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## Fractured lives: understanding urban youth vulnerability in Perú

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### ABSTRACT

The paper reports on a mixed methods study that sought to analyse determinants of youth labour market and educational disengagement in Peru. It begins by questioning the widespread focus on NEET – youth not in employment, education or training – as a measure of youth vulnerability in countries with extensive informal labour markets where labour precarity can be as problematic as unemployment for young people's futures. A broader category of 'urban vulnerable' youth, including both NEET and precarious workers, is proposed and used as the basis for analysing the factors that influence young people's trajectories. Key factors and shocks in youth trajectories are identified through qualitative life histories, and are tested using cross-section and panel survey data. Findings from the study have implications for the analysis of youth labour market vulnerability in the Global South, as well as for the policies that seek to address this problem.

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Many countries in the Global South are undergoing demographic transitions that are leaving them with greater numbers of young people in relation to the existing dependent population. Often referred to as a 'demographic bonus' such configurations, which constitute a tremendous opportunity for development, also pose many challenges in contexts with exclusionary social and economic regimes in which many young people have grown and come of age in vulnerable situations.

Addressing vulnerable youth transitions to adulthood requires a precise understanding of who is included among the vulnerable. The term NEET – which refers to young people not in education, employment or training – was coined in an effort to address new forms of youth labour market disengagement, beyond traditional unemployment. As youth transitions to adulthood have become more complex, less linear and protracted (NRCCP 2006; Walther 2006), academic discussions sought to include greater numbers of young people who may be vulnerable to labour market disengagement and social exclusion (Furlong 2007).

While the term emerged in the context of developed countries, a focus on NEETs has become the global standard to address youth labour market vulnerability. As we shall discuss, various critiques point to the problematic nature of the term, which does not capture the specific problems affecting different groups of young

people who may qualify as NEET, and excludes the growing number of youth in precarious employment.

The latter point is especially relevant in low and middle income countries where informal labour markets and employment precarity – casualization and low quality jobs – are widespread. Understanding precarity in different contexts is therefore a key element for the development of adequate policy responses.

This paper reports on a mixed-methods study of NEETs and precarious young workers in Peru that used household survey data as well as primary qualitative data. The study begins with the development of a contextually nuanced definition of precarious young workers, and provides an estimation of their numbers with those of NEETs. Using qualitative life history methods, the study then reconstructs the trajectories of a group of young people that fall within the broader category of ‘urban vulnerable’ – which includes both NEETs and precarious workers – in order to identify the factors that have led to their current status. The impact of identified factors and shocks is then tested using cross-section and panel survey data, and explanations are developed with the help of the qualitative data.

Findings from the study have important implications for the analysis of youth labour market vulnerability in the Global South, as well as for the policies that seek to address this problem. Current responses to the problem of NEETs tend to focus on skills development and labour market insertion, but the conditions and life courses that render young people NEET or precarious workers suggest the need for more integral policy responses.

### Is the focus on NEETs relevant for less developed countries?

During the second half of the XXth Century unemployment rates were the main indicator of labour market vulnerability. The term NEET emerged in the United Kingdom in the late 1980s, when changes in the benefits regime led to the exclusion of young people under the age of 18, who were expected to remain in education until that age. The term NEET sought to capture those young people who did not fall within any of the main occupational status categories of employment, education or training. Over time, the focus on NEETs has become a key measure of youth labour market vulnerability and is now globally used to address the situation of all young people between 15 and 29 years of age. Lacking adequate qualifications and exposed to recurrent bouts of unemployment, NEETs face greater chances of developing trajectories that may lead them to become socially excluded and marginalized (Furlong 2006; Maguire 2015b).

Several critiques of the concept have led to its gradual refinement. One major problem is that NEETs ‘combines groups with very different experiences, characteristics and needs.’ (Furlong 2006, 554). It includes young people who are searching for a job and those who are not; those dedicated to unpaid domestic and care work; and it does not distinguish between vulnerable youth who may lack the resources to navigate their transitions to adulthood, with more privileged young people who are able to exert agency over their life course.

Blurring the differences between the groups that are considered NEET may lead to negative stereotyping. Considered as those who ‘do nothing’ (Miranda 2015), it is often assumed that these young people have no desire to work (Maguire 2015a, 2015b). However, as various studies show, most NEET tend to come from vulnerable contexts or

families which strongly impact their trajectories (Furlong 2007), and 'discouragement' and lack of interest in education or finding a job account for only a very small proportion of NEETs (Bynner and Parsons 2002; De Hoyos, Rogers, and Székely 2016; Elder 2015; Novella et al. 2018).

Feminist critics have also targeted the concept because it assumes that paid work is the only possible route towards a positive transition to adulthood, thus rendering invisible the fundamental but unpaid role of women in reproductive work (Miranda 2015). This is especially problematic because the proportion of women who qualify as NEET tends to be much larger than that of men.

Such critiques have led to the presentation of data on NEETs in more disaggregated forms that distinguish between different sub-groups and help illuminate their different problems and needs (ILO 2012). While there is not a unique typology, such groups usually include distinctions between those who are actively searching for a job, those who are not, and those who are dedicated to domestic or care work (mainly women).

One criticism of the focus on NEETs that has not yet properly been taken into consideration, is that it 'draws attention away from those trapped in inferior forms of employment', that is, those who 'occupy precarious positions in the labour market' and may be trapped in 'insecure jobs without experiencing long-term unemployment.' (Furlong 2006, 555). Labour market insecurity and precarity may hamper young people's chances of upward mobility and make them vulnerable to long-term social and economic exclusion. Concerns about the increasing precarization of work in developed economies adds weight to this critique (Standing 2016; Strauss 2017).

Considering those in precarious labour market positions is especially important in low and middle income countries in which labour markets are characterized by high levels of informality and where precarity is a constant feature, rather than a more recent phenomenon associated with changes in the nature of work in the context of globalization. As highlighted by Munck (2013) the notion of precarity as a recent phenomenon

(...) does not speak to a South which never experienced welfare state capitalism. (...) The changing nature of work as a result of the erosion of the welfare state is but one modality of precarity, others have been in existence for a long time in the fraught relations between workers, the state and society in the South, marked by limited forms of citizenship. (752)

While international organizations often refer to labour precarity, their definition of precarious work, and the ensuing policy options, appear to be more suited to the Global North. The ILO, for instance, refers to new widespread forms of 'temporary employment, particularly fixed-term contracts, and agency work' (ILO 2012, 29), while the OECD specifically refers to the precarity associated with many new forms of non-standard employment (OECD 2015). In most of the Global South, however:

decommodified social protection was never widely available in the twentieth century. Therefore, even relatively secure wage workers have long had a tendency to rely on complex livelihood strategies that combine wages with non-wage income sources ... (Scully 2016, 166)

This suggests the need for context specific definitions of precarity. Simply considering those employed in the informal sector, however, would not suffice. While being informally employed generally means that workers enjoy no social protection, the informal labour market is far from homogenous and not all informal workers would qualify as precarious

when considering their earnings, career development opportunities and level of skills required from their jobs (Fields 1990).

### Urban vulnerable youth in Peru

Peru, as many other developing countries, has been undergoing a demographic transition that has led to a significant growth of the proportion of young people (15–29), which now account for 27% of the population (Balarin et al. 2017; UNFPA 2012). Most young people (77.5%) live in urban areas, many in informal or slum settlements, with high concentrations of poverty, where they ‘face numerous forms of exclusion from the spaces and socio-economic opportunities of the broader urban context’ (Lépore and Lapp 2018, 29).

In recent years, the push to capitalize on the demographic bonus and on the potential contributions that young people can make to the country’s economic growth has led to an unprecedented focus on youth policy debates. In this context, a focus on NEETs has become prominent. However, Peru is a good example of the limitations that a focus on NEETs may face when applied to developing contexts. The country’s economy and its labour market are characterized by very high levels of informality. It is estimated that approximately 70% of the economically active population is informally employed. Among young people aged between 18 and 24, the rate of informal employment is even higher (80%) (OIT 2015).

The high levels of informality are likely to account for Peru’s comparatively lower rate of NEETs, as many youth resort to self-employment or are underemployed in the informal sector. While the rate of NEETs in Latin America is 21.5%, in Peru it is only 16.9%, lower than the 20.2% of Colombia and the 23.2 of Brazil (De Hoyos, Rogers, and Székely 2016, figures consider youth between 15 and 24 years). This provides even stronger reasons to account for young people in highly precarious jobs when discussing the urban vulnerable.

Table 1 shows the distribution of urban youth aged 15–29 in different occupational categories, including various subcategories of NEETs. Following the discussion above, we also defined a new category of young people in highly precarious forms of work. Our new category of precarious employment takes into account not only whether young people are informally employed – which is way too common –, but also their earnings and the level of instability in work related activities.<sup>1</sup> We also developed a category of ‘urban vulnerable’ that includes both NEETs and highly precarious workers. The distribution of the urban youth population according to these new categories is presented in the following table.

**Table 1.** Urban youth occupational status (Young people aged 15 to 29)%.

Studying	25.80%
Working	34.15%
Working and studying	12.90%
Urban vulnerable	27.14%
NEET – looking for work	2.72%
NEET – not looking for work	8.63%
NEET – not looking for work & in domestic activities (women)	8.58%
Working – highly precarious	7.21%
Total	100.00%

Source: ENAHO 2015.

There is a significant group of highly precarious urban workers which raises the proportion of the urban vulnerable to almost one third of the total urban youth population. Those in precarious forms of work comprise a group that is almost as large as that of women dedicated to domestic activities.

A more detailed look at the sex composition of the urban vulnerable group shows that those not looking for work and who dedicate themselves to domestic activities are all women. Interestingly, however, when including the highly precarious group the overall proportion of men and women hardly changes (Table 2).

Table 3 shows the prevalence of NEETs and of our definition of urban vulnerable as a percentage of the overall 15 to 29 age group. While, as we shall see, dropping out of school is strongly correlated with the chances of being NEETs or urban vulnerable, we find a high percentage of young people in these categories who have completed their schooling. It is also interesting to note that while NEETs are more evenly distributed in all income groups, the urban vulnerable are much more prevalent among the poor and extreme poor.

Acknowledging that labour market positions may be volatile, we developed a transition matrix using National Household Survey Panel data. Table 4 shows the persistence in different groups' status from one year to the next. We notice that a young person who is performing a precarious job in one year, has a high probability (34%) of being a precarious worker on the following year, and a 20% change of becoming NEET. Persistence in time is also characteristic of NEETs who are dedicated to domestic activities and of those who are not searching for a job (33 and 49% respectively). In contrast, those NEET who are searching for a job have a high chance of being employed in a non-precarious job in the next year, which suggests that this group is in a more transitory situation. While these findings confirm the heterogeneity within the urban vulnerable group, they also suggest that for some – precarious workers and women – vulnerability is persistent over time.

## Understanding young people's trajectories of exclusion

Using this broadened definition of urban vulnerable youth (that includes NEET and precarious workers), we sought to analyse the life trajectories and factors that lead young people to occupy such positions. We used a sequential mixed methods approach to the identification and analysis of the factors affecting young people's trajectories (Creswell and Clark 2017).

Qualitative work consisted of group discussions and life history interviews with a sample of 30 young men and women, divided in six groups (of men and women only).

**Table 2.** Sex composition of the urban vulnerable group.

	NEET – searching for work (%)	NEET – not searching for work (%)	NEET – not searching and dedicated to domestic work (%)	NEET (total) (%)	Precarious workers (%)	Urban Vulnerable (NEET + precarious) (%)
Sex						
Male	53.90	67.00	0.00	36.40	33.60	35.60
Female	46.10	33.00	100.00	63.60	66.40	64.40
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: ENAHO 2015.

**Table 3.** Prevalence of NEET and Urban-vulnerable by age, level of education and poverty.

	% NEET in the age group	% of urban vulnerable (NEET and precarious workers) in the 15–29 age group
<i>Age</i>		
15 to 19	20.10	25.50
20 to 24	19.80	26.20
25 to 29	20.00	30.20
Total	19.90	27.10
<i>Education</i>		
Primary incomplete	47.40	65.50
Primary complete	31.10	49.70
Secondary incomplete	11.10	16.60
Secondary complete	<b>32.40</b>	<b>42.70</b>
Higher Education	11.70	15.80
Total	19.90	27.10
<i>Poverty</i>		
Poor extreme	<b>29.50</b>	<b>52.40</b>
Poor not extreme	27.50	41.20
Not poor insecure	23.60	33.90
Not poor secure	<b>15.90</b>	<b>21.30</b>
Total	19.90	28.10

Fuente: ENAHO 2015.

Participants were recruited using a snowballing strategy in three peripheral areas of Lima with high concentrations of poverty and economic vulnerability. In each area, we identified participants between the ages of 21 and 26 who were either not in employment, education or training, or who were involved in highly precarious forms of work as defined above. We chose to focus only on urban vulnerable youth so as to develop a deeper understanding of their trajectories that would complement the comparative quantitative work in which we considered both vulnerable and non-vulnerable young people. The age group was specified as to identify participants whose vulnerable trajectories were relatively more established, rather than those of a younger age who might be at a stage of transition into either education or work.

Interviews and discussions were conducted using a participatory approach. Group discussions included a community mapping exercise in order to understand the dynamics of their local areas and identify common issues of concern for the groups, especially in relation to their educational and employment trajectories. We then engaged participants in a photo-voice exercise (Wang and Burris 1997) which required them to describe their lives and matters of concern in pictures. The photographs served as the basis for the construction and discussion of participants' life histories, which were both recorded and graphed, identifying important events or shocks in their lives (Atkinson 1998).

The quantitative analysis was conducted in two stages. We first used data from the 2015 National Household Survey (ENAHO) to test the effect of different factors acting at the individual, family and contextual levels that we had identified through the qualitative analysis and the review of available literature.<sup>2</sup> The second stage of quantitative data analysis was conducted using the 2011–15 National Household Survey Panel, which has national representativity and provided us with a longitudinal view of how different shocks might change young people's trajectories over time, leading them to become NEET or precarious.<sup>3</sup> Explanations of how these factors and shocks operate were jointly developed with help from the qualitative data analysis.

**Table 4.** Urban youth occupational status transition matrix.

		Activity status in $t + 1$							
		Studying (%)	Working – Not precarious (%)	Studying and working (%)	NEET – searching for work (%)	NEET – not searching for work (%)	NEET – domestic activities (%)	Precarious work (%)	Total (%)
Activity status in $t$	Studying	56.3	7.6	17.1	2.1	8.8	3.6	4.6	100.0
	Working – not precarious	2.5	73.0	6.8	<b>2.3</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>3.4</b>	7.4	100.0
	Studying and working	22.4	20.8	42.2	1.4	4.7	1.6	7.0	100.0
	NEET – searching for work	8.9	<b>44.0</b>	7.0	7.9	11.0	13.3	8.0	100.0
	NEET – not searching for work	20.5	20.6	6.6	4.2	<b>33.4</b>	5.4	9.4	100.0
	NEET – domestic activities	7.8	18.7	3.2	3.7	4.9	<b>48.9</b>	12.8	100.0
	Precarious work	5.5	31.4	9.1	<b>2.5</b>	<b>7.7</b>	<b>9.8</b>	34.0	100.0
Total		22.7	33.6	15.5	2.5	8.6	7.5	9.8	100.0

Average for 2011–2012, 2012–2013, 2013–2014, 2014–2015 transitions.

Source: ENAHO Panel 2011–2012, 2012–2013, 2013–2014, 2014–2015.

Observations: 3691.



## *Vulnerability configurations*

The life histories, which are illustrated in the diagrams below, showed some important differences in participants' trajectories in terms of the presence, accumulation and moment of their life in which they experienced different life altering events or shocks. We found two distinct groups. One with a set of trajectories (see [Figure 1](#)) characterized by a greater density of shocks (such as domestic violence, parental abandonment, parental health related issues), that begun at an early age and intensified during adolescence, often leading to an early school drop-out. Within this group there was also a high degree of concatenation between events (e.g. migration led to grade repetition which led to an early dropout), which was also indicative of individuals and their families scarce resources to deal with adverse situations.

A second group (see [Figure 2](#)) was characterized by a later onset of shocks during adolescence that were more specifically related to issues of early pregnancy or parenthood, the pressure to earn money and contribute to the home economy, and the challenges of post-secondary school transitions into further or higher education and work.

The table below presents the main factors identified through the life history analysis as well as the different ways in which these factors come together in each of these groups' trajectories ([Table 5](#)).

The life histories showed that participants in the more vulnerable group all came from families that had been affected by abandonment or death of a parent/carer, domestic violence, and other factors contributing to greater instability. Another distinguishing element between the two groups was the degree of interconnection between one event or shock and the next, which was indicative of the extent to which the individual and/or his or her family, were capable of dealing or absorbing the impact of different shocks. Early pregnancy, for instance, had a differentiated impact on young women who could count on family support to finish their school education, and those who did not.

Two important points emerge from comparing the trajectories of the two groups. The first is the confirmation that not all NEETs and precarious workers are equally vulnerable. As can be seen in the life histories, the difficulties experienced by those in the less vulnerable group, appear at a later stage, when young people are transitioning from school to work and higher or further education; while those in the more vulnerable group face the cumulative effects of various adverse events that begin in their childhood. While the first group may be better suited for the kinds of skills and active labour market policies that tend to characterize responses to youth labour market vulnerability, the second group would require more integral responses that address the multiple conditions that have rendered them vulnerable.

The other point has to do with the degree to which the wellbeing regime in Peru relies on families' ability to fend for themselves, rather than on state social policies. Throughout the life history interviews it was clear that one of the main points of differentiation between the two groups' trajectories is their families' capacity to support them and absorb the impact of different shocks or adverse events. When families are in more vulnerable situations, their ability to do so is considerably diminished ([Filgueira 2005](#); [Martínez Franzoni 2005](#)).

**ESTEFANY****Significant events**  
Born in Ayacucho  
(migrant)

Age

**Shocks**1  
2Domestic  
violence  
(alcoholic  
violent father,  
rape attempt)3  
4Gets behind in  
school

moves to Lima

5  
6Has to repeat a  
school grade  
more than  
once

7

8  
9**RICHARD**  
**Significant**  
**events**

Age

**Shocks**1  
2

Father leaves

3  
4Involved in  
petty robbery  
to survive8  
9Starts living on  
the streetSells odd  
things on the  
street,  
including  
drugs

10

Leaves School  
(5th grade)

10

Escapes from  
parental home  
and moves  
with brother

11

Goes back to  
live with  
mother

12

13

Keeps  
repeating  
primary years  
Leaves school  
having  
advanced only  
to the 5th  
grade

14

15

moves in with  
partner  
Has a natural  
abortion16  
17Moves with  
partnerFrom the time she  
leaves work and has  
2nd child she performs  
different odd jobs

18

First daughter  
dies at birthGets job at a  
printer

18

Partner  
pregnant/stops  
taking  
drugs/they lose  
child

19

First child is  
bornWorks as  
private  
security

19

First child is  
born / leaves  
partner

20

21

Father dies  
Second child  
is bornWorks in  
construction  
Raises  
chicken

21

Stops working to care  
for children

22

Performs odd  
jobs

22

23

**Figure 1.** Group 1 - Highly precarious youth trajectories.

CARLOS significant events	Age	Shocks	MAGALI significant events	Age	Shocks
	1	Father leaves		1	
	2			2	
	3			3	
	4			4	
	5			5	
	6			6	
	7			7	
Helps mother as street vendor	8			8	
	9			9	
	10			10	
	11			11	
	12			12	
Mother has new partner	13			13	
	14			14	
	15			15	
			House materials improve (from wood to cement)	16	Grandfather becomes ill and moves in with her family
Finishes school	16		Finishes school	16	
	17		Mother begins to work and she stays home to take care of small brother	17	
1st job - factory (2 months)	18		1st job (kitchen assistant)	18	Father loses job
2nd job - factory	19			19	
		Sister has accident and he loses savings to help pay for treatment	2nd job (handbag business)	20	
Performs odd jobs	20			20	Mother has accident
	21			21	
Gets a moto-taxi / returns to live with parents	22		Non-paid family work (helping mother with care and small business)	22	Stops studying to help mother

**Figure 2.** Group 2 - Less precarious youth trajectories.

### Factors associated with the urban NEET and vulnerable youth condition

By conducting a cross section analysis of the National Household Survey (2015) we were able to test the influence of different factors on the probabilities of urban youth becoming NEET or precarious workers. We analysed the influence of different factors on each of these two groups separately, as well as for the category of urban-vulnerable youth that combines the two. We also used the National Household Survey Panel data to estimate how

**Table 5.** Factors and vulnerability groups.

	GROUP 1	GROUP 2
Family	Factors: family structure (single parent homes); economic or domestic responsibilities at early age; sibling composition; illness or death of family member; poverty; migration; parental education level. Highly vulnerable families (single parents, poverty, domestic violence, abandonment, death, health problems); migration (from rural to urban area)	Greater heterogeneity in young people's families (more or less stable), but with greater social and economic resources to deal with adverse events.
School trajectory	Education level, mobility and turbulence; grade repetition; school drop-out <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intense school turbulence often leads to grade repetition</li> <li>• School drop-out</li> <li>• Early labour market insertion and early pregnancy gets in the way of schooling</li> <li>• Difficulties for finishing school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less intense school turbulence</li> <li>• No school drop-out</li> <li>• no school dropout</li> <li>• Many transition into different forms of higher or further education, although most abandon studies because of inability to pay or need for earnings.</li> </ul>
Pregnancy, children, domestic responsibilities (women)	Women: Early pregnancy and parenthood; early move with couple; separation or abandonment (from/by partner) Men: early labour market insertion; pressure to generate income to support family of origin or newly formed family <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early pregnancy</li> <li>• Moving in with partner at young age.</li> <li>• Less resources or no resources to deal with impact of childbearing.</li> <li>• Arrival of children truncates educational and/or work trajectories; loss of economic independence.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Later age of pregnancy (after 20).</li> <li>• None move with partners at young age.</li> <li>• More varied impact of childbearing: some trajectories become truncated, but some participants count with family support to deal with impact of pregnancy and continue education and or work.</li> </ul>
Parenthood/economic responsibilities (men)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early parenthood or family economic needs lead to early labour market insertion &amp; early school dropout</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Later parenthood &amp; labour market insertion</li> </ul>
Health	Parental health; occupational health; mental health Health issues for both groups were mainly related to having to assume caring or financial responsibilities towards an ill parent or family member. Some sporadic mentions of occupational and mental health problems.	
Local context	Infrastructure, transport, security and presence of local educational and job markets impacted on possibility of movement, access to education, jobs and information	
Labour market outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long term inactivity (mainly women after childbirth)</li> <li>• High labour instability mainly through odd low skilled jobs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short term inactivity</li> <li>• While moving from one job to another more experience and skills are gained</li> <li>• If not currently employed they are certain about being able to re-enter the labour market.</li> </ul>

different factors and shocks may increase the chances of a young person becoming NEET or a precarious worker over time (see regression table in [Annex 1](#)).

### *The influence of the family and the home on urban young people's trajectories<sup>4</sup>*

In line with other studies (Bynner and Parsons 2002; De Hoyos, Rogers, and Székely 2016; Maguire 2015a) we find that the socio-economic status of young people's families of origin is one of the main influencing factors of their current status. The poorer the families the greater the chances a young person has of being vulnerable. Compared to those from families in extreme poverty, those who are not poor but insecure and those who are not poor and in secure positions, have 13 and 20% less chances of becoming NEET or

precarious. When these impacts were disaggregated by sex, the only difference was that the level of poverty of the home had a greater influence on young men becoming precarious workers, which may be indicative of the pressures that young men from poorer families face from a young age to enter the labour market and contribute to their families' income. This is consistent with the qualitative findings, which suggest that while women's trajectories are influenced by early pregnancy or domestic responsibilities, men are pushed into an early labour market entry, usually in precarious positions.

Being a migrant (from rural to urban areas) also proved to be an important factor that we were able to capture through the analysis of panel data. Results show that migration increased the chances of becoming urban-vulnerable by 16%. Effects were greater (18%) for precarious workers and were not significant for NEETs. The qualitative analysis suggested that migration influences young people's trajectories in two ways: through its effects on their families, who have to adapt to new conditions and usually undergo periods of extreme poverty; and through its effects on their educational trajectories, as it tends to generate a degree of educational turbulence that may lead to an early school dropout.

Having grown up in a single parent family after the death or abandonment by one of the parents was another important factor. While we could not capture this effect in the cross-sectional analysis, the shock analysis showed that abandonment by a parent has a significant effect on the probability of becoming a precarious worker (while not on that of becoming NEET). The life history interviews showed that those from families with histories of abandonment, parental death or parental health related problems, usually established more vulnerable trajectories. We found many stories of young people raised by lone mothers in extremely adverse conditions, which pushed them to search for an early labour market insertion or to take on caring responsibilities for younger siblings or for a sick parent, which often led them to drop-out from school.

### *Educational factors*

In line with existing literature (Bynner and Parsons 2002; Favara, Chang, and Sánchez 2018; Maguire 2015a; Vasile and Anghel, De Hoyos) another major factor affecting young people's trajectories and their probability of becoming NEET or precarious workers is dropping-out of school. The longitudinal analysis showed that the shock of dropping out of school increases the chances of a young person becoming urban-vulnerable by 65% (46% in the case of NEETs and 48% in the case of precarious workers).

Quantitative analysis also showed that a very important factor associated with the probability of becoming urban vulnerable is the number of years of education. The effect size of this factor is larger in the case of precarious jobs than in the case of NEETs. As can be seen in Table A1 (Annex 1) completing secondary schooling reduces the probability of being urban vulnerable by 49% (compared to having incomplete primary education).

The interviews showed that many participants, especially those in the most vulnerable group had developed turbulent school trajectories, with various experiences of moving from one school to another, having to repeat a school grade often more than once and becoming overage in relation to the year they should have been attending. These factors contributed to a lack of motivation, which when added to the pressures derived

from having to assume work or domestic responsibilities often led to an early school drop-out.

In the case of women, as we shall see next, dropping out of school was also associated with early pregnancy.

### *Early caring and economic responsibilities*

The early arrival of more adult-related responsibilities, either in relation to care or income generation, gave rise to another set of factors that contribute to youth vulnerability. Existing literature shows that in the case of women, moving in with a partner or having a child at an early age increases their probability of becoming NEET (Baron, Popova, and Sánchez 2016; Bynner and Parsons 2002; De Hoyos, Rogers, and Székely 2016).

In our case, we found that being a woman increases the chances of a young person becoming vulnerable by 7% (5% for becoming NEET and 2% for becoming a precarious worker). Analysis of the panel data showed that having had a child in the last year increased the chances of women becoming NEET by almost 100%, while it did not have much impact in the case of precarious workers – which coincides with the idea that most female NEETs are in the care economy. For men, the presence of children reduced the chances of becoming a precarious worker, but not those of becoming NEET. Such differences might be explained by the fact that having young children may generate a greater pressure for men to find more stable sources of income, while women assume caring roles that often lead to a complete and sometimes permanent break in their educational or work trajectories.

Including precarious workers provides a better understanding of gender specific dynamics in the trajectories of urban-vulnerable young people. The greatest proportion of women in the NEET category has often led to analyses that focus on the pressures of care that young women face (Maguire and McKay 2016). But including precarious workers suggests that, while different, the pressures that young men face for generating an income, may also lead them to establish vulnerable trajectories.

Moving in with a partner at an early age is also strongly related to becoming NEET or a precarious worker. Analysis of the panel data showed that it increased the probability of becoming urban-vulnerable, including both men and women, by 90% (81% in the case of NEET and 69% in the case of precarious workers). The qualitative analysis suggests that moving in with a partner at an early age may be related to the overall vulnerability of the young person's family of origin, where they opt to leave the home due to its degree of poverty or because of the incidence of domestic violence.

### *Health factors*

The life histories suggested that health issues were another influential factor on young people's trajectories. In the literature, the relation between health and NEET status has focused mostly on the effects of mental health and disability. These have been shown to have either a direct effect on NEET status, or an indirect effect through their impact on young people's schooling careers or disengagement from work (Benjet et al. 2012). The impact of other health aspects, such as accidents or chronic illness have been somewhat less explored.

Our study analysed the effects of a young person having had an accident or an illness relapse in the past four weeks. Results showed that such shocks increased their probability of becoming urban-vulnerable, especially for NEETs. Analysis of the panel data also showed that having a chronic illness increased the probability of a young person becoming urban-vulnerable by 14%, and the effects were, again, stronger for the chances of becoming NEET (25%) than for becoming a precarious worker, where the effect was not significant.

The interviews suggested that for many participants' health issues were related to having to care or provide financial resources for an ill parent or close family member. In some instances, this could lead to a complete break in their educational or work trajectories. The impact of occupational health issues was also prominent in the men's life histories, who highlighted the physical nature of the jobs they have access to and the poor levels of occupational security. In the case of women, who are more prone to work in service jobs, there is less exposure to occupational risks.<sup>5</sup>

### *The influence of local contexts*

One final and very important set of issues that influence young people's trajectories has to do with the nature of their local contexts. Studies such as that of Lépore and Lapp (2018) for the case of Argentina, show that urban marginality has a strong influence on young people's labour market participation and occupational status. Their study found that both educational achievement is lower and 'joblessness and low-skill informal employment increase significantly when young people reside in informal settlements, independent of other factors.' (38).

While there was no available quantitative data to explore this issue, in the qualitative interviews and group discussions participants reported on the different ways in which their local contexts negatively impinged on their lives. In all cases, they reported on the lack of adequate infrastructure and services, the absence of municipal and police presence, the high levels of violence and insecurity and the presence of gangs and drugs in their zones, all of which are typical of peripheral informal settlements in Peru and other similar countries.

The community mapping and photo-voice exercises were useful for eliciting reflections about the influence of the local context on participants' lives. There were noticeable differences between the three areas where the work was conducted that generated different problems. In neighbourhoods which are closer and more connected to the inner-city areas, and have greater local market dynamism, access to jobs was less of an issue; but delinquency, the pull of joining gangs and general violence were all matters of concern. In more distant neighbourhoods, in contrast, the issue of distance, lack of roads and lack of public transport, and the lack of a local job market, were the main issues of concern. The presence of localized labour markets appeared to make a great difference in terms of young women's future employment opportunities because they would provide them with greater possibilities of balancing their work and caring responsibilities.

### *Addressing the needs of urban vulnerable youth*

While establishing internationally comparative indicators of labour market vulnerability is important, it is equally fundamental to consider the ways in which national and regional

labour market configurations may affect their relevance. Critiques of the focus on NEETs – now the go-to term for discussing labour market vulnerability – have pointed towards the need for greater internal differentiation within the group, to enable distinctions and adequate responses to the needs of different sub-groups, such as women, those affected by health problems, etc. It has also been pointed out that an exclusive focus on NEETs in efforts to address labour market vulnerability may leave out the growing numbers of young people in precarious forms of employment who also experience high levels of labour market vulnerability. As discussed, considering those in precarious labour market positions is especially important in low and middle income countries with underdeveloped labour markets and high levels of informality. The study conducted in Peru, proposes a definition of young people in highly precarious labour market positions who should also be a focus of policy concerns.

While analysing the effects of different factors on the trajectories of urban vulnerable young people (NEETs and precarious workers) casts a light on some of the most pressing issues that policies should attend to, it is fundamental to understand that these factors interact and add up in different ways for different groups of young people. As the analysis of the life histories showed, the degree of vulnerability of young people is marked by the stage of their lives at which different life events or shocks occur, their concatenation throughout their life course and the degree of support that their families can provide them with. Many families living in poverty, however, lack the economic and social resources to enable their children to establish more positive transitions into adulthood.

The focus of policies that seek to address the needs of young people in developing countries who face exclusion from the labour market is overwhelmingly set on the importance of implementing skills development strategies and active labour market policies, as well as on strengthening labour market formality to improve the availability of better quality jobs. While these are clearly important, policies appear to have a remedial nature that focuses at the point of young people's transition into the labour market, rather than assuming a preventive approach to address the different factors that may render urban youth vulnerable. At the same time, such policies do not appear to fully take into account the ways in which family dynamics and local contexts influence young people's trajectories and possibilities of social and market inclusion.

Important elements that contribute to young people being situated in NEET and precarious jobs have to do with the nature of urbanization processes and their effects on the structure of opportunities for families and young people. Addressing inequalities at the urban level is therefore key (Deneulin and Ancochea 2018), but has been notoriously absent from policy strategies in Peru and many other Latin American countries.

By reconstructing vulnerable young people's life histories and analysing the factors that have contributed to their current status, the study enables us to distinguish between groups of young people who experience different vulnerability configurations. While some confront problems more clearly related to their acquisition of post-secondary school skills and the challenge of accessing less precarious labour market positions, others face earlier challenges that seem to require more integral and localized forms of policy support and provision.

The interconnection between the precarity of urban contexts, the vulnerability of families who inhabit them and young people's trajectories of exclusion suggests the



need to develop broader and more integral policy approaches that address the multiple and cumulative conditions that render young people vulnerable.

Available evidence suggests that programmes targeting vulnerable urban youth should focus not only on developing specific skills, but should also include outreach, mentoring and other strategies to mobilize family support, strengthen neighbourhoods and empower individuals and develop their social capital (NRC 1993) – including a gender perspective is also a key factor (Chinen et al. 2017). Furthermore, evidence suggests that programme delivery is also key: programmes should be adaptable to the needs of different subgroups (Escudero and Mourelo 2015), they should be delivered at a localized level and should include interagency collaboration – such as through community based multi-service centres (NRC 1993) – in order to address the multiple deprivations and needs that render young people vulnerable.

## Notes

1. Different criteria for inclusion were used for independent (self-employed) and dependent workers. Included independent workers were those whose monthly earnings were less than half of the minimum wage, and whose activity or business was either (i) conducted informally, (ii) conducted in an improvised way or (iii) had lasted for less than six months in the past year. For dependent workers, we also considered those earning less than half of the minimum wage and were either (i) informally employed or (ii) worked for less than 15 hours a week. Following findings from the qualitative work which showed that many young people are unwaged family workers whose responsibilities got in the way of their studying or finding paid employment, we also included among precarious workers those in this group who performed the unwaged activity for more than 15 hours per week.
2. We used a non-linear logit method, correcting standard intra-group errors by geographical conglomerates and using the following specification:  $\text{Pr}(\text{urban} - \text{vulnerable})_i = f(\beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{individual} + \beta_2 \text{Family} + \beta_3 \text{contextual} + \mu_i)$  Where the probability of being urban-vulnerable (NEET or precarious) is taken to be the outcome of factors acting at the individual, family and contextual levels.
3. The analysis was conducted using the following specification  $\text{Pr}(\text{urban} - \text{vulnerable})_i = f(\beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Shock}_i + \mu_i)$ . We only specified shocks because we had already controlled for the two groups to be as similar as possible using various individual, family and contextual variables using a propensity score matching technique in order to identify and compare two highly similar groups within the panel, one that was and one that was not affected by a certain shock.
4. Factor and shock analysis data are provided in Tables A1 and A2 (Annex 1).
5. The impact of mental health issues also became evident in some of the interviews but was not explicitly explored in the work.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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## Annex A

**Table A1.** Marginal effects of factors associated to being NEET or a precarious worker – urban youth 15–29.

VARIABLES	(1) NEET	(2) Precarious workers	(3) Urban vulnerable
Female	0.0450*** (0.00936)	0.0214*** (0.00615)	0.0667*** (0.0100)
Presence of children under 5	0.0126 (0.0118)	0.00582 (0.00774)	0.0180 (0.0126)
Age	0.00654*** (0.00220)	0.00736*** (0.00122)	0.0152*** (0.00224)
Presence of health shock in past 4 weeks	0.0298** (0.0116)	0.00481 (0.00787)	0.0349*** (0.0123)
<i>Education level (in relation to 'Primary incomplete')</i>			
Primary complete	–0.213*** (0.0613)	0.0533 (0.0416)	–0.162*** (0.0625)
Secondary incomplete	–0.435*** (0.0484)	–0.0363 (0.0251)	–0.474*** (0.0471)
Secondary complete	–0.152*** (0.0484)	0.0177 (0.0250)	–0.141*** (0.0473)
HE	–0.423*** (0.0477)	–0.0638*** (0.0245)	–0.496*** (0.0465)
Being eldest child	–0.0265*** (0.00997)	0.00740 (0.00651)	–0.0190* (0.0110)
Migrant	0.00347 (0.0125)	0.00638 (0.00724)	0.0113 (0.0128)
Single parent home	–0.0161 (0.0107)	0.00293 (0.00714)	–0.0136 (0.0115)
Number of household members	–0.00643** (0.00300)	–0.001000 (0.00187)	–0.00723** (0.00310)
Head of household with HE	0.0271** (0.0115)	–0.00994 (0.00807)	0.0202* (0.0122)
<i>Household level of vulnerability (in relation to 'Poor – extreme')</i>			
Poor – not extreme	0.0343 (0.0509)	–0.0944** (0.0466)	–0.0843 (0.0550)
Not poor – vulnerable	–0.00137 (0.0496)	–0.109** (0.0474)	–0.138*** (0.0525)
Not poor – non-vulnerable	–0.0573 (0.0502)	–0.124*** (0.0480)	–0.208*** (0.0533)
Poor conglomerate	–0.000774* (0.000416)	3.76e–05 (0.000258)	–0.000686 (0.000440)
Observaciones	6,125	6,125	6,125

Errores estándar robustos entre paréntesis.

\*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .\*\* $p < 0.05$ .\* $p < 0.1$ .

**Table A2.** Effect of shocks on probability of becoming NEET, precarious or vulnerable – urban youth 15–29.

	(a) NEET	(b) Precarious worker	(c) Urban vulnerable	(d) NEET	(e) Precarious worker	(f) Urban vulnerable	(g) NEET	(h) Precarious worker	(i) Urban vulnerable
Moved with partner/married	0.814*** (0.285)	0.693*** (0.259)	0.908*** (0.221)						
Gave birth in last year				1.015*** (0.220)	0.422 (0.267)	1.170*** (0.235)			
Has chronic illness							0.225*** (0.0701)	–0.0861 (0.0808)	0.144** (0.0686)
Constant	–1.778*** (0.272)	–2.008*** (0.285)	–1.249*** (0.183)	–1.076*** (0.172)	–1.796*** (0.265)	–0.581*** (0.162)	–1.388*** (0.0623)	–1.875*** (0.0875)	–0.982*** (0.0542)
Observations	420	420	420	495	495	495	5,115	5,115	5,115
Number of young people	154	154	154	186	186	186	2,006	2,006	2,006

Standard errors grouped by clusters (in brackets)

\*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$ .

Change in number of household members		–0.220 (0.420)	0.838* (0.469)	0.261 (0.439)					
Dropped out of school					0.463** (0.201)	0.488*** (0.180)	0.651*** (0.185)		
Migrant							0.0776 (0.0758)	0.181** (0.0823)	0.164** (0.0733)
Constant		–1.165*** (0.333)	–2.275*** (0.619)	–1.145*** (0.358)	–1.685*** (0.191)	–1.844*** (0.190)	–1.193*** (0.151)	–1.368*** (0.0661)	–0.965*** (0.0575)
Observations		160	160	160	833	833	833	4,922	4,922
Number of young people		66	66	66	324	324	324	1,924	1,924

Errores estándar agrupados a nivel de conglomerados (*clustered*) entre paréntesis\*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .\*\* $p < 0.05$ .\* $p < 0.1$ .