population. Enable and support completion of compulsory schooling and continuing education and training.

Design services that are disconnected from legal age limits to address challenges that are attached to key transitions in young people's lives, faced by those who are leaving home, education or care. Allow for adequate alternatives of housing which enable a smooth transition to independent living.

Provide institutional support for those young people who would like to continue in post-compulsory education and who lack support of their families of origin, in the form of reliable and predictable financial and housing support, together with encouragement and emotional support from a trusted adult.

5.2. THE POLICY ISSUE: Lack of resources for civic and political participation

Young people with disadvantaged backgrounds have very **different opportunities for civic and political participation**. First generation immigrants invariably have **language problems** and **lack relevant social networks**, even if these issues also often affect their descendants. Several generations face the additional challenge of **ethnic discrimination** before they are fully (or partially) accepted and integrated. This is not only a problem for them but equally so for the societies in which they live, which should make it a key concern for policy-makers. Unregistered immigrants also represent a disadvantaged group that **lack resources and recognition** and are often **overlooked** as a result of their precarious legal status (being 'illegal'). Unfortunately, since they are undocumented, neither having citizenship or residency status, they remain on the periphery of society.

YOUNEX showed that **the effect of unemployment on social and political participation** seems to vary across countries. In some countries it leads to lower levels of participation, while in other countries it does not. This suggests that the impact of unemployment is mediated by **national and local opportunity structures**, more specifically by access to the institutionalised political system and by the particular welfare regime. The YOUNEX project underlines the **importance of social capital in youth for political participation**. Unemployed young people who are involved in **voluntary associations** are more likely to be politically active, and the gap in participation levels between the young unemployed, precarious young workers and regularly employed youth groups is reduced when

controlling for associational membership. These results still need further research to understand the stronger political involvement of precarious workers.

The policy challenge: Empowerment of youth agency

Individuals have the capacity to make positive adaptations within the context of significant adversity (Luthar *et al.* 2000); to adapt along appropriate developmental pathways, despite disruptions such as family breakdowns (Edwards 2007). Referring to Kasearu *et al.* (2010), a young person is a mediator between two generations of adults of both positive and negative life chances; young people are active in building their own human, economic and social capital. Youth agency includes **capabilities and resilience that could be empowered with political measures** directed towards young people with biographical disadvantages.

YiPPEE visualised cases of young people with disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g. low value of education, dysfunctions of the birth families) and how they formed **the ambition to become better than their parents**. The researchers highlighted both **internal as well as external empowering factors** that were found among youth from care backgrounds who identified themselves with post-compulsory education. The internal factors are connected to **will, persistence and commitment** but also **valuing knowledge** (an acknowledgement of further education as a necessary precondition for getting a better job and building a good future). The internal factors are closely connected to the external factors – support from school, motivating teachers or key-workers bridging school and the transition to post-compulsory education, the finance schemes for widening access (such as benefits, loans, or scholarships), and housing schemes to ensure affordable and appropriate accommodation.

YiPPEE also highlighted **the value of volunteering and civic engagement** for young people in and leaving care, bringing them into contact with well-integrated adults outside the care system and extending their social networks. However, lack of money and time limited their opportunities, especially after they had left care. YOUNEX pointed to social capital, particularly that deriving from membership in voluntary associations, and how it reduces social exclusion and increases the **political participation** of a young person. Even in countries with lower traditions of civic association, a number of indicators referring to the conceptualization of social capital, such as the scope of friendship and participation in social activities, show a positive impact on the integration of unemployed youth.

The policy challenge lies in developing measures addressed to the empowerment of youth agency to enable young people with disadvantaged backgrounds to break the chain of disadvantages and broaden the field of choices about their future. The promotion of access to social rights can contribute to the promotion of equal opportunities and social inclusion. With the internalisation of these rights comes a sense of empowerment that can help young people to realise their potential.

Policy implications: Support for young people's capabilities and resilience

The research projects noted several positive examples across countries in supporting vulnerable young people's transitions to autonomous life: changes in laws, functional welfare provision, good practices demonstrating how the education system and labour market policies can reduce the disadvantages of young people, and civil society initiatives. The studies also highlighted the challenges around how youth agency can be empowered. As an example, youth agency is empowered through the process of peer-learning. CSEHYP recruited homeless or ex-homeless young people as co-researchers to interview other young people who were homeless or at risk of homelessness and during the interviews the young people often asked the co-researchers how they had coped with being homeless or had got their lives back on a positive track. The young co-researchers formed positive role models for the young people they were interviewing because they had lived through the same situations as them.

The projects also revealed that NGOs play an important role in filling the vacuum of giving support that the youth with disadvantaged backgrounds need in contexts where those groups of young people are politically under-recognised and insufficiently supported by public policy. In the most positive cases, it is the **network of service and policy oriented organisations** (NGOs and public institutions) that, through cooperation and partnerships, can guide young socially excluded people on more positive pathways of transition. **The support should start as soon as the need emerges.** As the YOUNEX project has shown, organisations play a key role by specialising either in service provision or in policy advocacy, although in some cases these activities overlap. Civil society organisations are fundamental policy implementers across Europe: they contribute to raising political and social awareness among youth, and they also have an important impact on local and national policies. In countries with less developed welfare regimes, as YOUNEX shows, civil society organisations are often the only way youth have to get a job or training that can improve their employability. EUMARGINS noted positive practice related to political participation in Estonia, Sweden and Norway where young people with a residence permit are allowed to vote in local elections.

Recommendations

Empower young people with disadvantaged backgrounds to fight politically for their own rights as an interest group. Consider giving voting rights to young migrants with a residence permit.

Elaborate measures that will foster more active civic and political participation among young people with disadvantaged backgrounds to enable them to access their social rights and feel responsible for shaping their own futures.

Involve civil society organisations, as bodies which complement or substitute state provisions and have extensive knowledge of young people's everyday situations, more closely in the design and implementation of relevant policies.

Include representatives with ethnic minority or migrant backgrounds in political parties and develop political issues and agendas that reflect their interests; recruit young immigrants in campaigns and create the feeling that they count.

Strengthen the recognition of non-formal education by employers and within educational systems, elaborate schemes of granting subsidy money for those extensively engaged in the youth work.

Launch community information centres to inform young people of the possibilities of, for example, active engagement, the existence of European funds to support involvement in a range of programmes, and the opportunities for training.

Chapter 5: Key messages

Young people at risk or being homeless, youth leaving care, and migrant youth are exposed to diverse risks associated with the possibility of social exclusion: leaving families of origin earlier than the general population while being unprepared (psychologically, socially, economically) for an autonomous life.

Young people who leave school, care or home early face more difficulties in making successful transitions to independent living compared to the whole youth population and thus are in need of societal resources to compensate for their disadvantages.

Young people with disadvantaged backgrounds have very different opportunities for civic and political participation. The potential of civil society organizations to involve young people are underexploited. There should be consideration of the development of subsidy schemes and

scholarships for granting to actively engaged youth. Political parties can consciously recruit migrant youth in developing political issues and agendas and carry out campaigns.

The empowerment of youth agency releases resilience and the capacity of young people to fight politically for their own rights as an interest group and to be taken seriously by the governments and politicians.

CH. 6. THE WAY FORWARD: Tackling multiple disadvantages of youth on the margins of society

The 'EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering', the 'Council Resolution on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field for 2010-2018', and 'Europe 2020. A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth' set a triple goal for European youth policies: (1) to create more opportunities for youth in education and employment; (2) to improve access and full participation of all young people in society; and (3) to foster solidarity between youth and society.

*The policy evidence from research on youth with disadvantaged backgrounds revealed a social divide in opportunities and access to full participation of European young people and in social solidarity. Young people with disadvantages face a glass-ceiling that impedes their personal aspirations in their life careers. Even if they have ambitious goals concerning education or professional life, as the research has revealed, they can only achieve these (if at all) with delay because of **less opportunities, lower access** and **less solidarity** between these young people and society compared to society's 'contract' with the general youth population.*

Based on numerous recommendations drawn from the research results, *the social divide can be narrowed by political acknowledgement of the special social and educational needs of these groups of children and young people who have to carry a range of disadvantages (dysfunctional or non-supportive family, ethnic minority or migrant backgrounds, institutional and structural barriers), the early prevention of social exclusion (e.g. risk-buffering educational systems reducing inequalities) and elaboration of reinsertion measures supporting youth transitions to independent living.* This conclusion refers to the need for a complex mosaic of inclusive educational and labour market policies combined with supportive welfare policies, an activated civil society, and last but not least the empowerment of young people's agency from an early age, by encouraging participation and citizenship in a supportive and secure social atmosphere.

6.1. Increase in formal support, protection and encouragement will open up more opportunities for the social inclusion of excluded youth

Williamson (2007) stresses the opportunity-focused youth policy across Europe, framed at local, regional, national and EU levels, that is not only economically more sensible, but also more morally and socially defensible. An opportunity-focused approach to the social inclusion of young people can be secured by the strategic investment of financial (including youth-sensitive budgeting) and human resources (for example, counselling, mentoring, supervision and support). The *policy challenge* addressed to children and youth with disadvantaged backgrounds is the elaboration of an **opportunity-focused framework of generalised support and a multi-agency approach in youth policies**. The *policy responses* are twofold:

- (1) Elaboration of measures that reduce the risks of social exclusion for youth with potential biographical disadvantages – migrants and ethnic minorities, those from disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and those left without family support – from their early age;

- (2) Development of social reinsertion measures targeted at youth with low personal resources, facing institutional and structural constraints.

6.2. Integration of policies and the strengthening of their inclusiveness will improve the accessibility to education and the labour market of excluded youth groups

The policy challenge is the elaboration of inclusive educational policies (in certain school contexts) that can help to overcome structural inequalities facing young people in combination with social protection and inclusive labour force policies addressed to youth with biographical disadvantages (in or from public care, homeless or at risk of homelessness and those with ethnic minority or migrant backgrounds).

The policy responses can vary from a single measure to complex programmes involving multiple agencies with:

(1) *Basing policy making and practice on evidence and reflection.* The policy challenge is making societies more inclusive through encouraging critical reflections on them. For *policy responses*, this means the annual collection of comparative statistics at national and local levels using EU indicators, both about the current situation as well as the achieved **trends** but also explicit legislation to oblige local authorities and child protection agencies to provide financial and practical support for young people below and over the age of majority (usually 18) to stay in education. At the EU level this means identifying, measuring and monitoring young people with disadvantaged backgrounds (missing family support; early school- and home-leavers; with migrant history) specifically in EU strategy and in policy documents with access to regional and local regulations by applying the Open Method of Coordination.

(2) *Elaboration of measures aimed at increasing the potential of education and training systems to reduce inequalities among youth.* This refers to the *policy challenge* of making education the first priority in the lives of young people with disadvantaged backgrounds. The *policy responses* revolve around providing children and young people with equal access (including opportunities and expectations) to compulsory and post-compulsory education ensured by financial and social welfare measures and enabled through highly professional designated teachers and adult key-workers.

(3) *Combining policies for securing transitions to adulthood.* The *policy challenge* is the identification of the special social and educational needs of children and young people with disadvantaged backgrounds. This requires strategies for looking at different policies (education, labour market, welfare) together, thus discovering the institutional as well as structural barriers that can cause noticeable delays in young people's transitions to independent living. The *policy responses* are aimed at compensating the lack of family support due to family dysfunction or incapacity in young people's lives with external efforts from the wider social environment. This refers to prevention and early intervention measures against both early school-leaving (the 'poor-family-poor-schooling effect') and home-leaving (the 'normalisation-according-to-legal-age effect'), including housing support services, grants for continuing studying and personalised ongoing support for those who require it.

(4) *Paving the way towards smooth entry to the labour market for youth with disadvantaged backgrounds.* The *policy challenge* lies in developing an education system that facilitates the entry of young people to the opened up labour market. As the *policy response*, a delay can be created in the insertion processes of young people into the work domain by political means in order to prolong their studies in ways similar to those that prevail amongst the wider population of the same age.

6.3. Promotion of citizenship and participation will empower youth agency and encourage solidarity between youth and society

The *policy challenge* lies in the treatment in policy considerations of an individual child or a young person who faces institutional and structural barriers in his or her life aspirations or preferences, as an active social actor. The *policy responses* have at least two trajectories:

(1) *Supporting the personal resilience and human resources of children and young people for better reinsertion into society through their individual capacities and social capital building.* The *policy challenge* lies in meeting the difference with tolerance and acceptance (e.g. multiculturalism in schools). The *policy responses* uncover participatory approaches in open and generic work with children and young people and their disadvantaged backgrounds.

(2) *Creating conditions for democratic participation of young people with disadvantaged backgrounds will lead to a sense of belonging and identity, in the community of everyday practice.* The *policy challenge* lies in the encouragement of young people towards volunteering, participation in organisations and social networks (such as organised time activities like after-care and after school leisure-time activities). The *policy responses* are related to a multi-sector approach that requires solidarity between different actors (e.g. apprenticeships through housing associations, NGOs and employers in the case of homeless youth), public and private service providers (e.g. training programmes developed by private business in cooperation with the homeless sector; risk assessments carried out by social workers, police and others who have a role in protecting children).

6.4. From the Europe 2020 flagship ‘Youth on the Move’ to actions

The EU *policy challenge* lies in ensuring that youth with disadvantaged backgrounds are more visible in EU programmes and funds. The *policy responses* uncover measures that remove economic barriers to participating in EU mobility programmes (for example, the introduction of a ‘means-tested’ application process or providing additional financial support, a European Employment Service fostering employment mobility, supporting job search and facilitating all additional procedures, including housing, insurance and linguistic support). The EU programmes and funds are important tools to promote learning mobility and other forms of learning and to increase young people’s opportunities in the labour market. Therefore it is vital that they are open to all young people. These programmes have to be strengthened and developed in order to build further the capacity of young people to realise their personal aspirations and life careers. Finally, the EU Youth Strategy actions for preventing social exclusion have to be reinforced, along with holistic key working methods and the active inclusion of those most in need of support.

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Objective WP2007: Youth and social exclusion (*SSH-2007-3.2.1*)

The aim is to achieve a comprehensive and integrated approach and provide policy recommendations to dealing effectively with the social exclusion of young people in terms of **causes, processes, changes and prospects**. Research in this context should examine trends in the social exclusion of young women and men, and could address issues such as their opportunities, prospects and needs, availability of employment and its quality, career possibilities, education and training issues, as well as access to public and private services and facilities, housing, economic and social representation, means of formal and informal participation, and empowerment and integration strategies. In addition, related questions such as poverty and inequality, social and cultural capital, discrimination, gender, migration, and insecurity of various kinds facing young people could be included. In addressing such matters, questions such as life projects, identity development, attitudes, deviance and drug use ought to be considered.

Evidence-based policy conference 'Social inclusion of youth on the margins of society: more opportunities, better access, and higher solidarity.'

17–18 November 2011, Brussels, Madou Auditorium

Conference focuses on:

- Opportunities for socially excluded youth to **overcome their biographical disadvantages**; (family, migrant, ethnic minority)
- Formal and non-formal learning actions for inclusive, accessible and affordable learning;
- Pathways of **transitions** to *adulthood, parenthood, labour market and social integration*.

It supports in particular the EU2020 flagship initiatives "Youth on the Move" and "Platform against Poverty", and aims to support social innovation in addressing poverty and exclusion around three policy axes:

1. **Promote citizenship and political participation (empowerment of the youth agency)** – volunteering, social networks, participation in organisations, improve the cooperation between sectors, increase the role of the civil society → will encourage **solidarity** between actors and the whole societies;
2. **Integration of policies and their inclusive character**: inclusive educational policies (certain school contexts) may help to overcome the structural inequalities in combination with social protection and inclusive labour force policies → will improve the **accessibility** to education and labour market of the excluded youth groups;
3. **Increase the formal support, protection and encouragement** → will open up more **opportunities** for social inclusion of the excluded youth.

**‘Social inclusion of youth on the margins of society:
more opportunities, better access and higher solidarity’**

An evidence-based policy conference on ‘Youth and Social Inclusion’,
European Commission, Brussels, November 2011

CONFERENCE REPORT

Introduction

Anchored by the Policy Review of the Youth Research Cluster on Social Inclusion, the European Commission hosted a conference to listen to and debate presentations from the five studies¹⁵ that informed that cluster. Participants came from all three corners of the triangle of youth research, youth policy and youth practice. This conference report endeavours to capture and crystallise the essence of that debate and to highlight key themes relevant to policy emerging from the research studies; it is not designed to repeat or replicate the conclusions drawn by the Policy Review, though it will at times reinforce them.

The core aim of the ‘Youth and social exclusion’ studies has been

to achieve a comprehensive and integrated approach and provide policy recommendations to dealing effectively with the social exclusion of young people in terms of causes, processes, changes and prospects.

Social exclusion both as a concept and as a reality is, of course, a contested issue. It has been interrogated in many ways (see, for example, Colley *et al* 2007), can be pitched at many levels (economic, political, cultural, social), and has a variety of meanings and consequences. Put simply, however, it has to do with some form(s) of obstruction to full normative participation in society: (a deficit of) access, capacity, opportunities, motivation, information, and other factors besides. The circumstances of young people considered to be socially excluded have been prevalent for many years within some communities and amongst some social groups of young people. Today, especially following the economic crisis throughout Europe, young people more generally are facing challenges around ‘pathways to inclusion’ – not only in education and the labour market, but in family life, health and housing. Though lives still have to be lived, and can be lived on the margins (see Williamson 2004), they are lives often characterised by risk, vulnerability and threat – to selves, friends and family, neighbourhoods and the wider society. Hence the commitment both of Member States and the European Commission (through its 2009 Youth Strategy – see Council of the European Union 2009) to strengthen opportunities, access and solidarity for young people, especially those who are more ‘disadvantaged’ (otherwise sometimes depicted as those with fewer opportunities). The construction of *barriers* to prevent exclusion and marginality, and the establishment of *bridges* enabling those already on the margins to find routes back into the mainstream represent central contemporary youth policy challenges.

¹⁵ YIPPEE (young men and young women in public care beyond compulsory schooling); CSEYHP (homeless young people); EUMARGINS (young adult immigrants in seven urban-metropolitan areas); EDUMIGRON (young people at the turning point of leaving compulsory education in multi-ethnic urban communities); and YOUNEX (unemployed and ‘precarious’ youth)

The conference was introduced by some framework-setting observations (by Dagmar Kutsar, co-author of the Policy Review, and by Antonia Wulff, chair of the Council of Europe Advisory Council for Youth). There were then three thematic sessions:

- Overcoming biographical disadvantages – individual agency of disadvantaged young people
- Inclusive, accessible and affordable learning – school and society related formal and non-formal learning actions
- Pathways of transition (to adulthood, parenthood, a job, civic and social integration) – policy implications

The conference ended with a panel guiding a policy-focused discussion of the implications of these findings. This conference report does not intend to summarise the proceedings in this sequential form but instead to reflect and represent the dynamics of the debate, especially those themes that threaded through and cross-cut specific presentations and thematic sessions.

OASiS – Opportunities, Access and Solidarity in (EU) Societies

The metaphor of an oasis is, arguably, apposite for disadvantaged young people at risk of homelessness, and from care and migrant/ethnic backgrounds, who need ‘watering’ and who, in some significant respects, have been deserted and cut off from the support and pathways available to most young people. The acronym also captures the central planks of the 2009 EU Youth Strategy.

A composite life story

Even platforms of robust empirical research can benefit from an exercise in imagination. Here is an imaginary ‘composite’ young person with all the characteristics that were the focus of the five research studies, parts of whom were described at different points of the conference, who secures a successful and desirable transition to adult life through the support advocated in the Policy Review:

From a poor ‘disadvantaged’ background and a dysfunctional unsupportive family, with a migrant background, taken into public care, facing poor prospects, s/he was provided with properly resourced ‘compensatory’ support from an early age – in school, leisure time, and later with careers advice, training opportunities, and labour market prospects. There were ‘critical people at critical moments’, and access to a ‘trusted adult’. Help with education and accommodation in early adulthood was made available. That supportive framework responded to the individual’s basically conventional aspirations, motivated and strengthened the exercise of their voice and commitment, enabled them to make positive choices and resist negative pressures, and led to engagement and inclusion, civic and personal responsibility, human dignity, and a meaningful life.

Terminology

Throughout the conference, terminology – beyond the routine challenges of many people engaging in what is not their native language – was contentious. It had been an issue in the Policy Review. Irrespective of the language (for example, disadvantaged, disaffected, with fewer opportunities, disengaged, excluded, marginalised, ‘put out’, cut off), there is general understanding of its meaning, though always scope for misrepresentation and misinterpretation. Perhaps a key issue is whether the ‘negativity’ of an expression has a positive mirror-image: re-engaged, integrated or included.

Evidence or evident?

Notwithstanding the evidence from the research studies, there was a concern that many of the issues raised were already well-documented. The question was no longer whether or not we know, but what we will, or can, do about it. There is a wealth of knowledge about the growing 'youth divide', both between and within the countries of Europe. Increasingly, concern is expressed about the extent to which labour market futures are commensurate with educational qualifications achieved. There is a recurrent issue of young people being 'stifled by their own past' – despite all personal efforts and wider support systems, they are still sucked back into the comfort zones of familiarity.

The intersection of inequalities

Half a century ago, drawing on Merton's theories of social structure, Cloward and Ohlin (1960) wrote about blocked opportunity structures and how young people 'resolved' them in different ways: through crime, retreat, resistance and rebellion. The conference repeatedly drew attention to the clustering of problems: rarely do 'disadvantaged' young people suffer from a single disadvantage, they almost invariably experience multiple challenges in their lives. These include: violence and discrimination; educational underachievement and unemployment; family illness, family conflict and a lack of family support; running away, substance misuse, criminality and criminalisation. The old 'grand narratives' of inequality – gender, race, disability, geography/locality – have certainly not disappeared in a tide of post-modernity, but are powerfully present in these research studies. They reinforce the point that, without interventions that can create 'turning points' in these young people's lives, typical and indeed predictable paths of social exclusion will persist.

A hierarchy of policy possibility

The conference noted clearly that, like a matrioska doll, there is a range of 'levels' of policy possibility and challenge that sit within each other. These are, however, perhaps best presented as a list:

- Welfare regimes (facilitating or obstructing the possibilities of inclusion)
- Youth policy (youth investment that is flexible and enabling, or rigid and regulatory)
- Public institutions (and their relationships and coherence)
- NGOs (their density, suitability and credibility)
- Those who work with young people (professional and volunteers, levels of skill)
- **Young people** (their aspirations, motivation, determination and resilience)
- Local communities and cultures
- Family (or public care) contexts

All of these can pull or push in both positive and negative directions, and in harmony or conflict. The conference was emphatic that positive public sector intervention, in conjunction with the NGO sector, can make the difference for more marginalised young people and confront some of the more adverse influences in their lives. The story, over the past decade, around public care and post-compulsory educational participation by care leavers in the UK is an exemplary illustration of this point.

What 'disadvantaged' young people told the research and the conference

Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds communicated some understandably mixed messages, largely from the juxtaposition of resilience versus resignation. Some had felt that 'nobody cares': being an outsider and being treated as one had produced a loss of faith in themselves and diminished self-belief. But deeper probing over time revealed a gritty determination amongst many of these young people: a desire not to be seen as different, to be understood, to contribute and to be involved. Sometimes such purposeful motivation arose from their negative childhood experiences: they did not wish to 'be like their family'. Such perspectives reinforced one of the old mantras of youth policy and political rhetoric. Young people are resources, not (just) problems, and policy and provision can be constructed *by and with* young people, not (just) for them.

Policy winners

Some core policy messages threaded through the conference, ones that would appear to be applicable to young people from the spectrum of disadvantaged backgrounds:

- **The importance of 'lead professionals' / 'trusted adults':** Mentoring and 'key worker' attachment to disadvantaged young people has proved both a popular policy option and demonstrated some effectiveness, but the sustaining importance of the family (however dysfunctional) should not be overlooked.
- **Recognise and respect young people's agency:** Young people will always struggle to 'make a life', however adverse their circumstances. Engaging with, and supporting their personal agency is as important as addressing structural obstacles and opportunities.
- **Take the time to understand culture and motivation:** Young people may not always take sensible decisions but they usually make decisions that make sense *to them* at the time. Working out 'what makes young people tick' is a critical starting point for working out which pathways may serve them best.
- **Involve young people in design, implementation and evaluation of policy:** Beyond fulfilling the aspiration of Article 12 of the UN Convention on Children's Rights, stressing children's right to have a say in matters that concern them, the perspectives of young people are an important dimension in the formulation and execution of good policy.
- **Joining up services:** strengthening 'partnerships', encouraging 'multi-agency' approaches and 'working together' is likely to make for better policy, though clear boundaries, responsibility and accountability are still required: joint work should be viewed as a fruit cocktail, not a fruit purée!
- **Safety-nets – that can also be trampolines:** In many, if not all, localities, there are usually NGOs or municipal provision that can 'catch' the most disadvantaged – a last refuge to provide food, accommodation and warmth. Such agencies also clearly have the potential to 'launch' young people back on constructive pathways to inclusion.

- **The role of youth work in enabling (consideration of) personal change:** There would be a broad consensus that school inclusion, labour market insertion, careers guidance, and drug or crime prevention are not 'youth work's' explicit and primary objectives. Nevertheless, through the relationships, support and opportunities it extends, more disadvantaged young people (if they are reached) often contemplate changing their behaviour and the direction of their lives, and seek further support to do so. Such *personal* change is an essential pre-requisite of *positional* change.

Policy challenges

The conference also identified some potential challenges in taking the policy agenda forward:

- **Policy transfer:** Because policy is so embedded in national, even regional and local cultures and traditions, even the very best of practice in one context needs to be 're-tuned' and attuned to new settings if it is going to produce an equivalent impact elsewhere.
- **Scaling up from pilot projects:** For a range of reasons (such as fresh political support, generous funding arrangements, keen professional commitment), pilot projects and programmes can demonstrate levels of success and positive outcomes that are difficult to replicate on a larger scale.
- **Windfalls v 'perverse behaviour'** [unforeseen benefits and unintended consequences]: Youth policy initiatives can produce unexpected additional outcomes that no-one really anticipated; conversely, when expectations are too rigid (with tight costs and timescales), delivery agents may not in fact reach the real target groups.
- **Hitting the target, but missing the point** (systems conspiring against professional efficacy): In a target and outcome driven policy environment, there can be a risk, at many levels, of establishing and hitting targets that in fact have little or no bearing on what really needs to be done with and for more disadvantaged young people.
- **The real influence of evidence...** Evidence will never be absolutely conclusive and always needs interpretation – occurring in the light of prevailing political and economic contexts and priorities. Quantitative data usually conceal numerous calibrations and variations – in circumstance, motivation, possibility, support – amongst any group in question that would be exposed through more in-depth qualitative inquiry. The major planks of effective policy and practice across the domains of youth disadvantage are already fairly evident.
- **... or a reason for inaction?**
Since evidence can always be contested, sometimes the quest and request for 'more evidence' smacks of a political excuse for not acting. There are always exceptions to the rule. In politics and policy, evidence is made use of selectively and expediently.

- **So why bother with evidence at all?**

Sceptics often doubt the mantra of ‘evidence-based policy making’, arguing that other factors (most significantly politics and ideology, but also resources and capacity) shape and influence the direction of policy more strongly. But this is not an argument to abandon the quest for ‘evidence’. Even without evidence, policy will still be made. Evidence may at least forestall more impetuous and populist political decisions if not more proactively contribute to political rationality and sense. Despite populist pressures, for example, in the field of substance misuse, ‘Just Say No’ campaigns are completely ineffective; evidence is equally robust on the matter of drugs education – it does raise awareness, but has little effect on behaviour. Politics and policy that ignores such evidence will fail to make any progress on the challenges it seeks to address.
- **The dilemmas of targeting and the risk of stigma:** For the most excluded young people, some degree of targeting is absolutely essential, preferably within a system of ‘universal service’ provision. With appropriate care, labeling and stigma can be avoided, and services can be directed at those who are most in need of them.
- **A policy paradox**

Both in the EU and its Member States (and indeed some transnational NGOs), there can be a policy rhetoric of inclusion, but a policy framework that in fact maintains exclusion. Ironically, in reference back to the point above, if policy initiatives are not carefully targeted at those most in need of support and opportunity, they can easily be taken up by young people who are already relatively included. In that way, youth policy can inadvertently exacerbate the youth divide.
- **Distinguishing policy structures from empirical realities:** Exploring what is actually happening on the ground in terms of relationships, progress, outcomes and destinations – almost irrespective of the policy framework – is an important task. The most disadvantaged young people are often, for many different reasons (fear, uncertainty, a lack of confidence, unfamiliarity, and more), reluctant to engage with new possibilities, opportunities and experiences.
- **Choice and Compulsion:** If evidence suggests that some experiences and opportunities are ‘good’ for young people, how can it be *ensured* that they get them? Compulsion is a contentious and often unpopular term: perhaps it should be ‘robust encouragement’. Very skilled practitioners have the best chance of getting the most alienated and suspicious young people involved.

Conclusion

The conference did not dissent in relation to the central messages conveyed by the research studies. There was clear consensus that policy development needed to intervene as early as possible in the lives of young people from the public care system, those at risk of becoming homeless, and those from migrant and minority ethnic backgrounds. Community service organisations alongside public authorities could play an important role in:

- Avoiding social dislocation
- Promoting attachment
- Maintaining hope
- Providing stepping stones
- Achieving destinations

Yet, in times of austerity and recession, unconditional offers to those needing or requesting public support are rapidly receding. Young people will weigh the nature of any 'policy offer' in different ways. We all make 'trade-offs' and young people are no different – but the criteria they invoke in considering a policy offer are often quite invisible to the adult (policy maker's) eye. Hence the need to pay full attention to young people's culture and motivation (see above).

The big policy question will not necessarily be whether or not societies make the offer to young people suggested by this research, but the basis on which the offer is made. Will there be conditions? What will be the eligibility criteria? Will there be sanctions for non take-up, non-compliance or non-completion? An increasingly frequently asked question is: if society does provide the opportunities in question, will young people be *expected or required* to make the most of them? It is not unreasonable to set out conditions and expectations, but everything depends on what they are. Otherwise, there is a serious risk – irrespective of the evidential arguments promoted by this research – of policy, once more, snatching defeat from the jaws of victory.

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Methodological overview table for the 5 Youth & Social Inclusion projects

	YiPPEE	CSEYHP	EDUMIGROM	EUMARGINS	YOUNEX
Target groups	young men and women <i>in public care</i> after the end of compulsory schooling (aged 18-24)	Homeless young Born in country <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ethnic dominant ethnic minority Immigrant 	14-17 year-old youth at the turning point of <i>leaving compulsory education</i> in <u>multi-ethnic urban</u> communities	<i>Young adult immigrants'</i> experiences of social inclusion/exclusion in 7 local <i>urban-metropolitan</i> areas	Unemployed & Precarious youth Long-term unemployed Precarious youth Employed (control group)
European Coverage (countries)	United Kingdom Denmark Sweden Spain Hungary	United Kingdom The Netherlands Czech Republic Portugal	Germany, Hungary, France, Czech Rep UK Slovak Rep Denmark, Romania, Sweden	Oslo (Norway), Gothenburg (Sweden), London (UK), Genoa (Italy), Barcelona (Spain), Metz (France), Tallinn (Estonia).	Geneva (Switzerland), Cologne (Germany), Turin (Italy), Lyon (France), Karlstad (Sweden), Kielce (Poland).
Quantitative Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secondary analysis of statistics (WP3&4) Surveys: national and local area studies (WP4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> secondary data analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> community-level surveys among 400-1.200 pupils (14-17) in local schools in the 9 project countries; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> secondary data analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> survey of 174 policy- or service-oriented CSO/NGOs survey on long-term unemployed & precarious youth,
Qualitative Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Literature reviews Interviews with social services, care managers & educators 170 Intensive face to face interviews Interviews with nominated adults 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> literature reviews, NGO interviews engaging & training (ex-) homeless YP as co-researchers interviewing young homeless people observing and testing intervention & case management in national contexts 	local community surveys: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> class room observations; interviews & focus groups with students, teachers & school personnel: interviews with parents, civil & official representatives 	Biographic interviews with about 30 young adults in each country. 10 of this sample will be among the most marginalised young immigrants, and 10 will be among the least marginalised in each national context.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> analysis of state & EU policies & practices towards unemployment in-depth interviews with young long-term unemployed focus groups with stakeholders
Sample sizes	170 young men and women aged 18-24	216 (92F/124M)	5.078 questionnaires in 101 schools, ± 500 interviews, ± 70 focus groups	250 life story interviews	174 CSOs/NGOs 7.200 young people