



Policy Brief 01

Holistic youth policy interventions





Introduction

In the last couple of decades simultaneous changes in the structure of labour and housing markets as well as the demographic makeup of societies have created new patterns of inequality. A key dimension of this new constellation is age. Inequalities in educational attainment, labour market precarity and affordability issues on the housing market imply new social vulnerabilities for young people, with which traditional welfare services often struggle to cope.

A promising response have been the development of new types of integrated services which aim to tackle complex social problems in holistic, process-oriented and personalized ways and which put the aspirations and agency of young people at the centre. Based on the findings of the UPLIFT project, this policy brief aims to provide policy makers with inspiring examples of holistic youth policy interventions and articulate key takeaways.



The UPLIFT project

The UPLIFT project aims to understand the patterns and trends of inequality across Europe, focusing on young people (aged 15-29) in urban areas. Through a range of methods, the project seeks to understand how individuals experience and adapt to inequality, and – together with communities in four locations – aims to co-design a policy tool to involve young people in the creation, implementation and monitoring of policies seeking to reduce inequalities. The UPLIFT team is made up of 15 international partners including academic partners, independent research organisations, social workers, local municipalities and others.

The project uses existing data sets to understand the different factors contributing to socio-economic inequality particularly in the domains of housing, education and employment in 16 different urban areas across Europe. These have been selected as research sites for their range in economic potential and redistributive environments. At eight of these sites the partners conduct further research, investigating individual experiences of inequality through interviews and workshops with both young people and adults. In a final four cities, Amsterdam, Barakaldo, Tallinn and Sfântu Gheorghe, the project explores policy co-creation. Together with the UPLIFT researchers, young people in each of these four areas design potential policy solutions to address their experiences of inequality. Through the reflexive policy making agenda, UPLIFT aims to develop a new, sustainable, participatory policy co-creation process, where young people are actively contributing to policies that directly influence their life chances.

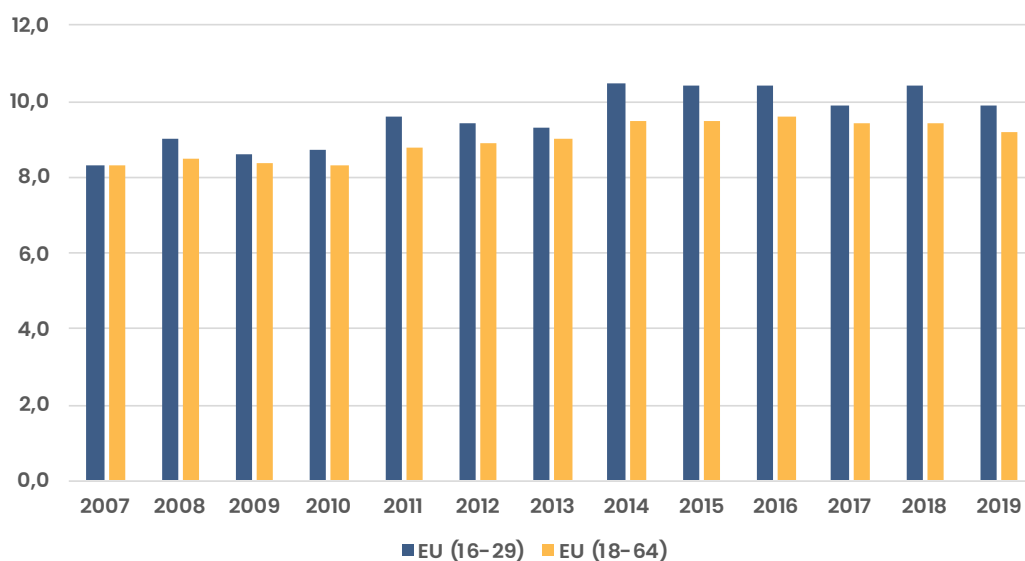
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Policy challenge: new vulnerabilities facing young people

The past decade has been a period of polarisation and fragmentation in Europe with the financial crisis and rapid technological change widening socio-economic inequalities. However, in many cases the crisis has only acted to highlight and amplify the effects of longer term processes. Since the 1980s, structural shift affecting the labour and housing markets as well as the demographic makeup of societies have created new patterns of inequality and new forms of social vulnerability which now pose new challenges to welfare systems. A key dimension of these new patterns of inequality is age: young people are more likely to experience new types of vulnerability.

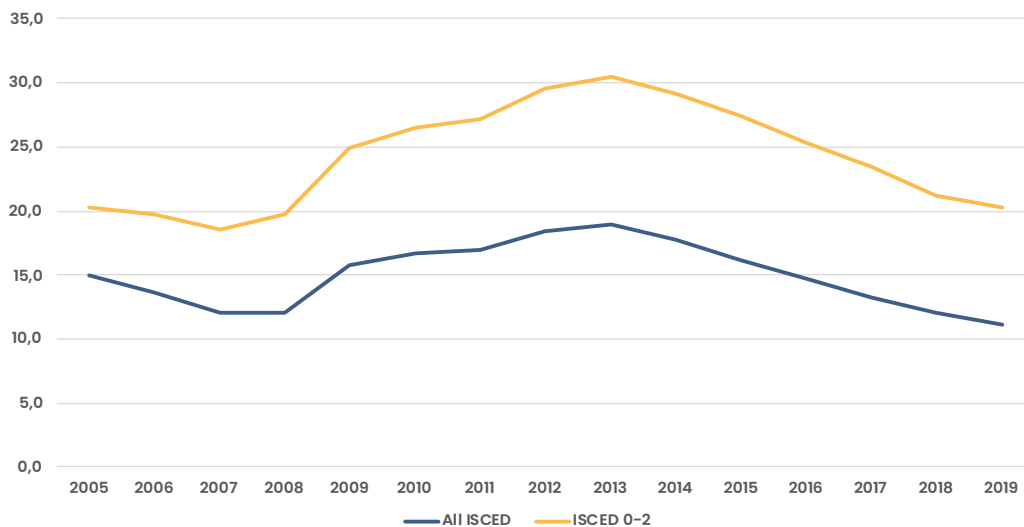
One of the key transformations has taken place in the labour market. Globalization, the decline of industrial employment and the rise of the service sector have created new conditions in which part time and precarious jobs are now more common. Although labour market flexibility can benefit certain people, more often casual, part time or flexible jobs are not chosen. They are giving rise to new types of vulnerability, such as sporadic employment and in-work poverty.

In-work poverty rate in the EU countries



Data source: Eurostat, In-work at-risk-of-poverty rate by age and sex - EU-SILC survey [iic_iw01] - employed persons, from 16 to 29 years

Youth unemployment rate in the EU countries by educational level



Source: LFS

Across Europe, young people appear to be particularly affected by these shifts in the labour market, as evidenced by higher rates of unemployment and labour precarity – especially among the lower educated.

In many parts of Europe, young people have struggled to integrate into the labour market even when the rest of the economy has showed signs of recovery after the financial crisis. In turn, the economic upheaval caused by the Covid pandemic has highlighted again that even when young people are in employment, they are often in positions of 'last-in, first out'.

These labour market developments are acting to amplify inequalities in schooling in a new way. Previously, industrial employment could provide reasonably paid, stable jobs for lower educated workers. Sectoral shifts, technological developments (often labelled the Fourth Industrial Revolution) have increased the gap between highly qualified and well-paid workers doing intellectual labour and workers with less education and lower skills. In the newer, high productivity sectors of the economy, employers require skills current education systems are ill fitted to develop, such as problem-solving abilities, working in a group, creativity etc.

Job-related disruption* during the pandemic for different age groups, 2020, OECD

18-29

50%

39-49

46%

50-64

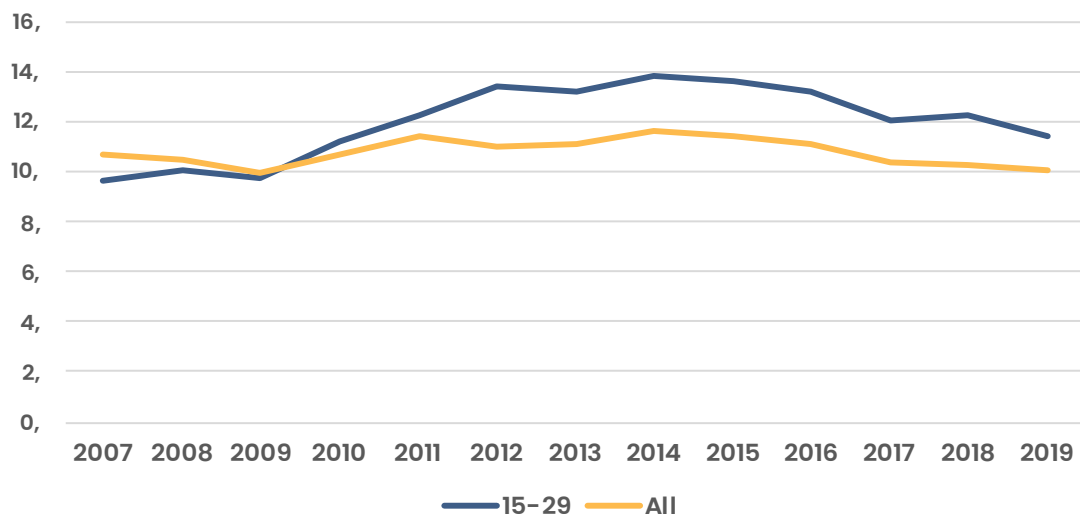
37%

*Job related disruption includes job loss, the use of a job retention scheme, a reduction in working hours, and/or a pay cut. Source: <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/young-people-s-concerns-during-covid-19-results-from-risks-that-matter-2020-64b51763/>

The difficulties many young people experience in finding sufficiently paid, stable employment are closely connected to difficulties in the housing market. In the last couple of decades, there have been an overarching trend in the increase in house prices and rents in large cities across Europe. In many cities, this has now led to an acute affordability crisis, whereby households are unable to find adequate housing or are forced to

spend a disproportionate share of their income on rents or mortgage payments. For young people, the affordability crisis meant that they are often forced to rely on their parents for financial support and remain longer in the family home. Homeownership rates among the young people have plummeted compared to previous generations.

Housing overburden rate in the EU countries



Source: SILC: Housing cost overburden rate by age, sex and poverty status - EU-SILC survey [ILC_LVHO07A_custom_2299316]



New vulnerabilities and welfare responses

Across Europe, young people are increasingly becoming the focus of targeted policies. A typical example is the active labour market policies found in many countries and also pursued by the European Union through the Youth Guarantee program, which aims to ensure that young people are offered quality education, training or employment opportunities.

Traditional welfare services however often struggle to cope with the interconnected issues and vulnerabilities young people face.

- Firstly, most welfare states developed at a time when employment could serve as a guarantee against poverty – as such, welfare provision was centred around helping individuals back into work and providing interim aid. This paradigm is challenged by today's more precarious labour conditions.
- Secondly, especially since the crisis, many polities have implemented cuts to public spending, which lead to more restrictions in the access to services and benefits, and curtailed local and national governments' abilities to meaningfully intervene in the functioning of the market. This is especially visible in the housing market, where the decreasing share of public housing has been accompanied by growing housing costs.
- Thirdly, traditional welfare support is often temporary and addresses only domain of the recipient's life such as employment or education, without regard for the complex connections between these different domains. As such, welfare measures often only manage to help recipients 'stay afloat' but do not support personal development or meaningful change.

Tackling complex social problems then require new – more holistic, process oriented and personalized – responses. A promising example of such new solutions have been the development of new types of integrated services which attempt to put the aspirations and agency of young people at the centre. This requires overcoming traditional departmental boundaries and forging new forms of cooperation across the public and private sector. It means finding new ways of working and introducing new concerns into the provision of welfare: a focus on establishing connections and relationships and the personal capacities and goals of young people.



European cooperation in youth policy

During the German EU presidency in 2020, the EU Youth Strategy was introduced with the long-term aim to synchronize youth policy principles across the European Union. The aim of the framework is to encourage national authorities to follow a common approach to policy making for young people. The strategy focuses on three core areas of action: fostering youth participation in democratic life (engage), supporting social and civic engagement (connect) and ensuring that all young people have the necessary resources to take part in society (empower). A key overarching theme of the strategy is the development of cross-sectoral youth policies which encompass multiple domains that affect young people's lives.



Innovative examples for integrated services for youth

You can find out more about both of these innovative examples in the UPLIFT *Inventory of post-crisis policies* available [here](#).



BARAKALDO, SPAIN

Accompaniment for Emancipation and Transition to Adulthood

The program was launched in 2016 in response to the persistently high levels of unemployment among young people in Barakaldo. The service targets young people aged between 18 and 35 and aims to accompany them in their transition to adult life and attempt to address everything that entails. In effect, the program functions as a mentoring service and a one-stop shop to access all the other services available to young people, be it training opportunities or financial and housing support. As such, the program takes advantage of and facilitates access to a wider set of policies (such as the minimum guarantee income) available to vulnerable young people.

The service begins with the development of a personalised plan encompassing the different domains of life focused on the concrete steps needed to realise the young person's aspirations. This in itself is an important aspect of the program, as it allows young people to gain perspective in their own life and formulate achievable goals for themselves. Once the young person begins to put the plan into action, the advisors in the program are in constant contact with colleagues in other departments, monitoring progress. The program aims to provide support while making young people their own protagonists. For this reason, there is no set time frame to the service, the length of the accompaniment is tailored to the young person's needs.

The program is funded by local municipal funds, but subcontracted to a third party. The main costs of the program are the personnel. Currently there are two full-time and one part time employees working in the service. The greatest challenge so far has been reaching the most vulnerable young people and increasing the use of the service – although more than 200 young people have taken part since the beginning of the program.

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Delphin project

Delphin is an integrated socio-educational care service, focused on providing support for socially disadvantaged children and adolescents. It is specifically aimed to reach young people with multiple problems who provide a particular challenge to other existing welfare services in the city. Run by a private provider, Delphin combines social work with therapy, (if needed) temporary housing and income generating and community building opportunities through urban gardening and fish production. Most of these services are delivered by the organization itself, while others (such as housing) are provided in cooperation with the municipality and others.

The core of the team is made up of trained 'socio-educational' professionals, aided by other experts in occupational therapy, technical training and urban agriculture. Through the inclusion of urban farming and the provision of such varied services, the project aims to provide young people not just with specific types of help, but with a chance to belong to a community, form new relationships and experience their own agency. This is seen as fundamental in enabling troubled young people to find joy and motivation for their lives.

Delphin provides its main service through a contract with the municipality, but its independence allows for more room for flexibility and experimentation. The service benefits from multiple legs of funding (municipal, EU and private), which is enabled by its legal structure whereby the urban farming and aquaponics operation is organised into a separate legal entity.

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Key takeaways

There are significant differences in the two programmes cited above in their organizational structure. The Delphin project itself provides a number of services for young people, while the Accompaniment program in Barakaldo acts more like a mediator or gateway to access services offered by other providers. Yet, despite these differences, the two and other integrated projects not specifically cited here are remarkably similar in their objectives and basic approach.



Personalization and process-orientation.

In both cases, the very first step in the program is the development of individual care strategies. This implies an important shift in the approach to service provision whereby offering standardized forms of help – with strict requirements and time frames – is replaced with a focus on the needs of the young person. This also implies the need for new skills and a high level of flexibility on the part of the provider, not just in the initial phase of needs assessment, but all throughout the process.



Focus on the capabilities and aspirations of young people.

Another key inversion of traditional welfare logics implicit in the approach of innovative interventions is their focus on not just what the young person in question lacks but also on what they already have such as ideas, skills and resources. Such an approach questions the division of roles between welfare provider and recipient through harvesting the agency of young people.



Cross-departmental approach.

The key feature of both case studies is their holistic and cross-departmental approach – that is the way they attempt to address multiple facets of a young person's life simultaneously in an integrated fashion. In the case of Delphin, this is made possible through the provision of multiple interconnected services 'in-house', while in the Accompaniment program it is done by a dedicated team acting as a linchpin holding together multiple different providers. In both cases though it seems significant that the service is delivered by a non-governmental organization, enabling more flexible operation.



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