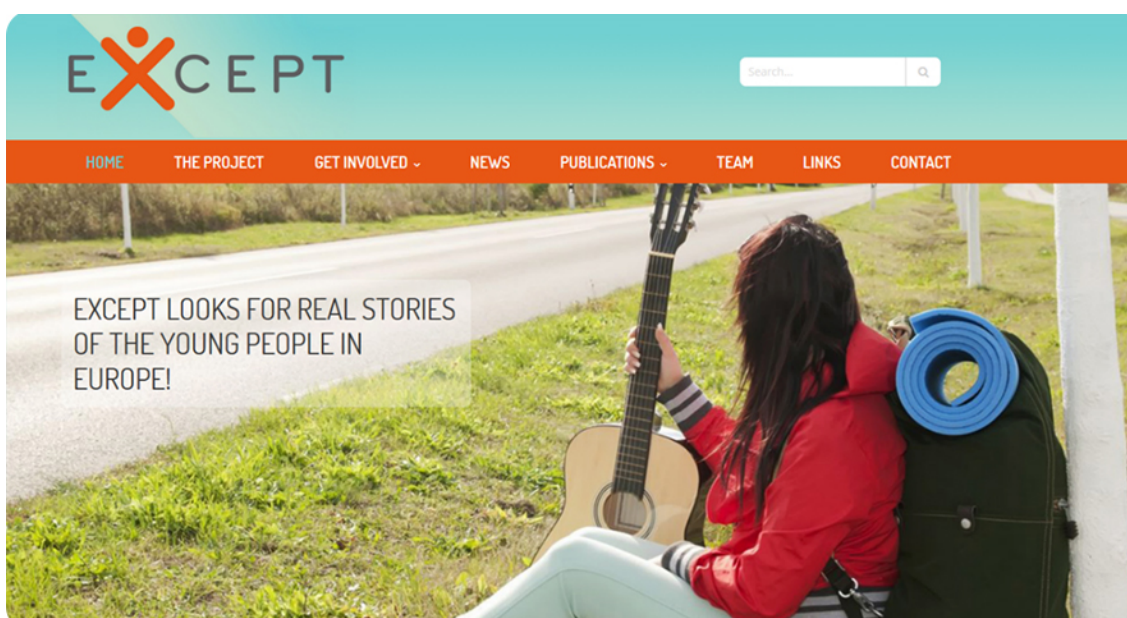


Composition and cumulative disadvantage of youth across Europe



INTRODUCTION

EXCEPT is an EU funded research project that aims to develop evidence based and contextually relevant policy recommendations for youth inclusion and employment policies in the EU-28 and Ukraine.

The main objectives of EXCEPT are:

1. Understanding the multi-faceted risks of social exclusion of youths
2. Studying youth's multiple risks of social exclusion in a dynamic process and life course perspective
3. Bringing in the perspective of youth: self-perception and coping strategies
4. Evaluating the effects and effectiveness of policies
5. Generating new ideas for policy improvement

The research consortium consists of partner institutions from Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Germany, Italy, Poland, Sweden, UK and Ukraine bringing together a diverse research expertise along with the knowledge of varying economic, social and institutional contexts.

The project adopts a mixed-methods study design to uncover how job insecurities and labour market exclusion affect youth's well-being and health, chances of gaining autonomy and economic independence by leaving the parental home and forming their own families, as well as short-term and long-term risks of poverty, material deprivation and capabilities of qualifying for social security. Having a focus on recent school leavers, a population group which is highly vulnerable to labour market risks, adopting a life-course perspective, and putting youth's voices into the centre of the discussion are distinguishing features of the EXCEPT approach.

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FIRST EVIDENCE

The EXCEPT project started with a comprehensive review of the theoretical literature on social exclusion to form a conceptual framework and a quantitative comparative study of the EU-28 countries and Ukraine to describe the situation of youths and identify high-risk groups of youths for the subsequent analytical work. One of the conceptual innovations of EXCEPT is to look at subjective and objective experiences of labour market insecurities next to the traditionally considered unemployment and NEET indicators.

Quantitative evidence:

Since we are interested in the labour market situation of young people not studying and with limited experience in the labour market, our sample is limited to recent school leavers, aged 15-29. Thus, EXCEPT adopts a life-course approach, focusing not on the youth age group, but on recent school leavers in European countries. The Project's first study compared various indicators and found that the situation of youth in Europe with respect to labour market exclusion and insecurity varies considerably across countries.

The main findings are:

- Recent school leavers are more disadvantaged in the labour market than prime age workers: they are more likely to be unemployed or among NEET (not in education neither in employment nor in training), and the last economic crisis deteriorated the labour market situation of recent school leavers in the majority of European countries (except Germany).
- Unemployment of recent school leavers varies considerably between the European countries: the worst outcomes are observed for graduates from Greece, Spain, Italy and Croatia. Educational attainment is associated with improved chances of recent school leavers to enter labour market in the majority of countries.
- In most post-socialist countries, atypical, insecure forms of employment are a rare phenomenon both among recent school leavers and prime age workers; in Spain, Greece and Italy the labour market exclusion of recent school leavers, depicted by high unemployment rate, overlaps with high employment insecurity.
- Labour market entrance trajectories of recent school leavers differ among the European countries. In Southern Europe and in some post-socialist countries labour market mobility is low, while in Austria, the Netherlands, and the UK the transition of recent graduates to employment is much faster.



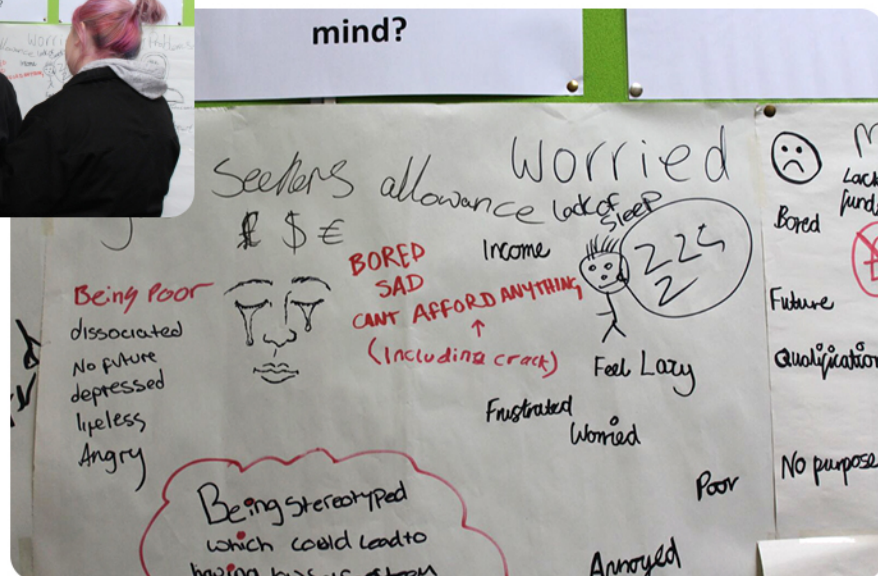
Existing policies:

EXCEPT research on policies started with an overview of policies at EU level that address youth labour market problems. Since 1997, youth labour market participation policy interventions have been part of a coordinated European Strategy with Youth Opportunities Initiative, giving a new impetus in reducing youth unemployment in 2011. Formerly limited to so-called “soft” regulation, the EU has recently intensified the level of its engagement in shaping national youth employment policies in two ways. First, it now imposes a common policy framework to all Member States via the adoption of the European Youth Guarantee (2013) and a related obligation for each country to develop its national implementation plan.

Second, it earmarks part of the European budget to support national youth employment promotion. In further work, EXCEPT will look into how and to what extent the youth employment initiatives are able to address the real causes of youth unemployment and exclusion.



EXCEPT graffiti wall, UK, March 2016



Youth voices:

The main characteristic of the EXCEPT project is that the problems are considered from the perspective of youths. It is important to understand which expectations, difficulties and attitudes young people experience with regard to their labour market situation and available employment policies. This allows us to bridge the gap between existing policies, their efficiency and the actual needs of youth.

EXCEPT applies diversified approaches to the collection of youth experiences in verbal, but also in visual and emotional, forms in order to better understand their needs and coping strategies. In many activities EXCEPT communicated with youth and gave youth a voice. To give one example: On the 1st of March 2016, the University of Kent set up a graffiti wall at Canterbury College. Apprentices from all different subject areas were invited to come and write or draw their thoughts and feelings in relation to the following question “When you think about the possibility of being unemployed, what words or images come to mind?” 27 apprentices took part in the event and



through the words they chose and the images used, they expressed sadness, anxiety and fear – fear of not being able to have a family in later life (as not being able to afford a home, etc.) as well as fear of being stereotyped and stigmatised for being on benefits.

Another example is the EXCEPT photo competition that has recently started. In order to better understand youths' experience of becoming adult, EXCEPT asked young people around Europe to tell what it actually means through a photograph. Is it about getting a job, being able to pay your bills, having more freedom or maybe taking one's own decisions and bearing the consequences independently?



EXCEPT photo competition photograph by Josephine, UK

EXCEPT researchers are currently carrying out hundreds of in-depth interviews with young men and women who are experiencing labour market exclusion and insecurity across Europe. This brings youth voices into the centre of the discussion to better understand the effects of policies on the choices, strategies and conditions of young people in relation to different institutional contexts and different welfare state systems. Notably, the study documents youths' perspectives on policies' effectiveness, their positive and unintended effects, as well as difficulties and successes in their implementation country by country. Comments made by the interviewees also allow us to collect useful data in order to identify those already-developed formal and informal practices that could be considered successful and potentially transferable from one context to another, and to gather suggestions for designing further policy recommendations.

Our interviews show the variety of youths' experiences and that labour market exclusion and insecurities and their consequences for other life domains of young people are a complex problem that vary across and inside countries. We will soon have systematic insights about the attitudes of young people across Europe towards employment services and policies and their experience with them. The following six examples of quotes from qualitative interviews provide a first impression of youths' experiences and attitudes, some of which are positive and some disappointing, with respect to policy measures.



(male, 29, unemployed, Germany): Exactly, that's extremely disappointing. Instead of helping that you can escape from unemployment, the employment agency gives a shit about you. You have to care about yourself [...] However, at the moment in the newspaper there isn't any job announcement I can do or I am qualified for. [...] There is no offer, neither as a construction worker, because it is winter, nor for any other job. And for other jobs I haven't got the required vocational training. That's a problem. How can I cope with that?

(female, 25, unemployed, Germany): Well it is (...) I have to say that I liked it, because I'm doing something and I am able to say "okay, I get Hartz IV [unemployment benefits] but I'm doing something" [...] but I think it is a really good measure, because I have to say [...] they also give certificates for what you do. You can also apply with it and perhaps it is also good for the CV if you say "hey, instead of having done nothing, hey, I did that" and... For example, we did our forklift license there and they also paid for it

(female, 24, unemployed, Ukraine): I want to find a job, like a real normal job in an office where I can work as other people do. – Have you addressed employment centre with that? - ... No.. if I did I would have to take that job - ?.. - ...I have a small daughter, I need to be flexible, and at that jobs I will have to work from 9 till 6 and what I will earn? 1500 UAH¹ per month? It's nothing. I will need to spend all this money only for transport and for food there. I can earn almost the same money working as promoter or animator from time to time, but then at least I will have some free time and can spend it on myself and my daughter.

(female, 21, unemployed, Estonia): Actually ... all those unemployment offices taken together, they haven't helped me at all, because they all say that I am such a good communicator and I am so brisk, that I can manage on my own more or less. They only offer me, but they don't have the right kind of job to offer me and I have to manage by myself. I go there for 10 minutes, schedule another meeting and that's all... So, if the person is a good communicator or talks a lot or talks like she should get any job, this doesn't mean, that she will get a job right away. It can be only on the surface, indirect. They should try to look at the background more deeply, what is behind all of that, and then start to help.

(female, 27, temporarily employed, UK): No that (the Job Centre) wouldn't be the first point of call I don't think, especially as they're not great and I have been to them before and signed on and they have been like "okay sign on and then get lost!"

(male, 28, employed, Italy): Are there any programs or measures, promoted by public institutions or private organizations you have turned to or you would turn to? - No. There aren't... and, I don't know, maybe I don't have that much trust in these... not much...- What do you mean, how does it come that you don't have any trust? - Well... maybe because of what I see around, because I hear... but ... I don't know, honestly they inspire me that much trust. I think that yes, sometimes yes, you can try, but I won't entrust it, I won't rely on it, I don't give it all my trust, that's it.

¹ 52 EUR



**FOR MORE
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