

Policy-making and gender mainstreaming

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Gender differences in youth labour markets and school-to-work transitions are frequently underestimated and there is often an assumption that gender gaps only emerge around parenthood, so that younger generations are largely unaffected (Plantenga et al. 2013). However, the evidence presented here from this comparative research suggests that gender differences open up early in the life course and that the policy environment across European countries is not well adapted to these differences on the youth labour market.

Research methods

In order to illustrate the differences between young women and men on the labour market we can map vulnerability by gender across countries (Gökşen et al. 2016). Vulnerability can be considered as individual risks to low quality, precarious or low-paid employment. However, gender differences are not the only factor shaping these risks and we can observe layers of risk whereby gender interacts with other risk factors such as country of birth and class. This is known as intersectionality (Verloo 2006). We then focus on the extent to which policies for young people recognise gender differences and adopt a gender mainstreaming approach (Gökşen et al. 2016).

We use a sample of countries in order to represent four types of regimes for school-to-work transitions – universalistic (Denmark and the Netherlands), liberal (the UK), employment-centred (France and Belgium) and subprotective (Spain, Greece and Turkey); where the data permits, we also include an analysis of Slovakia as an example of a post-socialist regime, but we are unable to provide a policy analysis for this country.

Furthermore, we benefit from specific, detailed inputs from national researchers in the case of five case-study countries covering four of the regimes – Denmark, Spain, France, Greece and the UK. Our analysis of the EU-SILC data demonstrates that gender gaps for young people exist across almost all measures of education and labour market statuses used to assess vulnerable outcomes. We also find strong evidence of the intersectionality of youth, gender and other forms of vulnerability linked to migrant status. The extent of these vulnerabilities varies across different school-to-work regimes but is nevertheless present.

Gender-blind policy environment

Our analysis of the policy environment towards young people shows that policy on youth labour markets is often gender blind and that there is limited evidence of consistent gender mainstreaming. Given the gender gaps identified in our mapping exercise, these policies could be more efficient if they recognised gender differences – for example school drop-out rates for boys, segregation of training opportunities for girls, and the interaction of gender and ethnicity in education choices. Although we find some evidence of good practice that recognises gender differences at the margins and indeed the intersectionality of youth, for gender and other forms of vulnerability more could be done.

Our Findings: Policy towards youth labour markets is often gender blind

We draw a number of conclusions from our work for future research in the area of school-to-work transitions.

- We suggest that researchers need to approach the youth labour market from a more consistently gender-sensitive perspective in order to understand the nuances and dynamics of emerging gender gaps.
- We suggest that greater consideration of the intersectionalities of gender with other demographic factors can help explain the segmentation of the youth labour market and improve understanding of the life-long repercussions for the risks of vulnerabilities.
- We suggest that in relation to vulnerabilities, researchers need measures and data that are sensitive to the impact of young people living in the parental home and to the risk that vulnerabilities are disguised by household-level data.

We also draw a number of conclusions from our work for future policy-making in the area of school-to-work transitions.

- We suggest that policy-makers adopt a more consistent gender mainstreaming approach in order to develop more efficient policies that reflect the realities of youth labour markets.
- We suggest that policy-makers adopt a more consistent gender mainstreaming approach in order to address emerging risks for vulnerabilities along gender lines.
- We suggest that policy-makers adopt a more consistent gender mainstreaming approach in order to capture the intersectionality of gender with other demographic characteristics.

References

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