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Expert Group Meeting

The Role of Families and Family Policy in Supporting Youth Transitions

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International Perspectives on Youth and Family Policies:
A Focus on the Transition to Adulthood

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1. Youth Transitions to Adulthood

The transition to adulthood has been longer, and more diverse around the world (Fussell, Gauthier, & Evans, 2007). The longer transition to adulthood and the dependence of youth on their parents for material assistance increases the burden on their family of origin (Furstenberg 2010) with significant broader economic implications to the society.

Moving out of the parental home and into a separate residence has been a significant and meaningful milestone for most young people in navigating their way to adulthood. Its timing and circumstances changed to a more delayed and diverse pattern than in the past (Mitchell 2017). The transition is also not always a one way process. The “boomerang age” term reflects the fact that young people often experience less permanency and more movement in and out of a variety of family-related roles, and living arrangements, due to globalization and to significant changes in public (e.g., economic, educational, work, and technological) and private domains (e.g., emergence of new family forms and structures, gender roles) (Mitchell 2017). There has been an increased number of boomerang youth, who return home after their initial launch for college or other opportunities in the recent decades.

Although there has been a strong focus on the needs in early childhood, the needs of youth as they transition into adulthood are equally important due to their long lasting effects on one’s education, work and family life (Settersten & Ray, 2010). While work, family policies and the transitions to adulthood have been examined in different areas of the globe they continue to need further consideration (Knijn, 2012).

As the transition to adulthood evolves, so should the institutions which are impacting this life stage so that they reflect the new changes and respond to their needs. Settersten and Ray (2010) indicated that in the community colleges, service learning programs and the military could be key institutions which could be instrumental in supporting a large number of youth in this transition. Community colleges could use the examples of 4-year colleges, which, through their structure and resources, provide a semi-autonomy specific to early adulthood, and provide a similar pathway. The service learning programs in schools and workplace provide important networking opportunities to young people helping them build skills and contribute to their communities and society at large. The military also serves young people, and similarly with 4 year colleges, provides a structure and pathway for successful transition to adulthood, through mentoring, skills development, resources, and connections with education and the workforce.

Family policies have the potential to support youth transition to adulthood by addressing the different needs that different parts of family systems, such as youth but also their parents, need to be successful in this process (Robila, 2014). Similarly, family life education programs targeting this life stage and its tasks could be effective in developing a smooth and successful transition to adulthood (Robila, & Taylor 2018).

The research on the transition to adulthood indicates that this process has become longer, more complex and less orderly than in the past. It is thus more challenging for youth and a large number of them are relying heavily on their family of origins for support during this transition.

(Setterson, Furnstenberg, & Rumbaut, 2005). The fact that governmental assistance programs to vulnerable youth typically end at the beginning of this process, makes it even more difficult for this group, particularly also because what happens during this process impacts youth on their future for many years (Osgood, et al. 2008).

Simultaneous pursuit of education and work throughout young adulthood is sometimes hampered by policies that discourage flexibility rather than encourage it (Setterson, Furnstenberg, & Rumbaut, 2005). Given that the population obtaining higher education increased significantly in the last decades, youth commonly combine education with employment or family formation or parenthood (Osgood et al., 2008).

Youth receive a great deal of assistance from their families, depending on family resources, parental education or number of siblings, with those having fewer resources receiving less and those with better economic circumstances receiving considerably more economic support (Osgood, et al., 2008). The level of assistance provides the youth with opportunities to follow different pathways with different opportunities.

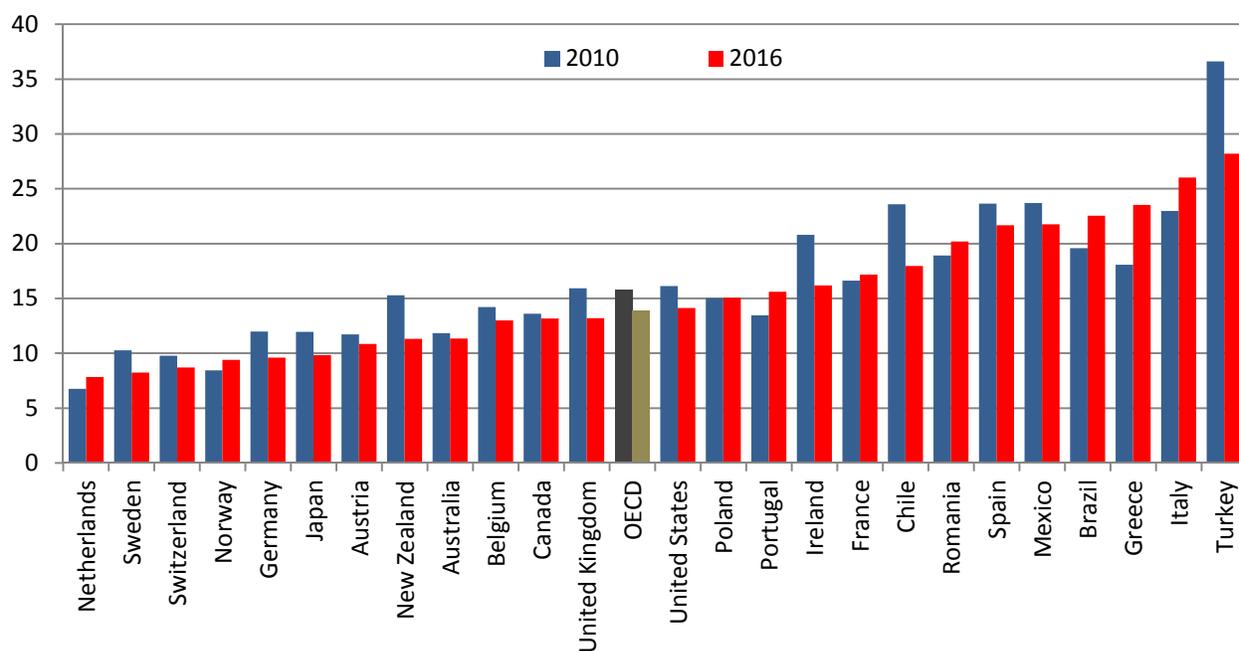
The transition towards adulthood involves different adult roles, such as finishing education, securing employment, or civic engagement and key adult roles such as forming one's own household, own family, or becoming a parent (Osgood et al., 2008). The following subsections address these areas.

Education

The transition process is becoming more ambiguous and takes longer due to longer and higher education. More youth is going to college today than in the past decades as the new global economies require higher levels of professional background. While in the long run, continuing the education on the higher level often results in increased economic and social opportunities, in the short run it delays the youth's ability to become self reliant. Moreover, unfortunately all around the world, sometimes youth end up outside the education system and unemployed.

Educational characteristics of the youth are quite diverse globally. OECD Data indicate that the proportion of 15-29 year old youth not in education, employment or training (NEET) (Table 1) vary greatly across different countries, ranging from approximately 10 percent in Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, Norway, Germany, Japan, or Australia to being very high, close to 20 percent in Spain Mexico, Brazil, Greece, Italy or even higher in Turkey. Several countries (e.g., US, UK Canada, Poland) were close to the OECD average at around 15%. Perhaps reflecting changing economic conditions, data also indicate that, with the exception of Brazil, Greece and Italy, the percentages are lower in 2017 than in 2010 for most of the countries.

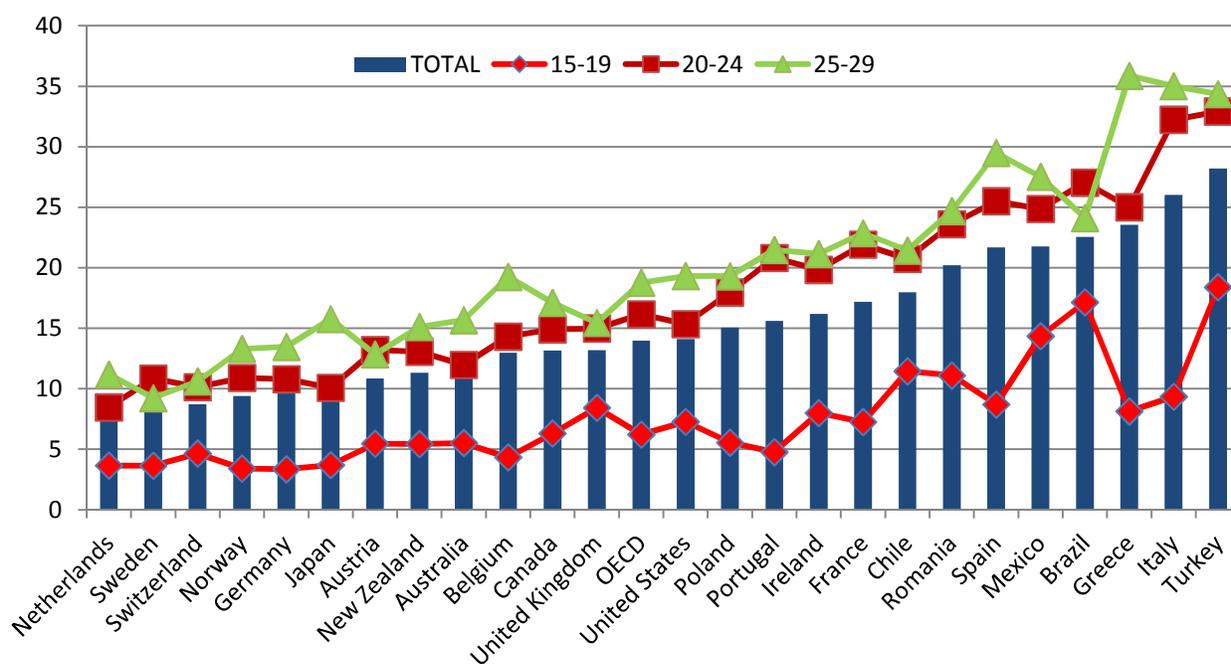
Table 1. Proportion of Youth (15-29 years old) Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)



Note: Data Source: OECD Family Database

OECD data on different age groups of youth not in education, employment or training (Table 2) indicate smaller percentages of 15-19 being in the NEET at around 5 % for a number of countries, while being considerable higher for Brazil at 16% and Turkey at 18%. The percentages for 20-24 and 25-29 years old were closer to each other across the countries, although they are higher for the oldest category, particularly for Spain, Greece, Italy and Turkey at around 30%.

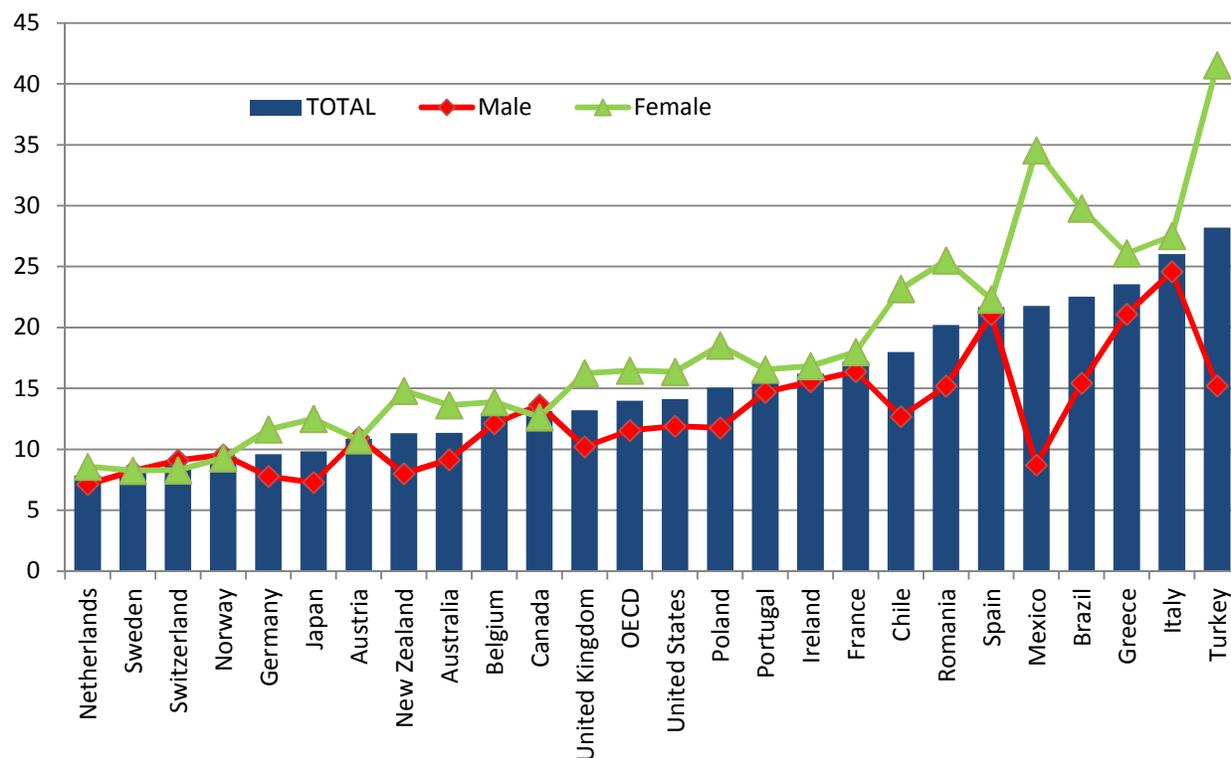
Table 2. Youth Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET) (2016)



Note. Data Source: OECD Family Database (2016)

OECD data also indicate that across OECD countries, young women were in higher percentages Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET) than men (Table 3), in some cases, with very big differences, such as in Mexico, Turkey, Brazil, Chile, Romania, Poland, UK, New Zealand, and Japan.

Table 3. Differences by Gender for Youth Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET) (2016)



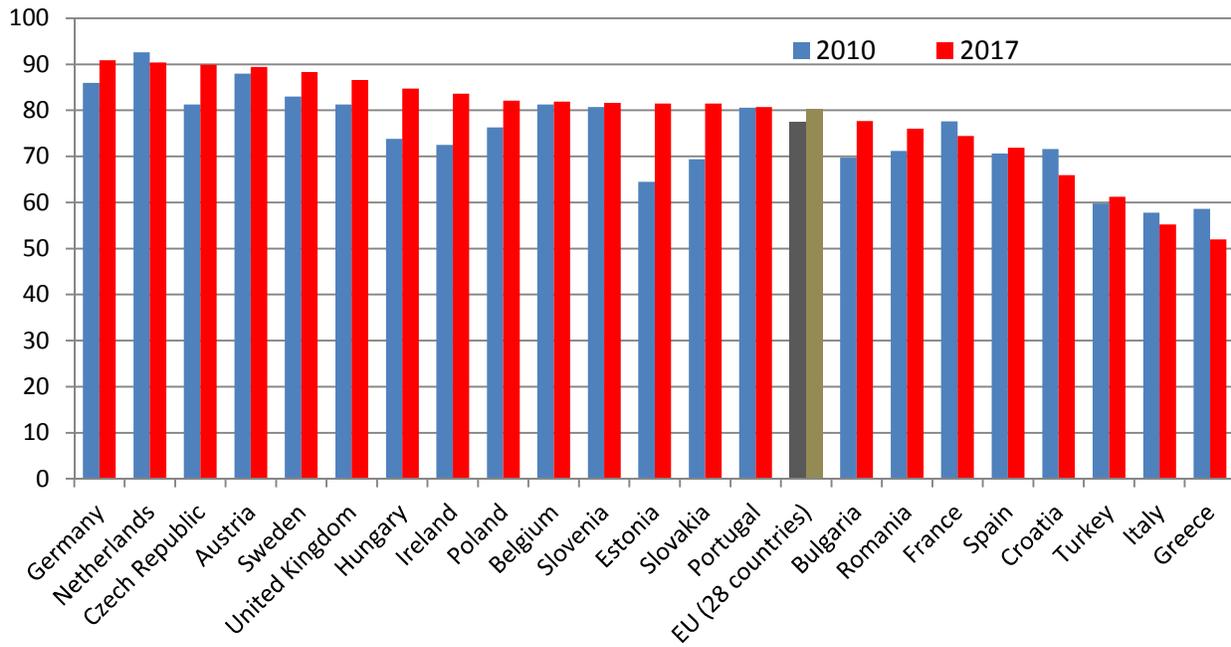
Note. Data source: OECD Family Database (2016).

Employment

Tackling youth poverty has a significant impact on the transition to adulthood. Low and unstable incomes are a major cause of poverty among youth and risks are increasing as they try to live independently and move out of family homes (France, 2008). Thus providing youth with appropriate wages is important not only to support achieving a proper economic level but also in maintaining it. Policies to ensure this practice are necessary in supporting youth become independent and economically successful.

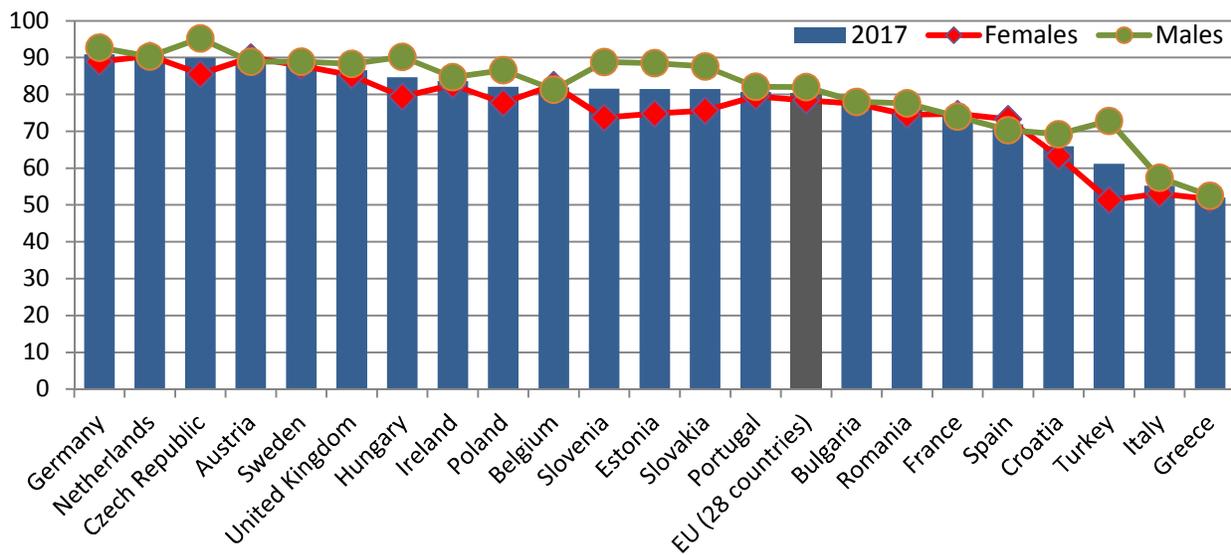
The Eurostat data on the employment of recent graduates (Table 4) indicated that, from 2010 to 2017, while many European countries experienced an increase (e.g., Hungary Ireland, Slovakia, Estonia), some registered a decrease in employment of their recent graduates (e.g., France, Croatia, Greece). The average for the EU countries was 80%, with several countries being having higher percentages (e.g., Germany, Netherlands, Czech Republic, Austria) and others much lower (e.g., Greece, Italy) for both years.

Table 4. Employment Rate of Recent Graduates (Eurostat Data, 2010, 2017)



The same Eurostat 2017 dataset (Table 5) indicated that for most of the countries, the employment rate for recent women graduates is lower than that for men. The largest difference are noted for Turkey, Slovenia, Estonia, Slovakia, Czech Republic. Gender differences were smaller for those from Netherlands, Austria, Sweden, Bulgaria and Greece.

Table 5. Employment Rate of Recent Graduates by Gender (Eurostat, 2017)



Civic Engagement

Youth civic engagement is important for society and for the growth and maturation of youth (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). Opportunities for civic engagement are not evenly distributed, with low-income and minority young adults having a lower rate of involvement, due to fewer resources, and lower parental education. For example, there are fewer opportunities for civic engagement for young adults who do not attend college. Youth's journey to adulthood could be more meaningful if the society provides civic engagement opportunities.

Specific examples were identified in some regions. In United States, the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act (2009) increased the number of slots in AmeriCorps programs in health care, education, environment, emergency preparedness and public service; made the process more flexible; increased the education award to \$6,095 (can be applied to a wide range of institutions); and involved marginalized youth (e.g. from economically disadvantages backgrounds, such as foster care) (Flanagan & Levine, 2010).

Research conducted with national samples in US on the developmental course of community service across the transition to adulthood indicated that community service increased during high school across the decades and declined from ages 18 to 24 (and leveled off thereafter) (Wray-Lake, et. al., 2017). Community service involvement varied by gender, high school grades, religiosity, college expectations and educational attainment, although all groups declined their participation. Being female, religious and high grader earner predicted steeper decline in civic engagement after high school, and college degree attainment is one of the strongest contributors to high civic involvement later in life.

Similar developments occur in other countries as well. For example, the number of youth involved with non-profit organizations in Italy has increased over the years during the transition to adulthood as a way to increase their employment opportunities and using their time and skills in meaningful ways (Walther, 2006).

2. The Role of Family in Supporting Youth Transitions

Most of the families are continuing supporting their children beyond childhood and adolescence into the early adulthood. Data show that parents' expenditures for children aged 18 to 34 is equivalent to about a third of what they spend in raising a child from birth to eighteen (Schoeni, & Ross, 2005). Parent financial support takes many forms, including housing, food, education costs, and cash, and it is connected to income levels, children from families in the top quarter of income distribution receiving at least 70% more than those in the bottom quarter.

Data also showed that in the United States parents of youth eighteen to twenty one, are spending about 10% of their annual income (regardless of income) to help their children (Settersten & Ray, 2010). Children from families with higher income are thus better positioned to have a strong start into their transition to adulthood, increasing their ability to attend college or pursuing other activities (e.g., travel), while those from families with lower incomes have to negotiate

education and work, many times going back and forth between the two, or doing both at the same time.

Transition to adulthood is a complex process for both youth and their families, particularly their parents because the changes involved reverberate in the parental family. Parent-child relations are found to be related to career development, as career choices, employment, opportunities, self-governance and relationships are often discussed with parents (Young, et al., 2008).

The quality of family relations that youth have with their families of origin is also an important factor in their transition. Supporting youth and families develop a thorough understanding of this life stage and develop skills to tackle it successfully is of tremendous importance. Families' multiple resources such as time, emotional support, or financial assistance, will have a significant impact on how difficult or smooth youth transition can be. Strengthening family relations has the potential to be a strong factor in youth successful transition.

Research shows that young people who can build stronger and wider connections with adults other than their parents, such as teachers or mentors, are better equipped to be successful, because it might open opportunities and provide resources within the larger community (Settersten & Ray, 2010). Developing mentoring programs at the community level would provide youth with fewer resources with much needed guidance and support to achieve a healthy and successful transition to the adult roles.

3. International Perspectives on Policies Supporting Youth Transitions

Given the more diverse pathways to adulthood and work, young people are prone to make more individualized decisions regarding their trajectory. Walther (2006) examined different transition pathways focusing on youth choices, flexibility and opportunities across different European countries, but also on the risks of social exclusion and failure. For example in the UK a large number of youth are using the extended access to education and training in hoping for career opportunities with fair payments. In Germany, youth are concerned about the stigma of using social assistance and thus they are focused on pursuing regular training and securing standard employment, while in Italy, a large number of youth live with their families and rely on their support, given the high unemployment rates for all education levels and lack of access to benefits (Walther, 2006).

Fussell, Gauthier, and Evans's (2007) examination of multiple events involved in the transition to adulthood in Australia, Canada, and the United States, indicated that the youth in the US experience a more uniform and shorter transition than the youth in the other countries due to the concentration of education in traditional school age, an earlier entry into employment, and a more continuum into marriage and household headship (perhaps due to more traditional values in the US).

Youth face greater obstacles in their transitions to adulthood in the Middle East than their peers in other areas such as Latin America or Asia, despite increases in oil revenues and economic

growth (Salehi-Isfahani & Dhillon, 2008). Youth transitions in Middle East are impacted by several factors, including high numbers of youth (due to high fertility rate in the area), oil revenues which raise household income reducing incentive for youth to take jobs resulting in youth unemployment in countries with high levels of imported foreign labor. While education is expected to ease the transition to employment, it fails to achieve that in this area. The unemployment rate is one of the highest in the world, determining youth to live longer with their families of origin and postpone their own family creation. The cause of the problem lies with the institutions which are mediating these transitions from school to work and family formation (Salehi-Isfahani & Dhillon, 2008). Public policy would be more effective by aligning the education and human capital formation with public and private sector employers and economic needs of the society.

Policies Supporting Youth in Vulnerable Situations

While youth who are living with supportive families of origin continue to receive a substantial amount of financial and instrumental support from their families, youth who are in more vulnerable situations such as being part of disengaged families, homeless, or in foster care, special education or the juvenile system are missing out on a strong and comprehensive support system to help them navigate the transition to adulthood (Settersten & Ray, 2010).

The U.S. federal government does not use a unified approach to address the challenges that vulnerable youth experience during the transition to adulthood. However, there are separate programs helping youth be successful in different areas, such as education, workforce development, juvenile justice, social services, public health and civic engagement (e.g., community service) (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2018). In an effort to increase the coordination among the different services, the U.S. Congress passed the Federal Youth Coordination Act of 2009 which amended the Tom Osborne Federal Youth Coordination Act of 2006 to establish the White House Office for National Youth Policy to develop, coordinate and evaluate the National Youth Strategy to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of youth services.

Policies Supporting Homeless Youth

Homeless youth include those living in shelters, on the streets, and at group homes, and those living with other families in overcrowded conditions. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act is the main federal policy in the United States addressing homeless youth transition to adulthood by supporting them in continuing their education, removing barriers to attending school, encouraging interagency collaboration in promoting student's success, and prohibiting the segregation of homeless students from the general population. Among the provisions of this policy are the fact that homeless students may remain in their school of origin for the entire time they are homeless, regardless of their residential mobility, the school district arranges transportation for homeless youth that remain at their school of origin, but move outside the school boundaries as a result of residential instability, and students can enroll without delay, even if they lack the necessary documentation or immunization records. However, although this policy is effective in terms of increasing the number of homeless youth attending school, policies should also address the specific educational needs of these students, and create diverse

educational opportunities, mentoring programs and better interagency coordination (e.g., between shelters and schools) (Tierney, Gupton, Hallett, 2008).

In the UK, the policies designed to address the problems of youth transitions to independent living including The Rough Sleepers Strategy, the “More than a Roof” Initiative or the Homeless Act of 2002 and the Housing Bill (2004) have had a tendency to consider homelessness as a choice or the result of unwillingness or possibility to work, which prevents a more supportive approach in helping the youth through the transition to adulthood (France, 2008).

Transitions to Adulthood for Youth in Foster Care

Given that adolescents aging out of the child welfare system are more vulnerable to the challenges of the transition to adulthood, such as unemployment, poverty, homelessness, a continuing family and community support is necessary to foster individual development (Collins, 2001). Youth coming out of the foster care system rarely experience the sustained parental and family support that families of origin are usually providing in society, which continues beyond adolescence into young adulthood.

The United States Congress amended the Title IV-E of the Social Security Act with the Independent Living Initiative (1986), which was reauthorized into permanent status as Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993, to have funds for states to develop and implement programs to assist youth 16 years of age and older to make transition to independent living. In 1999 The Independent Living Initiative was renamed the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program with the passage of the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999.

While youth leaving the foster care are encouraged to move towards self-sufficiency and independent living, Propp, Ortega, and NewHeart (2003) suggest reframing and emphasizing an interdependent approach that values interdependence, connection and collaboration. Many youth describe the transition to independent living difficult, due to lack of preparedness and insecurity. Thus, redefining how success is perceived, and a shift from independent living to interdependent living might be more effective, promoting a combination of self-sufficiency and connection with other people in coping with life transitions, underling that connecting with others is a sign of a healthy human development and growth. The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoption Act represent a shift away from the goal of preparing youth to be independent of state assistance by the time they are 18 years of age towards an active engagement by government in parenting foster youth into adulthood (Courtney, 2009).

Courtney (2009) comprehensive report on policies addressing the difficult transition to adulthood for foster youth in the U.S., underlines that while significant progress to support foster care youth with their transition towards adulthood have been made, some challenges still exist, particularly the lack of knowledge on effectiveness of independent living services, and the lack of well established models of coordination between different agencies supporting foster care youth.

Transition to Adulthood for Youth with Special Health Care Needs

In its clinical report on supporting the health care transitions from adolescence to adulthood in the medical home, the American Academy of Pediatrics (2011) provides practice based guidelines for the implementation of this transition to insure a coordination of patient, family and provider responsibilities so that youth 18 to 21 years of age with special health care needs (e.g., chronic physical, developmental, behavioral or emotional conditions) optimize their ability to assume adults roles and activities. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Service's Maternal and Child Health Bureau has been promoting an effective transition for all youth and families. The Transition Plan includes four steps: 1. Assessing the transition readiness and developing realistic goals; 2. Plan a longitudinal process of achieving the goals; 3. Implementing the plan through education and skill development;. 4. Documenting the progress accomplished. While progress has been made towards achieving a smooth transition, more evaluation research has to be conducted to address the transition needs of adolescents to adulthood.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Youth transition to adulthood is one of the most dynamic and complex life stages, with significant long term impact on the future. Equipping the youth and their families with effective educational and life skills will prepare them to tackle the challenges and accomplish their goals. Policies have the opportunity to provide the institutional support that is needed in developing the structures and pathways to provide the opportunities to navigate this life stage successfully.

Recommendations

- Strengthening family relations as they have the potential to be a strong factor in youth successful transition, given that families' resources (e.g., time, emotional support, financial) have a significant impact on how difficult or smooth youth transition develops
- Developing strong networks and connections with other supportive adults besides family members, such as teachers, mentors, professionals.
- Develop policies to support simultaneous pursuit of education and employment throughout young adulthood
- Develop policies to support youth' appropriate wages to develop and maintain an appropriate economic level
- Develop policies to better connect education and work experiences for a successful transition to adulthood. Develop specific work skills, appropriate to the contemporary needs of the employers. Organize the education system so that this is accomplished
- Encourage youth to finish school and reduce the number of youth leaving school

- Promote policies that focus on the pathways that youth follow after leaving school
- Foster youth civic engagement
- Promote effective policy development, implementation and evaluation focused on this life stage
- Increase investment in youth in order to decrease financial costs later on

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