

Comparing the Employment Prospects of the 'Lost Generation' of Youth in Greece and the UK

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There has been a crisis for young people building in many European countries for three decades or more because of persistently high rates of youth unemployment, particularly in France and several southern European countries (Green, 2017). Younger generations have been at the 'sharp end of globalisation' since the mid 1980s, in many countries experiencing successive waves of labour market reforms seeking to enhance economic competitiveness by increasing the contractual flexibility of labour. But it was the financial crisis of 2007/8 and ensuing recession and austerity which has dramatised the plight of young people, causing many commentators to talk of a 'lost generation.' Greece and the UK are amongst those countries where young people have been suffered disproportionately, relative to other age groups, although in distinctive ways.

Greece is an economically and socially weakened country, heavily affected by the crisis and the ongoing recession. The impact of the recession on youth employment in Greece was huge and persistent (Papadakis, 2017). Unemployment amongst young people (aged 15- 24) peaked in February 2013 at 60.5 percent. It has declined somewhat but still almost one out of two young people in Greece are unemployed. The unemployment rate is almost twice as high as the EU average and compared with the situation before the crisis. At the same time, precarious forms of employment are increasing among the employed ones. The seriousness of the situation for young adults generally (aged 15- 34) can be gauged by increasing rate at which they are emigrating in search of work.

In the UK young people have also seen their employment opportunities decrease, if not to the same extent as in Greece. Unemployment for those aged 16-24 rose to 18.9 percent in 2009 but subsequently declined to more normal levels. However, in other respects employment prospects for young people have remained relatively poor. Real wages for employees aged between 16 and 34 fell by 12-15 percent between 2008 and 2014, compared with 5 to 6 percent for those aged over 35 (Bell and Blanchflower, 2011; Gregg et al, 2014). Under-employment and precarious working, including involuntary part-time working, short-term contracts and so called 'zero-hours' contracts, have been increasing, now including up to 14 percent of 20-29 year old male employees and 17 percent of female employees. Graduates still have better prospects of employment than non-graduates, unlike in Greece, but their chances of finding graduate employment have declined, with only an estimated 40 to 50 percent now unable to gain graduate jobs within five years after graduation (Green, 2017).

In this paper we use Labour Force Survey and other data to compare the employment prospects for young adults today in Greece and the UK. In particular we focus on trends for young people in general in: 1) employment and unemployment rates; 2) NEETS; 3) real pay levels; and 4) precarious working. In respect of graduates, we look, additionally, at the trends in 'over qualification' and employment in 'graduate level' jobs. We further analyse the social vulnerability among youth (emphasizing the case of Greek NEETS) as well as the revival of the intergenerational transmission of poverty, that affects and essentially limits young people's life chances, regardless their educational background/ level.

References

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