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Introduction [A]

Tackling youth unemployment has long been a key priority in Europe. In the European context, particularly in the last quarter of a century, the fragile position of the unemployed, and especially the young unemployed, has for the most part been considered to be the result of individual failings, such as weak competencies, unattractive CVs, or poor motivation (references needed here). Consistent with this, European institutions have promoted supply-side policies aimed at dealing with youth unemployment by improving the *employability* of the young, and young people have become one of the primary targets of the activation policies which developed as a key policy approach (Lødemel and Trickey 2001; van Berkel and Hornemann Møller 2002; Barbier 2005; Serrano Pascual 2007).

Over the years, supply-side labour market policies have been criticized for several reasons. First (and beyond the scope of this chapter), they have been challenged for their failure to make a real impact on employment. The rise in unemployment and inactivity rates, especially among young people (Dietrich 2012) in the current recession, has drawn attention to the insufficiency of supply-side policies alone. . This has brought back onto the European and national agendas the need for policies to stimulate the creation of more jobs, and of a better quality. Second, the activation approach has been criticised for its coercive and stigmatizing character, as opposed to a more empowerment-oriented approach (Serrano Pascual 2007, Torfing 1999). A third source of criticism concerns the

contradictory nature of the individualisation process that has accompanied the development of these policies. There is a tendency towards the individualisation of responsibility for unemployment (blaming individuals for the reasons already mentioned), and – increasingly – of the financial management of programmes (with the growing use of vouchers as the tool to regulate individualised relations between the unemployed person and the provider supplying the services) (Sabatinelli and Villa 2011). Paradoxically, though, while the personalised character of these measures has long been described as their key strength (reference), the measures are often standardised in their contents, based on a simplified definition of employability and on the application of common rules, incentives and sanctions. Programmes are often targeted at broad categories of unemployed people, such as ‘young people at risk of unemployment’, that are understood to be internally undifferentiated (Sabatinelli, Villa 2011).

This chapter challenges the assumption underpinning supply-side labour market policies that young people at risk of unemployment are a homogenous group. Over the last few decades, transitions to adulthood have become prolonged and de-standardised. This trend, coupled with the diversification of pathways in and out of the workforce, has increased the group of young people at risk of unemployment, blurred its boundaries, and increased its inner differentiation (Billari 2004, Guillemard 2005, Bynner 2005). The group is not only differentiated by individual features such as skills, motivation, and experiences, but also by the type of resources that they do or do not have access to. The resources that young people have access to through the welfare state depend largely on the context they are embedded in, including the welfare model and the way that young peoples’ citizenship status is understood in the country where they live (Walther 2006). Yet, they also depend on the features of their previous labour market participation, especially in some countries. The diversification of pathways in and out of work and the implications for

social rights has led to increasing differentiation in young peoples' experiences of labour market risk.

Drawing on interviews with vulnerable European young people, this chapter aims to deepen our understanding of the conditions of social vulnerability in young people at risk of unemployment. By social vulnerability we do not mean a state of material deprivation, but rather a multidimensional condition of instability in one or more of the main systems of social integration – family, welfare or labour market – which may add up to individual vulnerability (Ranci 2010). The analysis explores the factors that form the basis of work instability among young people, and the resources to which they have access that can act as protective factors. It also explores the impact on their well-being and their strategies for coping with labour market precariousness. In doing so, it draws out both individual features and structural factors, and situates the relationship between the individual and the structural taking in account the biography of the interviewees within a diachronic perspective. A comparative approach is adopted in order to investigate whether these relationships are predominantly found in some countries or welfare models, or whether they cut across them.

The rest of the chapter is organised into four sections. In the next section, the research objectives and design are presented. In the third section, we present five 'profiles' of work precariousness that emerged from our interviews; we explore the ambivalence of their work instability and investigate the interrelations between their agency, the constraints they face, and the resources they rely on. In the fourth section, we discuss the impact of unemployment on the well-being of our young interviewees, and their strategies to cope with it. In the final section, we draw some conclusions and implications for policy-making.

Research objective and design [A]

The results presented in this chapter are drawn from a wider research project, the European FP7 project WILCO,¹ which set out to examine, through a cross-national comparison, if and how local welfare systems promote social cohesion in European cities. The project focused on three vulnerable groups (young precariously employed; single mothers with pre-school aged children; and first generation migrants) and three policy areas (passive and active labour-market policies; early childhood education and care; and housing). The comparison included ten European countries, covering all geographical areas and welfare models: Sweden for the Nordic model; Germany and France for the continental model; UK for the Anglo-Saxon liberal model; Italy and Spain for the Mediterranean model; Poland and Croatia for the Eastern European countries; plus two hybrid cases: Switzerland, considered a mix of the continental and liberal model, and The Netherlands, a mix of the Nordic and continental model with strong insertions of the liberal approach in the last few decades (Esping-Andersen 1999, Ferrera 1996, Van Oorschot 2006).

This chapter focuses on one of the three cited vulnerable groups that were the subject of the research project, young precariously employed, and aims to address in a comparative perspective the consequences of occupational instability for social vulnerability in this group. It draws on the qualitative analysis of 120 in-depth interviews carried out in twenty European cities: two cities in each of the above mentioned countries, namely one large regional town and one middle-sized city.² In order to target vulnerable young people, the sample was selected on the basis of the following criteria: aged between 18 and 33 years³; either jobless or in unstable employment; with a low educational level (maximum ISCED 3⁴ and not studying at university); either living autonomously, or eager to live autonomously but living with their family of origin because of insufficient economic means. The rationale

was to try to capture young adults at the time they exit, or strive to exit, their family of origin. Interviewees were recruited through a large range of employment, orientation and training services, youth centres and other agencies.

The study set out to understand the participants' education and labour market trajectory, the resources they mobilised or accessed to cope with unemployment, and the impact of unemployment on their personal wellbeing and strategies for the future. The next two sections present the findings of the interviews. In particular, the following section identifies and compares five profiles of work precariousness, while the subsequent one analyses the impact of unemployment on the wellbeing of interviewees.

Findings: profiles of labour market risk and sources of welfare among European youth [A]

The interviews revealed that the labour market experiences of the young participants in our study did not conform to a 'standard' profile of unemployment. Rather, they represented a 'grey' state of weak integration into the labour market. Young peoples' working biographies were discontinuous and unstable and their stories were made up of episodes of unemployment followed by occasional jobs, temporary contracts, and failed efforts of starting apprenticeships or university. Often, unemployment was the result of the expiration of a temporary contract. The persistence of the current global economic crisis has intensified some of the labour market disadvantage experienced by these young people, particularly for some categories, such as first or second generation migrants (a finding particularly evident in Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands) and women (as seen in Italy).

The research participants' weak integration into the labour market was the result of several factors. While education was perceived by most to be a key factor to ease the transition to a permanent position in the labour market (as research confirms, see for instance Isengard 2003), for many, their education level or/and their specialization did not make them competitive in the labour market. In most cases, this was a result of two processes. The most fragile cases dropped out of school early; others did have a professional qualification but it was inadequate, either because it was in a sector that was too specialised or in crisis or because it lacked a clear vocational route to meet labour market demands.

Although characterised by low levels of education and inadequate qualifications, the unstable labour market integration of the study participants was often the result of a combination of vulnerabilities, of which low education was just one. Fragile familial circumstances, a chain of unstable biographical steps, and the opportunities and constraints offered by local labour markets and welfare systems influenced their stories of precariousness. Many of them had experienced difficult family situations, some of them had a criminal record and some of the women had experienced a teenage pregnancy. Their complex biographies suggested that young people's vulnerability stems from an individual fragility in a range of mutually reinforcing domains (family, labour market, welfare system) (Ranci 2010).

While all of the young people in our study were weakly integrated into the labour market and shared similar experiences of work instability, they were characterised by different biographical and work trajectories, and had access to different resources that protected them to varying degrees from work instability. Among our 120 interviewees, we identified five different 'profiles' of work instability or labour market risk, based on a multifaceted combination of features such as education and skills, labour market trajectories and

aspirations. The main elements considered in the analysis were: the age of their first 'serious' job (excluding occasional and seasonal work), if they had ever had one; their educational achievements or failures; the number and duration of employment experiences accumulated; the number and duration of spells of unemployment or inactivity; and whether participants pursued clear individual professional goals (such as becoming a filmmaker, or establishing their own business). On the basis of these indicators, taking into account similarities and differences, a qualitative construction of different profiles was carried out.

For each of the identified profiles we then examined which resources were available to the participants to help them cope with and overcome their condition of instability. Their access or lack of access to resources is central to understanding the degree to which labour market risks precipitated social vulnerability. Drawing on Polanyi's (1978) spheres of socio-economic integration, we classified resources according to three pillars: the (labour) market, redistributive public welfare, and support from close primary networks, such as family. We also took into account the role of solidarity networks (non-government organisations, neighbourhood associations and the like). Resources stemming from third sector bodies were classified as 'public welfare' where organisations were – entirely or partly – implementing publicly-financed programmes. We explored how the resources varied in their generosity, continuity and their actual impact on individual welfare, but we also assessed the balance between contributions from different pillars, as access to resources in more than one pillar can offer greater protection should resources in another dry up. Most interviewees reported having at least some support from all three welfare pillars. However, as expected given our sampling process, the market was significantly less prominent than public and family resources.

The next section sets out the five profiles of work precariousness, describing the distinctive features of each one, as well as outlining the challenges facing those in each group. Two profiles put in evidence the lack of motivation of young who confronts labour market instability (such as “Young and Fragile” and “Marginal and Weak”) quite often related to a experience of dropping out from the school system, while others show how labour market might fail in favouring the integration of young people when their professional profile is not congruent to the labour demand. Lastly, “Precarious with fragmented path” show the possible outcomes of the long-term entrapment in temporary jobs.

It also sets out the different resources available to each group of young people, and how these resources may be organised into ‘resource packages’, or configurations of resources from the three pillars. The research did not reveal a strong association between any precariousness profile and socio-demographic characteristics such as gender or migrant background. In addition, no clear pattern emerges in the way that the five precariousness profiles appear across countries and welfare regime models.

Interrupted careers [B]

The individuals in the first profile were typically among the oldest of the research participants (aged 27 and over). This group (made up of 15 interviewees) had experienced a more ‘traditional’ form of unemployment. After initially experiencing strong labour market integration, resulting in a coherent professional profile, they were pushed out of the labour market and had remained unemployed for quite a long time.

The reasons for which they were unable to find another job were differentiated on the basis of gender. Men typically interpreted their exit from the labour market as a consequence of the business cycle: quite often male interviewees blamed the economic crisis for their situation, particularly since neither their motivation, nor their experience, nor

activation measures seemed enough to find another job. In contrast, many female interviewees, who were aged around 30 at the time of the interview, felt discriminated against either because they had a young child or because there was the potential for them to have a baby and thus take maternity leave during an employment contract. For a number of female participants, their last contract had been interrupted, or not renewed, because of a pregnancy. Age was anyway an issue for both men and women: as they grew older, they could no longer benefit from financial incentives for employers to hire younger workers. In other cases, temporary contracts were not renewed because public regulation required that they be transformed into permanent ones after a certain number of extensions, a stipulation with which their previous employer was reluctant to comply.

I've been a hairdresser for 11 years but now I've been unemployed for about two years. I didn't want to change jobs, it's just that I couldn't find a job anymore, also because I'm beyond the age for apprenticeship contracts. This is very limiting for me and it's one of the reasons why I'm doing other courses to try and change jobs.

(Female, 31, Italy)

As a result of their relatively strong labour market integration in the past, these individuals had built up a greater entitlement to public support than their peers. In most cases, they were accessing contribution-based income support payments for unemployment that are more generous than the means-tested social assistance schemes, and which are often accompanied by re-training and re-orientation services. These participants were also more connected with public employment services, and were more aware of their social rights. More than half of this group combined this public support with help from their families, either their parents or their partners, making their 'resource package' balanced and sound.

But more than a quarter of these individuals, a larger proportion than in the whole sample, relied entirely on public welfare. They received monetary transfers (mainly unemployment benefits but also child allowances, housing benefits or others), they lived in public housing, and their children were enrolled in public day-care facilities. The information they could access about available jobs or training opportunities all came through their contacts with public welfare agencies.

The soundness of the resources they could access, including the relative generosity of public resources, supported the individuals in this group to continue to actively pursue labour market reintegration, despite challenges associated with the length of their unemployment, the poor economic conditions in their localities, having young children or other family members to care for, and the outdated nature of their professional skills. The major challenge for these young people was overcoming the scarring effect of their long period of unemployment. For those relying exclusively on public welfare, an additional risk was that they had little to fall back on if their entitlement to public support ceased or there were public policy changes which reduced their access to support schemes, for instance due to austerity programmes.

Precarious with fragmented paths [B]

The largest group in our sample (48 interviewees) included individuals who had had more or less continuous, but transient, labour market opportunities. Accepting the best offers they received in the short-term, they managed to achieve income continuity while never achieving stable employment. Even though they experienced the shortest unemployment spells among our interviewees (less than 6 months on average), these were sometimes only spaced out by very short contracts of few weeks or even days. As a result, at the time of interview, they were trapped in a 'grey' condition of unstable labour market integration,

which might deteriorate over time, since their fluctuation did not allow them to accumulate enough consistent professional experience to be competitive in any sector or profession. As they grew older, their CVs became increasingly fragmented and it became more difficult for them to achieve a permanent job contract and forge a successful career:

If I had to write a CV now, I think I could fill up 3 pages at least... My parents always told me: 'make sure you have an income'... so at some point I was just too easy in accepting anything that I was offered [...] And whether that helped me in my career? Well, if I look at where I was when I was 18 and where I am now, then no.

(Male, 30, The Netherlands)

The lack of employment stability also jeopardised the future prospects of these individuals achieving independence by leaving their family of origin and establishing a new household.

The interviewees with this profile can be described as 'mid-siders', that is, those workers with atypical contracts, a group that has increased significantly in the last few decades due to the flexibilisation of labour markets (Jessoula et al 2010). 'Mid-siders' are not entirely excluded from the labour market, but are only entitled to part of the welfare protection that those with permanent contracts are granted. Not only was their access to social protection limited, but many young people in this group reported being forced to accept jobs with low wages. The drastic deregulation of job contracts over the last few decades has increased the incidence of precarious and fragmented career paths, increasing the vulnerability of young workers. This is particularly true in Southern European countries, where the new social risks created by labour market deregulation were not compensated for by reforms of social protection systems (Bonoli 2007).

Two thirds of the *precarious with a fragmented* path reported having very limited resources across all three pillars. They had few opportunities to draw resources from the labour market, and their relatives were for the most part as economically disadvantaged as they were. They had limited entitlement to public welfare because of the low degree of social protection associated with atypical job contracts and meagre nature of residualist social assistance-style income support payments, particularly in Southern and Eastern countries. Hence, in spite of their ongoing participation in the labour market, the degree of social vulnerability experienced by this group was the highest of all five groups, since they could barely make ends meet and their integration into basic social spheres was extremely weak.

For this group, the chain of short-term experiences fostered a general mistrust of the labour market as a sphere of social integration. Only a minority in this group declared that finding a new job would be the solution to their precarious situation. Most did not view it as a solution, as none of their many past occupational experiences has been and they felt that any new job they were likely to get would probably be similarly short and lacking in career prospects. Confronted with the reduced availability of jobs brought about by the enduring economic crisis, many appeared to have no idea of what the future held for them, both in the short term and in the medium- to long-term.

Flexible with a professional project [B]

The smallest group we identified was made up of nine young adults (around 24 years old on average), characterised by being highly-motivated to pursue a professional career. Interestingly, most of them were involved in creative and artistic fields, such as theatre, dance or filmmaking. Their passion nourished the determination with which they pursued their professional goals. Each had a strategy for pursuing a successful career that involved

alternating between employment and training initiatives with the aim of developing a set of competencies highly sought after in their field of interest. Many of them were involved in new educational projects in order to improve their chances of obtaining attractive positions.

These interviewees had access to a wide package of resources, made up of entitlements to public welfare, some attachment to the (labour) market and family support. Their strong motivation guided them in pursuing resources that made their end-goal more achievable: they sought out specialised training courses and public funds for cultural projects, they submitted bids for start-up funding, and they used their contacts to locate interesting employment opportunities which expanded their professional networks. These resources helped to keep them highly-motivated and able to invest financially in their careers. While the training that these interviewees participated in was often expensive (particularly when the fees were combined with the opportunity costs of study), some of them had a temporary, instrumental job to cover their basic needs while they studied and some relied on additional support from their family and primary networks to supplement their basic income. Parents often covered their housing costs or supported them with monetary transfers. Some of these interviewees avoided living with family by pooling resources and cohabiting with friends or colleagues with similar professional pursuits.

Their strong resource packages meant that these interviewees were in a position to cope with periods of unemployment. Except for the instrumental jobs that some undertook to supplement study, they were more selective about the jobs they accepted, seeking out work and training experiences that contributed to the development of their desired occupational profile. Often they were young enough to access contracts aimed at easing the first entrance in the labour market, making them competitive with older workers even if they lacked experience. Their selective labour market strategy was often rewarded by

obtaining longer job contracts than those acquired by individuals in the other four groups (17 months on average):

I have a precarious lifestyle. Probably, it is due to the fact that in Italy there aren't many opportunities for young people. You have the chance to learn a job at school, but it's hard to do it in practice afterwards. Many young people have good ideas to contribute to the creative sector, but it's hard to establish a real career, particularly in my field [film-making].

(Male, 28, Italy)

These interviewees seemed to cope better than others with the flexibility of their labour market involvement, which was perceived by these interviewees as typical not only of their generation, but also of the field in which they are interested. The most serious risk this group of young people faces is the failure of their professional project. Despite their high motivation, this may occur not only due to contingent economic cycles, but also because competition is intense in creative sectors and because the skills they accumulated are so specialised that they may not be easily transferred to other sectors.

Young and fragile [B]

The fourth profile we identified was made up of young people who had just exited the educational system at the time of the interview, quite often without achieving a basic qualification. Many of these 14 research participants had limited and fragmented work experience, mostly temporary (for example seasonal work in retail, personal services or tourism, sometimes without a contract), or attached to youth activation programmes. They were the youngest group in our sample (under 20 on average) and they still had not yet

developed a clear idea of their future. They exhibited little sense of agency to achieve self-determined goals; none spoke of passions or talents which they wanted to pursue, nor had they been motivated by any work experience in the past to pursue a career in a specific field. None actively pursued paid employment, and during unemployment spells they seldom underwent training or re-training. Some waited for someone to offer them 'something to do'. Their main aspiration was to access an apprenticeship. Although poorly paid or even unpaid in some countries, it was the only option they cited as a prospect for gaining some professional experience and improving their chances for labour market integration.

I was doubting a little, whether I should continue studying or not, so I didn't do anything for two or three months, just thinking if I was going to go back to school or look for a job. And then I decided to get a job because I wanted to earn money, help my parents and stuff, and then I started looking for a job.

(Male, 25, The Netherlands)

Two-thirds of those with a *fragile* profile had access to a variety of resources from the three welfare pillars. Still being young, many were supported by their families. Others had unstable family backgrounds and limited labour market attachment and as a result of the accumulation of social disadvantage, some of these participants were supported entirely by public welfare agencies. However, the remaining third had scant access to resources from any pillar, including public welfare. This sub-group, alongside the group identified in the next section, was the most vulnerable to the risk of social exclusion.

Occurring at such an early stage of life, this vulnerability is particularly dangerous. For this group, the most insidious risk was the passivity with which they approached their condition of unemployment. This lack of motivation, combined with their limited familiarity with the labour market, has the potential to turn their current NEET situation (not in employment, education or training) into a longer-lasting condition, jeopardising their medium or long-term professional prospects and leading to ongoing exclusion from education and employment. This is a particular risk for those who are not adequately supported by their family or formal services. The capacity of the social and employment services to intercept these cases and re-motivate them through concrete educational and employment options is vital to the future prospects of these young people.

Marginal and weak [B]

The individuals with this final profile (34 in total) are arguably the most fragile of all the research participants and they are quite often at risk of social exclusion. Besides a weak school record, including failures and dropping out, they also have a difficult personal and family background. Many had experienced parental illness, death or imprisonment, or a difficult parental separation. Some had difficult migration trajectories, or they had early contact with the criminal justice system (for illegal drug use or trafficking).

I started [lower secondary general schooling], but I failed and I went to a lower level [...], eventually dropping out, because of absence and fighting. I ended up in drugs-related crime, earning hundreds of euros a day. Finally, police caught me and I went to prison for a few months. With a record, I cannot apply for a job now, but I'm thinking of taking over a shop.

(Male, 22, The Netherlands)

In some cases, disability and illness made their integration into the labour market more difficult than that of their peers. In other cases, interviewees had caring responsibilities for dependent family members, which decreased the possibility of being employed full-time, and positions with flexible hours were difficult to find. For many young women, early pregnancy became an obstacle to labour market integration, especially if they had few options for sharing caring responsibilities (for instance after the separation from the child's father) or if childcare options were lacking in the area where they lived.

With these particularly precarious backgrounds, coupled with fragmented experiences in the labour market, most of these young people were long-term unemployed at the time of interview (on average, more than 18 months had passed since their last contract). They did not yet have clear ideas about what to do in the future. Some of the participants reported having been encouraged by their public employment services tutors to use the months of unemployment in order to get trained or re-trained, so as to be better equipped and more competitive once the economy started to recover. However in most cases, the interviewees reporting this had not acted on this suggestion.

Almost half of the participants in this group had access to scant or unbalanced resources, depending on one pillar alone, most commonly public welfare. Some received a wide range of supports by social services, including protected labour market experiences, income and housing support, and access to information. However, the quality of these initiatives depended on the generosity of the national and local welfare systems, and thus varied from country to country. In Southern and Eastern countries in particular, social assistance benefits are either meagre or lacking completely, labour market are programs limited, except for some local project-based exceptions, and housing provision or support are residual, so the overall impact of the all-welfare resource packages was limited.

Poorly integrated into the labour market and scarcely supported by their family and primary network, this sub-group of interviewees suffered a high level of social vulnerability. The fact that they relied heavily on public welfare resources exposed them to an additional risk: that their entitlements may expire or be reduced.

Work precariousness of the young: different profiles, differentiated needs [B]

Our analysis has identified five different profiles of labour market precariousness, evident across each of the ten European countries studied, and across welfare regimes. The findings highlight the complex and varied nature of work instability, showing the differing constraints facing young people with different profiles. Participants with *interrupted careers* experienced a traditional form of unemployment: after initially experiencing stable labour market integration, they found themselves outside the labour market; those with *precarious with fragmented paths* had completed one short contract after another, achieving neither stabilisation nor professionalisation; in contrast, the *flexible with professional career ambitions* included their multiple experiences in a coherent path guided by a strong orientation and motivation; the *young and fragile* seemed stuck in a long and difficult transition from education to work; and the *marginal and weak* combined difficult biographies and family background with a weak education and labour market integration.

Across the five profiles the young interviewees had access to different sets of resources. Approximately half of our interviewees, these resources were rather well-balanced, deriving from the market, the family, and public programmes. This sound 'package' protected them from a shift into impoverishment or at least kept them on the verge of subsistence. A quarter of our sample had access to an unbalanced set of resources, stemming mainly or exclusively from public welfare or family-based support. These

individuals are particularly at risk because if their only source of support should disappear (their entitlement to a measure could expire, or their parents may no longer be able to support them), they would be left with no other buffer. The remaining quarter only had access to a scant set of resources. Although they wanted to access more secure support through, for example, applying for welfare measures, they were either not entitled or lacked the relevant information about their rights. Others did not even try to apply, discouraged by previous stigmatising experiences.

In some instances, profiles of precariousness and resource packages combined to leave the participants with weak relationships to all three spheres: weak attachment to the labour market and limited support from family or the welfare state. Those in this group, including *the precarious with fragmented paths* and *the marginal and weak* who – at the same time – had only one source of support (all-welfare or all-family) or little support at all, were most at risk of becoming economically deprived and socially excluded. These young unemployed people bear the greatest level of social vulnerability in our sample, exposed to a large extent to market contingencies. Most of these cases were concentrated in the cities of Southern Europe, which supports existing research that finds – when the family is absent or unable to provide support – little other social buffer is available in the Mediterranean welfare systems (Leibfried 1992, Ferrera 2005).

The comparison of these profiles reveals that the impact of employment instability on social vulnerability is filtered by different configurations of resources. In the next section, we discuss the impact of employment instability on the well-being of the research participants, and the strategies they had to cope with it.

Coping with unemployment [A]

Managing the insufficiency of economic resources [B]

Although characterised by diverse profiles of work precariousness, the young Europeans that we interviewed shared similar strategies to cope with their conditions of instability that cut across welfare regimes and countries. The most common strategies involved changes in or a reorganisation of their life expectations and plans, something that has also emerged from previous research (Blossfeld *et al.* 2005), as well as reducing expenditure, both for consumption and for investment.

For many research participants, a reorganisation of life plans typically meant the postponement of steps towards autonomy and adulthood (such as moving out of their parents' home, co-habitation, and having children) or even, for some of them, taking a step backwards, and going back to live with their family of origin (reference Berrington chapter). Among those who did live outside of the parental home, most relied heavily on their family. In some instances, all available resources in the family (including the extended family) were put together in income-pooling strategies. This lifted these young participants beyond a threshold of dangerous social exclusion. Nevertheless, dependence on family stressed and depressed the young adults, who felt like 'late' developers, compared to an ideal of full autonomy that they believed one should have achieved at their age. Those who had returned to live with their parents after a period of autonomy complained of a sort of personal regression, and of not feeling treated as an adult by their relatives.

I moved back with my parents. They've always helped me, but the relationship is strained since I moved back, because they treat me as a child, not as an adult.

(Female, 24, Spain)

Me and my brother had to move back to mother, at the time the gas is shut down, we have no heating, I don't know what would be with their apartment becuese they are not paying credit.

(Female, 25, Croatia)

Even more widespread was the severe reduction of expenditure. This not only meant relinquishing everything that was not indispensable (such as leisure, sports, and holidays), but also cutting back on basic goods (like reducing health expenses or food quality). Some incurred debts on expenses like utilities, rent, and car insurance). Many dropped out of training courses, or gave up plans to start new ones because they lacked the money to do so. Only those *with a professional project* viewed training as a basic good or 'fundamental expense' and cut back on other essential goods – such as clothes or housing – or took out loans in order to pursue relevant courses.

Interviewees also developed a number of methods for increasing their income. Many borrowed money from relatives and friends or from social services where possible; some reported selling family goods (like second real estate properties, or the car) or, when they own or rent an apartment, find roommates in order to share the housing costs, several undertook minor illegal activities (such as selling drugs on the street). Some were developing migration plans, or even thinking about extreme solutions such as 'selling ovules', or 'having children' in order to receive family allowances and have priority for social housing.

The interviewees who reported having access to resources that they could 'fall back on', such as family support, said that while this did help to overcome their present difficult situation, it did not allay their concerns about the future. However, the interviewees facing the strongest challenges were those without resources to fall back on. For these young

people, the severe reduction of expenditure had a significant impact on their basic quality of life, both in terms of food and housing.

Now I go to the food bank once a week. In the beginning, I was ashamed by this, but now I can see that there are also people coming who have a job, but even for them it is not enough. My children also learned to buy cheap items like cheap chocolate or to look at the kg-price [and] that it is better to buy at the discount shop than at the supermarket just around the corner.

(Female, 28, Germany)

Wellbeing and strategies for the future [B]

Across all European countries in this study, young people reported the negative impact of labour market instability on their overall well-being. The important relationship between labour market attachment and wellbeing is a widely documented sociological phenomenon with a long history (see Jahoda, Lazarsfeld and Zeisel 1971). However, the sociological analysis of this relationship has regained momentum in recent years as the labour market has become precarious (Standing 2011), and a flexible model of work has come to predominate (Sennet 1998, Castel, 2003). In an increasingly flexible and unstable labour market, being a fully integrated member of the workforce remains of great importance both for peoples' financial stability and for their sense of identity (Strangleman 2007).

As a result of their precarious labour market attachment, our interviewees reported feelings of distress, anxiety, a loss of confidence, a negative outlook, and the absence of a strategy for the present and of plans for the future. These feelings simultaneously lead to and were reinforced by strained family relations, and/or psychological and other health

problems, such as depression and rapid changes in weight.. Some participants reported making an effort to maintain a routine: waking up early, carrying out everyday activities, and doing (cheap) sports or volunteer work. Others, on the contrary, had lost their daily routine, often remaining inactive all day, feeling worthless and useless, or even plunging into despair.

It's been very straining, I stayed at home, and just needing to walk my dog forced me to get out of my apartment. I lost contact with most friends.

(Male, 20, Spain)

I feel kind of worthless, although I can work: I used to get up early in the morning and worked for 12-14 hours a day. Now I often sleep until late in the morning and I have become fat.

(Male, 31, Germany)

In this sense, having a concrete 'project' or strategy for the future had an important impact on the wellbeing of some of the interviewees: these projects (most commonly including searching for a job, getting additional training or emigrating) helped many to avoid the sense that they were 'surrendering' to their situation of distress, by finding new motivation and becoming 'active'. Having no concrete plans for the future had a negative impact on their self-esteem, even among those with access to a reasonable level of resources.

Unemployment is taken away a lot of my pride. You always feel not good enough. It really gets you down

(Male, 25, UK)

Several young people reported that being engaged in activation programmes like training courses and protected jobs was fundamental to restoring their motivation, their self-esteem, and their daily routine. This was particularly important for those who were not pursuing an autonomous concrete professional project:

At first I felt really bad. Now, since I am in the program, I don't feel like an unemployed person anymore, and it's getting much better.

(Female, 21, Switzerland)

However, other interviewees reported disappointment in and suspicion towards public programmes. Some took an instrumental approach to the activation programmes, reporting actions like sending the exact number of applications the rules require (no less and no more), because they felt the programmes were just a baseless instrument to justify the provision of income support:

I just did what I had to do... At first I had to do two job applications, then three, then four... So I did all the basic things, I think 'ok I have to apply for jobs, and I want to work, but I am not going to send out 30 applications when I only have to do 10. Who's the fool then?' [...] I think opportunistically: 'ok, if you are going to stick to the rules, then I am going to stick to the rules too'.

(Male, 28, The Netherlands)

These findings suggest that the rigidity of activation measures may (further) reduce the trust that young recipients have towards public welfare and activation services, especially

when they feel compelled to accept jobs that do not match their skills, or that are of short duration and/or very low pay in order to protect their entitlement to support.

Conclusions [A]

In this chapter we have analysed the conditions of social vulnerability of poorly-educated and precariously employed young people living in ten European countries. We have examined their education and labour market pathways and the resources available to help them manage financially and plan for their future. The analysis has showed how similar degrees of work instability can result in varying degrees of social vulnerability, depending on diverse combinations of *individual factors*, such as personal skills and motivation, *structural factors*, such as the labour market context and social policy system,, and the support available from *family* and other sources. Reconstructing the pathways of interviewees through education and work allowed us to explore the effects of education and work history on the type of public welfare protection that they could access (especially in some countries), and on their motivation and strategic agency.

Youth unemployment has long been considered a consequence of individual shortcomings, to be tackled through supply-side measures aimed at increasing individual employability. However, this approach has been criticized because it is no substitute for programmes that increase labour demand and improve job quality; they are often characterised by coerciveness and stigmatisation; and they tend towards individualisation of *responsibility* without really personalise the contents of interventions. The need for labour market policies to be ‘tailor made’ to the characteristics and needs of the individual recipients has gained wide consensus over the last few decades (van Berkel and Valkenburg 2007). Yet, these policies do not recognise the heterogeneity of young people at risk of unemployment and are based on a simplified understanding of ‘employability’, in

which Individual skills and attitudes are considered as being either fit for the existing or potential jobs, or in need to be upgraded or adapted through educating or training.

Our results show, instead, a more complex picture. Individuals have diverse combinations of strengths and weaknesses that change over time (for instance skills can be acquired, and motivation strengthened thanks to positive experiences; or skills can become obsolete, and motivation can be eroded due to inactivity). At the same time, similar strengths or weaknesses in skills acquisition or labour market experience may have different outcomes depending on a person's motivation, the strength of their professional project, the local labour market opportunities and the resources they have available to them.

This heterogeneity among young people who are unemployed or at risk of unemployment points to a need for differentiated policy responses. Study participants with an *interrupted career* have had stable work in the past and therefore had strong 'employability skills', or the 'soft skills' (such as familiarity with work routines and cultures) that make the transition back into the labour market a smooth one. However, their 'hard' skills or qualifications had often become outdated. They are entitled to mainstream income support measures, but there is a risk that their entitlements may expire before they find a new job. To find stable employment opportunities, the young with this profile need support in identifying opportunities for retraining or updating their skills. On the contrary, for our *young and fragile* interviewees the main risk is that the transition from school to work may become too long and may result in a slide towards a NEET status. For these individuals, even short-term work experiences may be a useful way of allowing them to develop their skills, build some experience and enhance their CVs. In contrast, continuing to accumulate short-term work experiences would not ameliorate the career trajectory of the *precarious with fragmented paths*. What these individuals need is the opportunity to identify a pathway towards a more stable position. This means training and targeted work experiences, but it

also requires income support to free them from the immediate need to pursue any salary whatsoever. Those *flexible with a professional project* do not need labour market orientation, as they have a definite vocational ambition and a well-defined professional plan, but rather specific counselling to identify and access targeted resources in order to be able to afford specialised training or start-up funds to pursue their project. Finally, the *marginal and weak*, the most exposed to commodification and at-risk of exclusion among our young, need more robust and encompassing help, providing social support as well as orientation, training and (possibly protected) work experiences.

The findings from our interviews suggest that relevant and targeted training programmes could make a significant difference to the experiences of unemployment and instability, though the rigid rules often prevented individuals from obtaining the type of support they required. The impact of austerity measures on such programmes risk further limiting their scope, especially in contexts where they were already comparatively less developed, such as in Southern and Eastern countries, and where cuts are particularly sharp, as in the British and Dutch context. However, in order to be effective and contribute to increasing the labour market participation and reducing the social vulnerability of young people at risk of unemployment, activation measures need to be better adapted to their differing sets of circumstances.

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¹ 'Social innovations at the local level in favour of cohesion' (www.wilcoproject.eu).

² The cities included: In Spain, Barcelona and Pamplona; in Italy, Milan and Brescia; In Switzerland, Bern and Geneva; in France, Nantes and Lille; In Germany, Berlin and Münster; in The Netherlands, Amsterdam and Nijmegen; in the UK, Medway and

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³ Individuals aged under 18 were excluded from the sample as they would typically be still in compulsory schooling in all of the countries included in the study. However, we included people just over 30 in order to include young adults in countries such as the Southern ones whose exit from the parental home is comparatively delayed. For the same reason, we included in the sample interviewees living with their parents, as long as they did so for economic reasons.

⁴ Level 3 of the ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education) scale makes reference to upper secondary education, usually providing education in preparation for tertiary education or qualified employment. The main reason was to observe young adults with a weak educational profile, who have the highest probability of being jobless, long-term unemployed or in unstable employment (Baranowska and Gebel 2010).