Expert Group Meeting on the Role of Families and Family Policy in Supporting Youth Transitions
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"Youth transitions, families and family policies"
Renata Kaczmarska, Social Affairs Officer
Focal Point on the Family/DISD/UNDESA

Youth and Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals most relevant to youth transitions relate to SDG4 on education and SDG8 on employment. It is important to keep in mind, however, that all SDGs are interdependent and action under one of them has a potential to contribute to the achievement of others. For instance, investments in SDG3: Good health and well-being, are indispensable to ensure good development in childhood to begin with. Similarly, investments in policies under SDG5: gender equality, especially in terms of promoting equal sharing of household responsibilities, is bound to impact young women and men and the way they see themselves and families they will form. Family policy development under other SDGs may impact youth behaviours, choices and life transitions as well.

The exclusion of youth from education and labour markets and societal consequences

The provision of inclusive and equitable high-quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all, under SDG4, is especially relevant for youth who should obtain not only basic skills, but also livelihood skills to support their transition from school to work. This is a challenge considering the persistent exclusion of some children and youth from the education system, combined with global trends in youth unemployment and changes in labour markets caused by technological advancements.

The long-term exclusion of youth from the labour market has negative impact on social cohesion and stability. A decent job is an

important step in completing the transition to adulthood for all young people and a milestone towards achieving independence and self-reliance. The International Labour Organization (ILO) notes that as more than 40 per cent of the world's active youth are either unemployed or working but living in poverty. In addition, the financial and economic crisis of 2008 has led to a "lost generation" of young people who gave up on securing decent employment.

Not only do unemployment and underemployment affect young people's material, physical and mental well-being, they also hamper their future economic opportunities. Research demonstrates that joblessness among youth is associated with lower wages and lower labour market participation later in life. Joblessness also causes young people's distrust in political, social and economic systems. Consequently, social unrest has been especially severe in countries and regions where youth unemployment is widespread or has been rising rapidly over the past decade.[1]

Youth and affordable housing

Young people need affordable housing to respond to education, training and employment opportunities. Lack of affordable housing and limited prospects of employment tend to force young people to forgo their educational and training opportunities and prolong their stay in the parental home. Thus, "the transition to responsible adulthood may be postponed and reliance on the older generation, especially in terms of housing provision and income-support, increases."[2] Lack of housing also delays young people's family formation.

Youth, globalization and migration

Globalization is continuing to have a major impact on youth employment and migration patterns. The imbalance between the number of young people seeking jobs and those who retire will grow in the coming years. Though each region is confronting different issues,

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[1] E/CN.5/2017/7
[2] A/66/62-E/2011/4

the absorption of a larger number of young workers is a global issue that will continue to fuel migration.[3]

Transition to adulthood: skills as pre-requirement

Youth transition to adulthood requires acquiring several skills, among them cognitive, like problem solving; social, like developing good relationships with peers and adults; physical, involving good nutrition habits; emotional comprising positive self-image; personal, sense of autonomy, identity, strong ethics; civic, commitment to community and broader society as well as vocational, skills for employment.

Successful transitions to adulthood depend on core and adaptive resources. Among the core resources are the level of IQ, socio-economic status and parenting quality. Adaptive resources include adults support, coping skills, planning and motivation.[4]

Transition from education to labour market

Over the recent decades labour market restructuring led to higher youth unemployment. This in turn resulted in longer youth transitions from education to employment which in turn affected the speed of family formation. There is a need for more support as transitions are now longer and more complex with young people often stepping out and back into the dependency). **As formal support is declining, the reliance on informal support, including family is growing.**

The role of families

Families play a key role in youth development and acquisition of skills enabling positive transitions. Family stability and parental supervision affect how well youth transition to adulthood. Parenting styles are also important with authoritative rather than authoritarian styles helping youth develop independence but still rely on families for

[3] A/62/61-E/2007/7

[4] J. K. P. Greeson, "Foster Youth and the Transition to Adulthood: The Theoretical and Conceptual Basis for Natural Mentoring", SAGE, 2013.

emotional support and advice. With a growing reality of separation and divorce among parents, maintaining positive relations with parents (despite challenges) is crucial as well.

As noted in the report of the Secretary-General "The transition to adulthood takes longer than in the past, owing in part to extended education, youth unemployment and work-family life conflict. As a result, a considerable financial burden is placed on families with young adults who cannot or are unwilling to live independently and who are supported by their ageing parents, often at the risk of jeopardizing their retirement savings."[5]

Moreover, as employers place more and more importance on previous work experience it creates an advantage for those youth whose families can afford to support them during internships, which are usually not remunerated. [6]

Youth transitions

There are many types of youth transitions. They relate to education, work, lifestyle, family and civic life. The most important are:

- From educational institutions to labour markets
- From singlehood to marriage or cohabitation
- From marriage to family formation (having children)

Such transitions, especially the first one, may not be permanent. In literature, so called 'yo-yo' transitions are emphasized where young people are in temporary situations of unknown duration and develop their own lifestyles while being economically dependent on their parents.

Youth transitions considerations involve the issues of dependency versus autonomy. Often policies in these areas have two basic interdependent goals: to reduce dependency and increase autonomy.

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[5] A/71/61-E/2016/7
[6] World Youth Report 2007. Young People's Transition to Adulthood, United Nations, 2007.

The apparent dichotomy of these terms stems from the fact that we see dependency in socio-economic terms while autonomy is not only socio-economic but also relates to one's identity and lifestyle. Moreover, this approach prevents us from seeing perhaps the most important transition towards the full integration into a society as a responsible adult with rights and responsibilities, part of which is mentioned earlier transition to civic life.

Challenges to youth transitions

All youth face more and more challenges in their transition to adulthood. Such transitions may be further complicated by many challenges stemming from particular family situations, including family conflict and violence or family instability caused by parental separation. Broader obstacles relate to challenges in securing employment that provides adequate wages, health insurance, and potential for upward mobility.

For youth at risk such challenges are often insurmountable and public policy often focuses on the following youth:

- youth emancipating from foster care;
- runaway and homeless youth;
- youth involved in the juvenile justice system;
- immigrant youth;
- youth with physical and mental disabilities;
- young unmarried mothers
- high school dropouts
- disconnected (not in school nor working) [7]

Some of these groups may lack financial or emotional support from their families. Children are especially vulnerable if they experience two or more risk factors below:

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[7] Based on A. L. Fernandes-Alcantara, "Vulnerable Youth: Background and Policies", Congressional Research Service, January 30, 2018

- family instability (growing up in two-parent families tends to result in better health and more positive behaviors)
- family dysfunction (especially witnessing violence against women and criminal activity among their family members)
- child neglect and abuse
- exposure to violence in the community (resulting in depression, aggressive behavior, anxiety, posttraumatic stress, psychological trauma, and antisocial behavior)
- low school and community resources and environment (poorer academic outcomes in schools with fewer resources)
- residential mobility (lower academic performance, high rates of school dropout, emotional and behavioral problems, and engaging in premarital sex)
- minority status (racial discrimination can hinder job opportunities for youth) [8]

The role of public policy

Public policies are less and less adequate to meet changing needs of youth. They are mostly still designed as if there was a smooth transition from education to work to family formation. For instance, current policies in Europe presuppose a linear transition from education to employment, which is rarely the case now. Some analyses of such policies indicate that they do not consider youth perspectives. They lead to so called 'scheme careers' to 'contain' young people and keep them out of trouble. In addition, such policies do not take into account youth's individual trajectories and aspirations and in effect demotivate young people.[9]

What's more some research evaluations point to the fact that policy focus on vulnerable groups, such as children youth and older

[8] Based on A. L. Fernandes-Alcantara, "Vulnerable Youth: Background and Policies", Congressional Research Service, January 30, 2018
[9] C. Leccardi & E. Ruspini A New Youth?: Young People, Generations and Family Life, Routledge, 2016

persons in Western countries over the past decades have resulted in some unintended consequences of separating generations and contributing to their 'insitutionalisation'. Intergenerational focus in policy design is increasingly seen as a good tool to overcome this situation.

Case study: Youth policies in the United States

Research in the US indicates that many youth receive assistance from their families during the transition to adulthood when young people attend school, move to live independently to some extent, e.g. while attending college, and stay with their families. The extended transition to adulthood for some youth may delay financial independence, which can create a burden for their families. For instance, a study from 2009 found that over 60 per cent of young people ages 19 to 22 receive financial support from their parents, including help with paying bills (42 per cent), tuition assistance (35 per cent), providing personal vehicles (23 per cent), and paying rent (21.5 per cent). Higher income families tend to provide more support.[10] Other research shows support provided by parents to their children has increased since the early 1980s. Despite such support, the current move from adolescence to adulthood has become longer and more complex.

Vulnerable youth experience more challenges due to at risk situations they find themselves in, such as family conflict, neglect or even abandonment. Further obstacle young people face is securing employment with wages adequate to cover expenses and health insurance. This youth may be prone to outcomes that have negative consequences for their future development as responsible, self-sufficient adults. Risk factors may include teenage parenthood;

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[10] Young adults whose parents were in the top quartile of family income received support ($15,449) six times as large as the assistance ($2,113) provided by parents in the bottom quartile" "An important indicator of the likelihood of school completion is socio-economic background. The dropout rate for students from low-income households is 10 per cent, compared with 5.2 per cent for those from middle-income households and 1.6 per cent for students from high-income households. High school dropouts are more likely to come from single-parent families or from families in which one or both parents are unemployed. Young people (aged 18-24) of Hispanic descent are less likely to complete school (64 per cent) than African American youth (84 per cent) or white youth (92 per cent). Native American youth also have a relatively high likelihood of dropping out." (World Youth Report, 2007)

homelessness; drug abuse; delinquency; physical and sexual abuse; and school dropout. Detachment from the labor market and school—or disconnectedness—may be the single strongest indicator that the transition to adulthood has not been made successfully.

In the US, there is no single federal policy to address challenges faced by vulnerable youth in their time of transition to adulthood. The policy at the federal level evolved from many programs that came into being in the early 20th century and expanded in the 1960s. Such programs focused on: workforce development, education, juvenile justice and delinquency prevention, social services, public health, and national and community service. They provide vulnerable youth with opportunities to develop skills to assist them in adulthood. However, despite these efforts, there is no coherent system of support which is due to lack of coordination between agencies providing services.

This deficiency has been recognized and efforts have been undertaken to coordinate funding across selected agencies, e.g. through Performance Partnerships Pilots (P3) initiative to support local communities in serving vulnerable youth. In addition, the Department of Justice has carried out the Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention since the 1970s to coordinate federal policies on youth involved in the juvenile justice system. Moreover, the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs describes positive youth development as a "process that engages young people in positive pursuits that help them acquire and practice the skills, attitudes, and behaviors that they will need to become successful adults." [11] [12]

The case of the US demonstrates the need to focus on community and local approaches. However, family-oriented approaches are lacking. Another issue is focus on delinquency prevention which combined with high rates of incarceration is of high importance but also stigmatizes youth, as problematic.

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[11] Based on A. L. Fernandes-Alcantara, "Vulnerable Youth: Background and Policies", Congressional Research Service, January 30, 2018

[12] In the 1960 Family and Youth Services Bureau addressed youth in the context of the family, later on a piecemeal approach of youth programs was gradually enacted

Conclusions & recommendations

Families play an indispensable role in supporting the development of life skills of youth and help with their life transitions. However, they may have limited time, financial and knowledge related resources to help children and youth acquire proper skills to enable smooth transitions. That is why focusing on supporting families to be able to assist youth is key.

Focus of family policies should primarily be on assistance or rather investment in families at risk, especially those with young children, those in poverty, ethnic minorities and migrant families. It should be kept in mind that youth do not live in a vacuum but mostly in caring families, thus educating parents and caregivers how to be more supportive and responsive to the changing needs of youth is indispensable.

In terms of public policy development in general terms "policy makers must begin to rethink and renovate the social institutions that were suited to a world where adulthood began at eighteen or twenty-one." [13] In particular policies encouraging flexible education and training systems and higher investments in vocational education are of outmost importance. Private sector engagement and support are needed as well. Educational and vocational planning services should be a priority with career and employment planning, establishing of short and long-term goals, etc. Money management training is a neglected area where youth skills may be lacking and need more attention.

There is a need for an increased "corporate responsibility in ensuring that internships are sufficiently remunerated or that part-time internship options are available, so that youth from all backgrounds are able to gain work experience. Public or private stipends for volunteers and interns from disadvantaged backgrounds would ensure greater equality in entry-level labour markets. Finally, increased opportunities

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[13] "Transition to Adulthood", *The Future of Children,* Vol. 20, No.1 Spring 2010
www.futureofchildren.org

for apprenticeships and entry-level jobs that require little or no prior job experience are needed."[14]

In addition, citizen based social assistance model where investments are made in universal healthcare, minimum wage, workfare (activation) programs are a must as well. Policies should be designed with families and youth participation, evaluated and updated regularly.

Lastly, as indicated by good practice evaluation, it is crucial to "form strategic partnerships including but not limited to families, youth, courts, community, private sector, education, social services, juvenile services, business, housing, and work force to provide the opportunities, services, and supports young people need to successfully transition to adulthood."[15]

ANNEX I
Recommendations in core areas of the World Programme of Action for Youth highlighted in the 2007 World Youth Report

Education
"1. Improve technical, secondary and higher education, maximizing the use of new technologies.
2. Preserve cultural heritage and diversity and encourage participatory dialogue.
3. Increase vocational, professional and life-skills training.
4. Promote human rights education, including among migrant and indigenous youth.
5. Facilitate the transition from school to work.
6. Train skilled guidance and vocational counsellors, as well as youth workers.
Employment
1. Increase microfinance and entrepreneurship programmes to benefit young people.
2. Target the unemployment of vulnerable and marginalized youth.

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[14] World Youth Report 2007. Young People's Transition to Adulthood, United Nations, 2007.
[15] http://www.itsmymove.org/docs/resources/Youth-Transitioning-to-Adulthood-Best-Practice-Report.pdf

3. Encourage youth-led and youth-run voluntary service projects.

4. Promote youth employment and skill development in the context of globalization.

Poverty

1. Empower young people as key contributors in poverty reduction strategies.

2. Promote decent work with social protection schemes, even in the informal economy.

3. Increase vocational training and employment opportunities.

4. Foster rural development to include youth in strengthening food security and sustainable agriculture.

Health

1. Ensure the provision of youth-friendly basic health services, including sexual and reproductive health care.

2. Further the development of health education, including sexual and reproductive health education.

3. Scale up the prevention and treatment of HIV infection and AIDS among youth.

4. Promote good hygiene and sanitary practices.

5. Reduce preventable diseases and illnesses.

6. Eliminate the trafficking and sexual abuse of young people.

7. Reduce obesity, hunger and malnutrition.

Rights of girls and young women

1. Eliminate discrimination and ensure equal participation at all levels of society.

2. Increase levels of education and literacy, including non-formal education.

3. Develop gender-sensitive health programmes, including sexual and reproductive health programmes.

4. Increase employment opportunities and ensure equal representation at decision-making levels.

5. Eliminate all forms of violence against girls and young women and strengthen the family.

Source: Drawn from the World Programme of Action for Youth (A/RES/50/81).

• The Governments, with the support of the international community and other stakeholders, should design and implement programmes aimed at reducing the proportion of youth in vulnerable employment. The term "vulnerable employment" refers to inadequate working conditions and to the work of own-account workers, unpaid family labour and others without social protection. It is important to ensure that policies established to address this issue do not simply move youth from vulnerable employment to unemployment but rather create viable decent employment options for them. Only through decent employment do young people have the opportunity to work themselves out of poverty.

• The persistence of unemployment among youth vividly demonstrates that economic growth alone is not a panacea for youth employment problems. Policies must focus on improving the overall context of development as well as providing opportunities in the labour market for those who are most vulnerable to unemployment. It is important for Governments to offer incentives to private sector enterprises that are labour-intensive and could contribute to the alleviation of youth unemployment.

• Volunteer work should be promoted and encouraged. Efforts are required to ensure that these experiences are mutually beneficial for the volunteer and the entity benefiting from the assistance. Recognizing that volunteer opportunities help to hone the skills of youth while also enabling them to contribute to development, Governments should devise incentives for businesses that provide such opportunities for young people. The provision of inducements also allows better monitoring of how youth fare in these work situations and may protect those who are vulnerable to exploitation.

• Governments should involve youth, represented by youth-led organizations, in identifying those subgroups of young people in need of special attention. Youth should also be involved in developing innovative approaches to, and assist with the implementation of strategies for, creating opportunities for decent and productive work for young people.

• Policies designed to support youth employment must be tailored to individual circumstances, as the contexts in which youth live and the solutions required to address employment challenges differ. Youth living in slums require different employment policies than youth living in rural areas. Similarly, specific policies are needed to address the employment needs of young women, the youngest members of the youth cohort, migrant youth, young people with disabilities, youth from ethnic minorities, and youth living in areas affected by armed conflict.

• Governments should contribute to easing the school-to-work transition by creating a supportive learning environment and facilitating the provision of ongoing skills training that translates into poverty-reducing employment.

• Partnerships between educational institutions and the public and private sectors should be established to facilitate the exchange of information on labour market needs and trends. Educational institutions can then focus on providing skills in high demand in order to facilitate the flow of labour to expanding industries where youth will be most productive.

• Every effort should be made to ensure that young people have access to information, knowledge and financial services that will enable them to establish their own business enterprises if they so choose.

• The private sector must be encouraged to make apprenticeship opportunities available for youth. Adequate remuneration must be provided to ensure equal access.

• Active labour market policies for youth need to be carefully and objectively evaluated to determine which are particularly effective in promoting youth employment.

• In many countries, facilities for vocational training are insufficient and need to be scaled up. Technical and vocational training is an important bridge between education and the world of work. Vocational

education can provide targeted training for those young people who lack marketable skills, improving their chances of securing productive employment."[16]

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[16] World Youth Report 2007. Young People's Transition to Adulthood. Progress and Challenges, United Nations, 2007.