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Book Part — Published Version

Policy themes on family matters

Provided in Cooperation with:
WZB Berlin Social Science Center

Suggested Citation: Nazio, Tiziana; Gábos, András (2017) : Policy themes on family matters, In: O'Reilly, Jacqueline Moyart, Clémentine Nazio, Tiziana Smith, Mark (Ed.): Youth Employment: STYLE Handbook, ISBN 978-1-910172-18-6, CROME, Brighton, pp. 207-211, https://style-handbook.eu/contents-list/family-matters/policy-themes-on-family-matters/

This Version is available at:
https://hdl.handle.net/10419/232040

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Policy themes on family matters

Tiziana Nazio and **András Gábos**

The research work being carried out on the influence of the family of origin is informative to policy-making around several key aspects of young people's jobsearch and insertion process. We studied how employment outcomes are connected to family social background and how they reflect on young people's plans for family formation or their decision to return to the parental home. In particular, important findings and policy implications can be drawn regarding

1. employment services and guidance for young people

2. more gender-equal opportunities in the labour markets and

3. income support measures for unemployed and first-time jobseekers.

Employment services and guidance for young people
Research findings suggest that family resources, both economic and non-economic (from co-resident and non-co-resident members), can strongly stratify opportunities for young people (Berloffa et al. 2015; 2106). Family resources seem strategic in guiding them through employment paths and helping them to avoid employment traps, gain access to social networks, develop soft skills, acknowledge their potential and interests, and select and afford educational investments. Our results revealed that the tightened labour market conditions for youth over the crisis period might even sharpen existing differences, which would suggest a need for better employment services for young people. These findings highlight the opportunities for policy interventions aimed at re-addressing the intergenerational transmission of (dis)advantages, especially in Anglo-Saxon and Mediterranean countries, where the effects are stronger.

Given the relevance of early stages of the employment career for later outcomes (Berloffa et al. 2016), a comprehensive investment strategy in young people's transition to employment should become a priority. Key steps would be: (1) increasing opportunities for low- and middle-class children, and for those from low work-intensity households, to pursue higher education; and (2) offering later guidance for young people's strategic planning through the initial steps of their career.

In particular, policy interventions should be targeted at young people living in households where parents or other family members do not work. These interventions should focus both on young people's aspirations and motivation, and on giving them access to an effective jobsearch service.

Interventions might comprise raising awareness among parents on the importance of their expectations, guidance role, and array of options with respect to their children's educational routes (length and affordability) and potential returns. Policies should also focus on offering career guidance, especially for young people from poorer backgrounds, so as to increase aspirations and recognise and plan viable strategies towards the achievement of short- and long-term career goals.

Further, policy interventions should aim at securing more even access to tertiary education by family background, especially in those countries where tuition fees are high and young people are excluded from entitlement to economic support while studying, or where residential costs are an obstacle to the pursuit of higher-level studies. Research results (Berloffa et al. 2016; Filandri et al. 2016a) also revealed family influences on the educational routes pursued by young people, with children from households with poor attachment to the labour market entering employment earlier and being exposed to higher risks of unemployment or future employment traps.

Further, all empirical evidence provided around family effects in the STYLE project revealed the strong capacity that the family background has to affect young people's life chances (both in the labour market and around family formation). Policies and interventions should invest in educational programs (already at younger ages) to increase self-awareness about one's abilities and interests; to increase equality in educational aspirations and expectations; and to provide more broadly some of the soft skills that better-off parents can afford to give their children (this might include self-confidence, leadership, resilience, diplomacy, cooperative teamwork and mediation).

Finally, providing wider and more homogeneous access to opportunities for internships or company-based training might contribute to counterbalancing wealthier families' higher capacity to access these resources through personal networks. This could be achieved through investments in educational institutions' career-support functions or through employment agencies. Policies should provide young people with opportunities for exchange, mentoring and guidance within mixed environments, for sharing opportunities and social networks, and for enjoying the experience of a larger array of strategies and possible outcomes. This is strategic insofar as perceptions become highly selective in closed social circles, while attitudes are actually formed and strategies are pursued on the basis of the perceived available options.

More gender-equal opportunities in the labour markets

Our research provided evidence that securing better employment prospects for women (i.e., the mothers of young labour market entrants) would both benefit employment outcomes for young people and favour family formation (Berloffa et al. 2015; Filandri et al. 2016b). In particular, we revealed a strong association between mothers' employment and children's later occupational outcomes (with speedier transitions and increased employment participation of daughters, among other results). This suggests the utility of implementing policies aimed at favouring

mothers' employment in order to prevent more difficulties for future generations. Our results also revealed that, for younger cohorts in recent times, a more gender-equal participation in the labour market is associated with a greater advancement in the transition to adulthood – for both genders (Filandri et al. 2016b). Results indicated the relevance of labour market structure, specifically of women's participation in the labour market (i.e., higher female employment rate), being significantly associated with all outcome states around family formation (employment and residential independence, partnership and parenthood). These results offer insights into a growing gender equality and a shift, especially for younger generations, to a double-breadwinning model in families, where two jobs (and income sources) are needed, desired or might be normatively perceived as appropriate for family formation. With growing levels of education and of uncertainty in the labour markets, self-realisation and personal autonomy (also through gaining an independent income) might be increasingly perceived as a necessary precondition to family formation by both male and female young people.

Addressing gender gaps early in the life course could help avoiding later inequalities and their long-term consequences. Gökşen et al. (*in this volume*) showed that gender mainstreaming has not been systematically applied to youth labour market policies in several case-study countries. Results from the research on family effects support the view that anti-discrimination policies that promote gender-equal access to employment and equal career opportunities might support young people in establishing an independent living and forming their own families, while also contributing to pursuing the objective of more inclusive and sustainable growth at the societal level. These measures also include conciliation policies to retain women in the labour force, such as paid leaves, long-term contracts (as opposed to fixed-term), care services and flexible working hours.

Income support for unemployed and first-time jobseekers

As of now, in most European countries, flexible jobs (agency work, fixed-term contracts, part-time work, mini-jobs, some forms of self-employment) risk becoming a lower segment of the labour force, catering especially for young people. These jobs often provide poor protection against risks such as, unemployment, illness, or providing the guarantee of a secure income in old age. Research results (Berloffa et al. 2015; 2016; Filandri et al. 2016a) suggested that relaxing hiring and firing legislation without compensating with generous social protection and active labour market policies, while also increasing the retirement age, risks affecting young people's capacity to establish themselves in employment in a way that strongly stratifies their life opportunities according to their class of origin. In the absence of a universal income provision for the unemployed, children from wealthier families may, with economic support from their families, bridge unemployment or non-employment much more easily than others. Especially Filandri et al. (2016a) indicated that both social origin and occupational circumstances were predictors of the likelihood of receiving regular income support. Non-employed children were more likely to benefit from parental support throughout, as are those from higher social classes. However,

parental resources seemed stronger predictors than young people's needs: in all countries, employed children from higher social backgrounds had a similar (if not higher) likelihood of receiving regular transfers than unemployed children from the lower class.

Further, increases in unequal access to employment and household income would further jeopardise lower-class young peoples' life chances and opportunities. They would also, at the country level, increase losses in productivity (with a tremendous loss of productive potential) and raise the pressure for more passive income support measures. Alternatively, they would unevenly strain families who have to compensate for retrenching welfare and increasingly fragile markets.

A growing use of temporary contracts (relaxing hiring and firing regulations), without strong and universal income support measures, may exacerbate the turbulence experienced by young people in the initial steps of their careers (by increasing overall unemployment duration and 'need' strategies and recourse to 'failure' strategies or informal work). It may also increase young people's dependence on their families of origin, further diversify their destinies on the basis of their social origin, and worsen their prospects of a successful employment outcome in the longer term.

These findings suggest that benefit systems should be harmonised to include young people, because labour market segmentation, prolonged turbulence and informal work can easily become traps for youngsters in need of gainful employment. These inequalities could be redressed by means of redistributive policies aimed at supporting the income level of the lower class, especially during non-employment, either through a universal system of unemployment benefits for young people (unrelated to the previous contribution history) and/or housing allowances. The analyses from Task 8.4 and Task 8.5 support measures whereby government social protection programmes guarantee regular cash transfers to poor young adults in periods of non-employment, conditioned either on active jobsearch or participation in ALMPs.

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