

NEGOTIATE

Overcoming early job-insecurity in Europe

Youth unemployment and the consequences for life satisfaction and social trust in seven European countries

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Overcoming early job-insecurity in Europe

NEGOTIATE – Negotiating early job-insecurity and labour market exclusion in Europe

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The Norwegian team at NOVA–HiOA

1 Summary and conclusion

The 2007–2008 global financial crisis led to the ‘Great Recession’, making a multi-year debt crisis a reality for several Eurozone countries. These developments had large and persistent effects on European youth labour markets, causing high unemployment rates among the youth in many countries. In an effort to understand the subjective effects of youth unemployment in Europe, the NEGOTIATE project conducted life story interviews with 211 individuals from seven countries and three cohorts (1950–1955, 1970–1975 and 1990–1995). The participating countries were Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Norway, Poland and the UK. The Norwegian team has written the present report, with important inputs from all the participating national teams.

Topics and questions:

Based on interview summaries from 211 interviews, we discuss the main narratives that emerged from the data, and explore the youths’ transition into adulthood in conditions of unemployment and job insecurity. Furthermore, we examine the interviewees’ narrations about the effects on unemployment on such crucial aspects as social trust and life satisfaction.

Our three main questions are:

- A. From a cross-national perspective, what are the main narratives of people who have experienced job insecurity in their early youth as they transitioned into adulthood? How did they seek to actively cope with job insecurity?
- B. What are the effects of unemployment on the interviewees’ subjective experiences of social trust and life satisfaction?
- C. What are the interviewees’ policy recommendations?

Methods:

All 211 interviewees signed an informed consent form approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data, and by local and university ethics committees when necessary. The interviews included questions on how interviewees transitioned from school to experiencing unemployment, and how it affected their life situations. The interview guide also included topics like social mobility and social trust. The recruitment criteria required that the interviewees were born in the years 1950–1955, 1970–1975 and 1990–1995, and that they did not receive any tertiary education until the age of 25.

All the interviewees were eager to convey their stories of unemployment and/or job insecurity. Their stories were expressed in an interpersonal context between the interviewee and the interviewer. The

interviews were recorded, and each participating country shared a summary (in English) of each interview with the other national teams. Hence, we base this report on interview summaries. To examine the three questions, we used directed content analysis, which involves a circular process of carefully reading the summaries while creating tentative categories and touching upon relevant theory.

Results:

At first glance, it may seem difficult to find similarities in data from such diverse countries and cohorts as these seven Eurozone countries, as there are significant economic, institutional and cultural differences between them. However, upon analysing the interview summaries, we identified four main narratives:

- A. The Stumbler Narrative consists of youths narrating their initial but passing troubles in their transition from education to labour.
- B. The Precariat Narrative is expressed by people who have experienced or are still experiencing a life situation of economic insecurity due to the lack of a permanent position. Temporary employment, either with or without a contract, emerge as a common factor.
- C. The Messy Life Narrative is distinguished by the telling of life trajectories that somehow got out of hand: chaotic upbringings, ill health and/or abuse issues are some of the themes that characterise this narrative group.
- D. The Great Crisis Narrative portrays unemployment in the wider sense of catastrophic societal crisis and loss. These stories are marked by a sense of hopelessness, and the interviewees portray their unemployment as a fate that is completely out of their control.

The diagram below shows that the Precariat Narrative is the biggest group by far. The second largest group is the Stumbler Narrative, followed by the uncategorised “Other” group, the Messy Life Narrative and, finally, the Great Crisis Narrative.

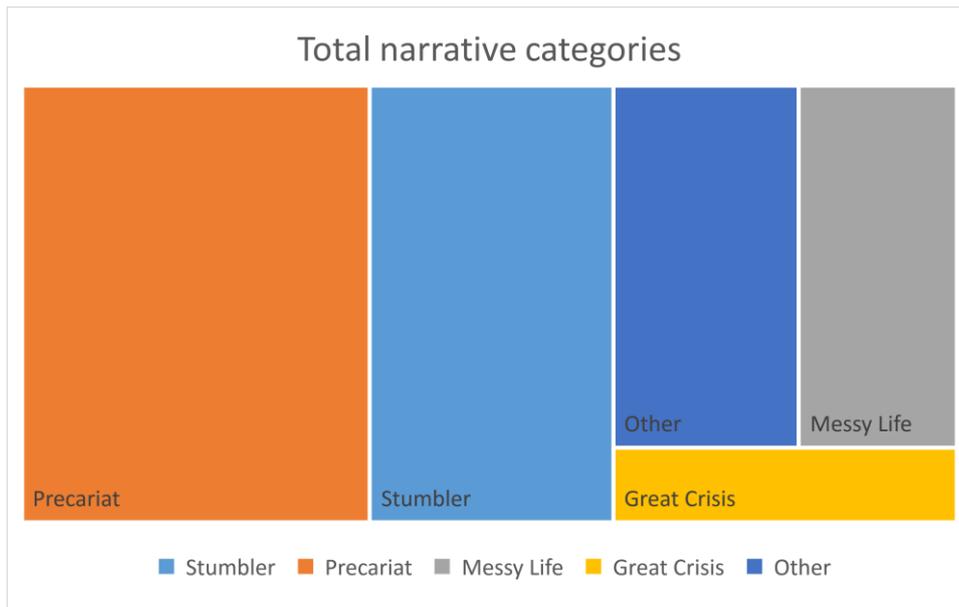


Figure 1: Narrative categories in total

Gender aspects are visible throughout the interview summaries, but more on an aggregate level than as thematised by the interviewees. Becoming a parent early in life can be a barrier to both finishing school and obtaining employment, and this was almost solely observed in the narratives of women. Nonetheless, a few British male interviewees spoke of the special burden that unemployed men experience as their breadwinner role is hit by not having an income.

When one is unemployed or has little income, help and support from family, friends and/or the state are crucial. In the summaries, the emotional impact of relying on social networks are thematised in particular. Many highlighted how grateful they are for support from their families; families emerged as a safe haven for some. Being dependent on family, however, also puts restraints on unemployed youth as they become financially dependent, and thus continue to live with their parents even as adults. Some interviewees expressed that they felt they were a burden on their parents.

As for trust and faith in the state and the support it offers, the interview summaries show a variety of attitudes, ranging from interviewees having lost all faith in the state, to interviewees feeling fully confident that governmental services will help them when needed. In general, the narrative data portrays the government in a personalised form, as interviewees gave anecdotes of both helpful and unhelpful caseworkers.

While no striking national differences could be found in the data in terms of social trust, one of the main subtopics of life satisfaction, namely financial insecurity, was particularly apparent in the summaries from Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Greece. Some of the summaries display how the consequences of unemployment and job insecurity affected the interviewees' family responsibilities,

such as providing housing, food and electricity, leading to high levels of stress and great psychological challenges. Several interviewees from all the participating countries narrated how unemployment affects their mental health. Unemployment, to some, is associated with social stigma. Furthermore, being unemployed affects one's self-worth and confidence. In some of the summaries, depression prior to the experience of unemployment also emerged, and may have contributed to difficulties in finding a job. A few interviewees also touched upon some unexpected positive outcomes of unemployment, e.g. they developed a deeper understanding of themselves after going through tough times, and they became more aware of their own skills.

Conclusions:

The data gathered from the life story interviews from the seven European countries uncover that there are significant differences between these countries with regard to the impact of the Great Recession on their lives. Nonetheless, there are also strong similarities in how unemployed individuals view their lives. The majority of our interviewees have been or still are affected by unemployment or economic exclusion. Accordingly, they suggested policy improvements in the areas of education, employment services and the practices of employers, including:

- More and robust apprenticeships,
- Better, individually tailored governmental services, rendered by employment agency caseworkers who do not only see you as a number, but as an individual, and
- Better monitoring of existing legislation that is supposed to protect workers from precarity and exploitation by employers.

2 Introduction

Employment provides individuals with income and opportunities for skills development, in addition to providing access to professional and social networks. A job grants important structure, stability and a certain predictability to life. For young people transitioning from adolescence to young adulthood, work often represents a prerequisite to attain adult roles. Without gainful employment, milestones such as graduating from school, starting a family and establishing an independent household may prove difficult or impossible.

The 2007–2008 global financial crisis was followed by the ‘Great Recession’; the telling name mirrors the Great Depression of the early 1930s (Eichengreen, 2015). A multi-year debt crisis is now the reality for several Eurozone countries. The recession has exerted a large and persistent impact on European youth labour markets. Eurostat data reveal that EU citizens under the age of 25 had a 23.7 percent chance of unemployment in 2013, with the corresponding number for those who are 25 years and over being 9.5 percent (Ayllón & Nollenberger, 2016:1).

The characteristics and effects of the recession vary considerably between European countries, with some countries being hit extremely hard. The percentage of Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) individuals is still only 5–10 percent in countries such as Germany and the Czech Republic, while it is as high as 20 percent or more in Greece and Bulgaria (O’Reilly et al., 2015:2). The effect of the recession on the youth will also look different depending on the definition of youth unemployment. For instance, we may distinguish between ‘poorly integrated new entrants’ into the labour market and ‘youth left behind’ who stay out of the labour market even in their thirties (O’Reilly et al., 2015). However, there is no doubt that today’s European youth face hardships that are unprecedented on this side of WWII, and that we are in real danger of having a scarred generation of labour market participants. There is also no doubt that the current levels of employment insecurity and unemployment have consequences on many levels on young people’s lives (Ayllón & Nollenberger, 2016:1) —from health and well-being to financial security and decisions about residence, family formation and more.

The youth are a vulnerable group in the labour market, and their chances of employment are susceptible to conjunctures to a larger degree than those of their adult counterparts. They are also more vulnerable to income poverty (Fahmy, 2014:38). Looking at how unemployment subjectively affects individuals, and gaining insights into how they cope and make choices with limited capabilities is of great importance to policy development; however, these factors have been underinvestigated in research studies (Tanum & Krogstad, 2014:253). Both causes and effects may vary substantially from one unemployed individual to the other, and the goal of this subproject and the present report is to show some of this variation.

For task 4.4 of the NEGOTIATE project, we focus on how three different generations have experienced unemployment as youth and young adults, with particular attention placed on aspects of personal life satisfaction and overall social trust. The participating countries include Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Norway, Poland, and the UK. In the report, we discuss three main questions:

- A. From a cross-national perspective, what are the main narratives of people who have experienced job insecurity in their early youth as they transitioned into adulthood? How did they seek to actively cope with job insecurity?
- B. What are the effects of unemployment on the interviewees' subjective experiences of social trust and life satisfaction?
- C. What are the interviewees' policy recommendations?

3 Data and methodology

The main objective of the life course interviews conducted in NEGOTIATE was to gain insight into subjective consequences of early adulthood job insecurity across Europe. Seven countries participated in this part of the project: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Norway, Poland, and the UK. The 211 interviewees were born within three different cohorts (1950–55, 1970–75 and 1990–95), in total equally divided between men and women. All interviewees were aware of the purpose of the project and signed an informed consent form, approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data, and by local and university ethical committees when necessary. The fieldwork started May 2016, and finished November 2016, differing somewhat among the participating countries.

CRITERION	SELECTION CRITERIA	NUMBER
Gender	Men	109
	Women	102
Birth cohort	1950–1955	39
	1970–1975	85
	1990–1995	85
Education level when entering labour market	Lower secondary or less	104
	Upper secondary	103
Occupational status before the age of 25	Precarious employment	49
	Long-term unemployment	107
Ethnicity/migrant status	Majority	166
	Minority (Roma, migrant etc.)	43
Health status	Minor disabilities or health issues	5
	Disabled or severe health issues	30
Current occupational status	Unemployed or in shadow economy	104
	Temporary job	37
	Secure job	61
Place of residence	City/capital	133
	Small town or village	76

Figure 2: Overview of interviewee criteria, in total

To qualitatively examine early job insecurity experiences, the researchers of NEGOTIATE developed and pre-tested an interview guide that after revision and comments by the partners was translated

into the participating countries' languages. The guide was drafted based on previous research in the field and the theoretical perspectives relevant for the larger project, e.g. the Capability Approach. The interview guide was thematically organised with the aim to investigate unemployment narratives within a life story frame. It included questions on the transition from school to unemployment, and how unemployment affected the interviewee's life situation. We asked about opportunities for being active during unemployment and benefitting from support (from family, non-governmental organizations, the government), and the activities undertaken during unemployment. We posed questions to what degree individual unemployment was seen as caused by broader changes in the economy and the labour market, and questions on the short and long-term consequences as reported by the interviewees. Other main topics were social mobility, social trust and life satisfaction. The interview started with easy and concrete questions about respondents' biography, family, education and current employment situation. We then moved to more sensitive and abstract questions.

In order to be recruited for interviewing, potential candidates were to have experienced unemployment or job insecurity by the time they were 25 years of age. They had to be born within the cohorts of 1950 to 1955, 1970 to 1975 or 1990 to 1995, and be without tertiary education before turning 25. However, all these criteria had to be tweaked somewhat in at least some of the countries. For instance, several of the national teams decided to be a bit flexible on the year of birth. In post-socialist countries the oldest cohort (1950 to 1955) had to be excluded from the comparison (or there were only few interviewees included) because the specific political and economic context in those countries in which everybody was obliged to have a job. Regarding the criteria to have been unemployed for more than 6 months or 12 months (i.e. the definition of long-term unemployment), this was sometimes overlooked. The reality on the ground is that people often go through repeated instances of short unemployment, precarious employment, staying at home with caring responsibilities etc., rather than being completely out of work. People go in and out of casual work and temporary jobs. As Dooley and others have argued, unemployment and underemployment exist along a continuum (Blustein, Kozan, & Connors-Kellgren, 2013; Dooley, 2003). Our data has shown us that many young unemployed Europeans are participating in the shadow economy, as for example in Bulgaria. The interviews there showed that non-contractual employment is part of the working experience for many young people. We did not want these very common experiences to be excluded from the study. Yet, our main emphasis remained on the long-term unemployed.

We recruited interviewees by various means and through several channels. Organizations like labour unions, NGOs working with minorities and disabled people were contacted, and we put information about the project and the wish to recruit people for interviews up in a variety of webpages.

Recruitment ads were put in community notice boards, in supermarkets etc. We have had ads on our institutions' web pages, on Facebook, and on the Negotiate web site. We contacted churches, museums and other institutions working with unemployed people, and we used the snowball method in our personal networks. To some extent, the teams used gatekeepers to gain access to certain communities. In addition, several of the teams made use of commercial services specializing in recruiting, surveys etc. in order to find interviewees with the necessary profiles from all three cohorts. Depending on local context and institutional practice, interviewees were given monetary rewards for partaking in the project.

Despite a lot of effort by the national teams, we faced challenges in the recruiting process, in particular in finding interviewees born in the older cohorts. The reasons for these troubles are probably complex. Some of our desired project interviewees may belong to groups that are difficult to reach through our recruiting channels. In some cases, unemployment and job insecurity may be sensitive subjects and associated with shame. The oldest cohorts, those born in 1950 to 55, belong to a group that entered working life at a time when many European countries experienced historically low unemployment rates, like in Norway, or in principle non-existent unemployment, as in Bulgaria and the Czech Republic. Similarly, in the UK, our team found women with caring responsibilities in this cohort, but very few men.

No matter whether the interviewees were self-recruited to the study or were recruited through professional agencies, they were in general eager to convey how they had experienced unemployment. The stories were produced in an interpersonal context, i.e., the one between researcher and interviewee, but it may be argued that interviewees also spoke – and in fact were asked to speak – to a larger social and cultural context (Squire, 2008:44). For example, some interviewees clearly wanted other persons to benefit from their experiences. In this respect, the researcher was perhaps regarded as someone who could give voice to his or her stories. These 'others' were likely to be policy makers or support services who would benefit from the interviewees' insight into the challenges of existing policy and services. To be able to speak to these other contexts, the ability and willingness of the researcher to co-construct the informant's recollection of past events are significant.

Some of the interviewees had recent experiences of unemployment and job insecurity, as they were still unemployed or in a precarious situation at the time of interview, and thus could give detailed accounts of experiences. Others, like the 1950 to 55 and 1970 to 75 cohorts, had sometimes only distant memories of experiences with unemployment. Their narratives look back upon occurrences that happened decades in the past. In forming these histories, the interviewees would have more

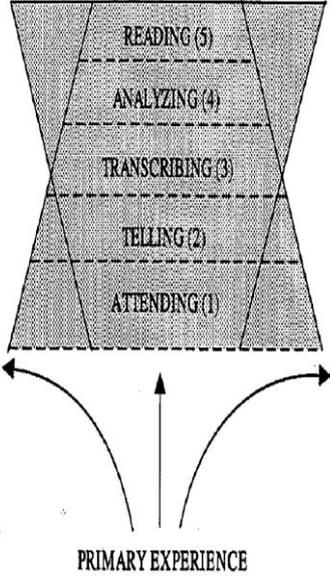
recent experiences of the labour market, and a lifetime of reflection to frame their experiences within. But no matter whether the unemployment were close or distant, in understanding the interviewees' stories it is important to stress that several aspects influence what the informant is capable of telling and chooses to tell (Riessman, 1993). The limit of recollection is one aspect. Other factors relate, e.g., to the context of the research interview. Interviews were conducted by a non-unemployed researcher, often (but definitely not always) in a privileged position in a number of ways to the interviewee. These conditions undoubtedly influenced the interviewees' stories, although it is difficult to assess exactly how. Faced with the employed researcher, the interviewees may have felt somewhat intimidated. On the other hand, concerning the topic at hand being unemployment, we tried to convey the interviewees as experts on unemployment issues. In such a position, the interviewees felt a need to contextualize utterances to make implied meanings known – to explain issues they expected the researchers not to be knowledgeable about.

We aimed for thorough and open-minded exploration of the narrated experiences, and aimed to allow the interviewees to remain in control of what aspects of their lives they wanted to elaborate on. This may have prevented significant questions being asked, but such potential weaknesses were reduced by inquiring at the end of the interviews whether relevant questions had been left out, an opportunity many of our interviewees took advantage of. Some interviewees, especially in the eastern European countries, had very low or no education, in addition to little experience with surveys and research. Some of these interviewees expressed difficulties in understanding certain questions from our interview guides. This weakness was reduced by paraphrasing the main idea of the question by the interviewer. Some interviewees declined to answer particular questions (for instance comparing their own socioeconomic position to that of their parents), and this was naturally respected. A member of the research team conducted the interviews, which lasted between 30 minutes and 2 hours – the duration of the interviews largely dependent on both the willingness and the ability of the interviewee to talk about his experiences of unemployment.

Nearly all interviews were sound recorded. A transcript in the national language was made for each interview, with a synopsis translated in English and disseminated via Dropbox between the NEGOTIATE partners. These summaries included the most important information following the main topics of the interview guide, including quotations. In addition, based on the national interviews in total, each team made a national summary with descriptions of the most important characteristics of their local interviews. Respecting the anonymity of the interviewees, the transcripts were marked with abbreviation and number code – for instance BG_01 and so on until BG_30. Some national teams gave fictional names to the interviewees, and in this report all interviewees have been given such pseudonyms. All taped interviews are stored in a secure manner by the consortium members,

the interview summaries and national summaries in open access when the project closes.

When writing this report we did not have immediate access to the interviewees’ life story narratives, as one researcher (nor a small team of researchers) could not possibly master all languages involved in the transcriptions. Many different people have been involved in contact with interviewees, transcribing, summarising and translating the interviews. What we have, are summaries in English, of each interview and of national totals. There are many steps in the process of analysing narrative data, and in this project, there have even more layers to the process. In short, the data that we have access to have already been through some of the layers without us having influence of or insight into it except through our colleagues. As Riessman and others have stressed, we as researchers do not “find” narratives, we participate in their creation (Riessman, 2008:22), and in this project there are aspects of the context, setting and feel of the interviews that we are prevented from information of. To visualise the process of a large, pan-European project such as ours, we have modified Riessman’s original model:



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Reading (5)	
Analyzing (4)	D - Review by the other involved national research teams C - Researchers analyzing interview summaries without access to earlier stages in the levels of representation in the research process B - Translating summary into English by researcher or assistant A - Summarising in original language by researcher or assistant
Transcribing (3)	By researcher that did interviews, assistant, or for instance a professional transcribing agency
Telling (2)	
Attending (1)	

Figure 3: Riessman’s original model (Riessman, 1993:10), and our modification

Riessman’s model is adapted to qualitative research where the interviewer, transcriber, analyser and reader is one and the same person. As will be evident, we have added some aspects to both the transcribing process and the analyzing process – aspects that come about from the sheer size and linguistic diversity of a pan-European project. There are more participants in these levels of the research process than what is usually imagined in models of narrative research, and all these participants bring with them different contexts, presuppositions and interpretations. For instance, in the summaries, some national teams have included many quotes, while others primarily paraphrases

the words of the interviewees. Some have worked with original languages closer to English, making it easier to do direct translations, others have needed to work more with interpretation – and some have chosen to make evident in the summaries links between different statements, or to comment on possible interpretations of the narratives.

In our reading of the interview summaries, we have focused on what the summaries tells us about each interviewees' characterisations of her life, and taken our analytical points from types of narratives that have been prevalent, strong or otherwise worth of remark. When there have been uncertainties of interpretation, we have looked at other interview summaries to get context and depth – and to secure transferability. Our approach when seeking to understand the narrative data gathered through this project may be labelled as directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005:1281) or categorical-content analysis (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Vedeler, 2013).

The label “directed content analysis” fits our method because we had some overarching themes that we could expect beforehand to be prevalent in the interview summaries. Existing theory and empirical research in the field of youth unemployment provided us with ideas of what variables would be of interest (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005:1281), for instance, placing the unemployment itself in categories (e.g. voluntary/involuntary, catastrophic/passing) and placing the unemployed interviewees in categories (e.g. minority status/class background/family responsibilities). The process was circular in that after a careful reading of the first interview summaries (the Norwegian, German and Czech data), we created tentative categories. We discussed these with our colleagues, and in light of the Capability Approach, whereupon we returned to the same interview summaries, and then the rest of the data. In short, ‘capability’ is a term for ‘the alternative combinations of things a person is able to do or to be – the various “functionings” he or she can achieve’ (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993:30).

The interviewees in each country are not statistically representative of unemployed in those countries. However, the interviewees and the rich narrative data they have given us do represent a comprehensive range of all the important groups of the young unemployed in Europe. In the following sections, 4 and 5, we will discuss different types or categories of narratives found in the interview summaries, and what the interview summaries tell us of social trust and life satisfaction among unemployed European youths.

4 Narratives on the transition into employment

4.1 Introduction

The present study investigates how certain Europeans speak of their experiences with unemployment during their youths. In other words, rather than discussing events, causes and effects, we concentrate on how these events, causes and effects are subjectively interpreted – often many years later – by the individuals themselves, and how these interpretations are verbalized or narrated to our researchers. Personal narratives are recapitulations of past experience, one particular mode of making sense of the events we live through (Baumeister & Newman, 1994:677). They come to life in particular cultural and societal contexts, and autobiographical narrative is always embedded both in cultural norms of storytelling and of what makes a good life. This makes such narratives of particular interest to, for instance, studies of concepts of selves in the wake of societal change, or as in this particular case study, of how – if at all – individuals relate their personal life trajectories to structural changes on the labour market. Life narratives are important parts of identity formation and self-perception or, as Brockmeier and Carbaugh poetically phrase it, “narrative is a central hinge between culture and mind” (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001:10). The data we have gathered for this project give insights into many aspects of unemployed lives, not least of which is to what degree the young European unemployed perceive their identities as marked by their status as unemployed.

Narratives (or stories, a synonym concept that will alternate through this working paper) may be defined as forms of communication linguistically framed to contain plot, character and action. There are at least two levels of narrative in our data. First, the individual interview summaries *contain* narratives in the sense that the interviewees told stories in answer to many of our questions. Several of our interview questions were invitations to more elaborate storytelling, such as the foundational question “Can you please tell me about the time after you finished school and you became unemployed?” or the follow-up question “What type of job did you find after being unemployed, and how was it to get back at work?”. Many, but not all of our interviewees took these questions as opportunities to narrate important aspects of their lives at length, or to tell anecdotes meant to illustrate the overall theme of unemployment. Secondly, the individual interview summaries *are* narratives, in the sense that they form accounts of individual lives seen from the focal point of unemployment. These life stories are sometimes artificial constructs, as presented in the summaries created in English by the seven national teams, outlining chronologically the main events of the lives of the interviewees. Other times, the interviewees themselves created such overarching narratives in the course of the interviews.

The narratives we have collected for this study may be labelled “life stories”, but they are specialized life stories, as our questions centred on certain events. While other life stories may be free to downplay or underline unemployment experiences, the narratives that make up our data put unemployment front and centre. Tolgensbakk recently did a study on young Swedish migrants coming to Norway as a direct result of high youth unemployment rates in their home regions. In those narratives, the interviewees let their experiences with unemployment go virtually unmentioned (Tolgensbakk, 2015:182ff). The life stories told in the NEGOTIATE project may in such a comparative perspective, be named “unemployment stories” or “unemployment life stories”.

Looking at the narratives of youth unemployment across such a variety of countries as the ones included in our NEGOTIATE subproject, it may, at first glance, be difficult to see any similarities. The economic, cultural and institutional differences are very large between such countries as for instance Norway and Bulgaria. Norway has enjoyed an unprecedented prosperity throughout the three cohorts and had only minor setbacks with regard to the labour market during the crises of the 90s and 2010s – the Norwegian narratives do not speak much of larger economic issues. The post-communist countries have endured enormous structural changes related to the transition to capitalism since 1989, and many narratives from these countries speak of these. Regarding the present crisis, some of the interview summaries have almost no mention of it, while it is a dominant issue in the Greek narratives. The institutional systems supporting citizens differ across Europe, and it is worth looking briefly on the broader policy contexts of the lives of the interviewees.

4.2 Policy contexts

The nine countries included in NEGOTIATE, seven of them covered by the interviews, had changing public systems in the areas of education, income protection and labour market policies during the lifetimes of the interviewees, that is, in the period from about 1950 to 2016. It is beyond the scope of this report to provide a comparative historical analysis of these systems and their diverse trajectories. Reports from other parts of the work in NEGOTIATE, in particular work packages three and eight are to some extent referring to these trajectories and contrasts in current institutional arrangements. The following discussion focuses on a few key institutional aspects, especially as appeared in the decade up to 2016.

A rich literature on welfare models and regimes has presented a diversity of views on similarities and differences between national welfare systems in Europe (e.g. Cerami, 2006; Cook, 2010; Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1999; Esping-Andersen & Korpi, 1987; Ferrera, 1998; Gallie & Paugam, 2000; Hall & Soskice, 2001; Leibfried, 1993; Lewis, 1992; Pontusson, 2005; Titmuss, 1987; Wilensky & Lebeaux, 1958). Yet, this literature is only partly helpful in identifying the main differences and similarities

between the nine NEGOTIATE countries. First, several of the original typologies excluded many southern and central European countries. Second, subsequent detailed analyses of specific dimensions of European national welfare systems showed that typologies gave too crude or even misleading pictures of the similarities of systems of countries associated with the same model (regime) or the differences between countries associated with different models (regimes). Third, there has been a tendency to see a given country as an example of a model, rather than being more or less close to the ideal-type traits of the model. In the further discussion, we therefore adopt a pragmatic and databased approach.

In this context, we concentrate on aspects of three interrelated policy areas of welfare in the nine NEGOTIATE countries:

Education, especially on

- o How large proportion of available resources countries have spent on education?
- o To what extent do educational systems have public funding and to what extent do they have private funding?
- o How large has the enrolment in education been compared to the size of age groups that could have participated?

Social protection, especially on

- o How large proportion of available resources countries is spent on social protection, that is, mainly income transfers for people with no or insufficient income (or maintenance)?
- o How countries have allocated resources to beneficiaries, especially with regard the use of means testing or not?
- o To what extent does social protection have public funding and to what extent does it have private funding?

Labour market policy, especially on

- o How large proportion of available resources have countries spent on active labour market measure, for instance training?
- o How large has the participation in active measures been, compared to the “need” for such measures?

4.2.1 Education

Table 1 shows that there has been substantial variation in the ratio between public and private funding of education, with Norway as the country with the largest dominance of public funding, and United Kingdom as the country with the largest role for private funding, especially related to tertiary education. By contrast, Table 2 indicates that for 2014, enrolment rates in for 15 to 19-year-olds varied between 83 percent (Greece) to 90 (Czech Republic and Germany). Among 20 to 29-year-olds, the enrolment rates for tertiary education varied from 15 percent (the UK) to 26 percent (Greece). The extent to which students enrolled in vocational programme varied strongly by both age group and country.

Table 1: Public and private expenditure on education (2013) by country.

	Public spending as % of Gross Domestic Product (GDP)	Private spending as % of Gross Domestic Product (GDP)	Ratio Pub/Priv	Share (%) of private expenditure on	
				Primary, secondary & post-secondary, non-tertiary education	Tertiary education
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-	-
Czech Republic	3.5	0.5	7.0	9	23
Germany	3.7	0.6	6.2	13	14
Greece	-	-	-	-	-
Norway	6.2	0.1	62	-	4
Poland	4.4	0.4	11	8	20
Spain	3.6	0.7	5.2	12	31
Switzerland	-	-	-	-	-
United Kingdom	5.2	1.5	3.5	16	43

OECD 2015 Fig. B2.1

Table 2: Rates for enrolment in education by age and kind of programme by country. Percent.

	Ages 15 to 19 (2014), programmes in both public and private educational institutions	Ages 20 to 29 (2014), programmes in both public and private educational institutions		Share of all students enrolled in upper secondary education who had enrolled in vocational programmes (2014)	
		Upper secondary or post-secondary Non-tertiary education	Tertiary education	15 to 19-year-olds	20 to 24-year-olds
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-	-
Czech Republic	90	-	23	71	96
Germany	90	12	23	35	88
Greece	83	2	26	25	88
Norway	87	6	25	46	75
Poland	89	6	25	53	27
Spain	87	9	21	21	66
Switzerland	85	7	20	62	78
United Kingdom	85	6	15	35	96

Source: OECD (OECD, 2016a)

4.2.2 Social protection

We usually measure public spending on social protection in one of two ways, either as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP), or as an indicator of national spending calculated to take into account the inter-country differences in price levels for the same products or services; i.e. purchase power standards (PPS). We can interpret the first indicator as a measure of how large proportion of a country's available resources that it allocates to this particular social purpose. We can interpret PPS per inhabitant as an indicator of what purchase power – ability to buy things – the social spending on average allows beneficiaries to enjoy.

From this difference, we can summarise Table 3 by saying that over the decade 2005 to 2014 all years all countries (except Germany and Poland) tended to increase the share of available resources they spent on public social protection. By contrast, Table 4 suggests that the average purchase power that similar percentages of GDP spent on social spending in percentage of GDP corresponds to very different levels of average purchase power across countries. Table 4 also indicates that rank order of the PPS per inhabitant remained roughly the same over the decade in question.

Table 5 (panel A) suggests that there is substantial differences in the extent to which the nine countries give priority to old people and survivors in their allocation of resources to social protection. Especially Greece and Poland appeared to give high de facto priority to these groups while especially Norway and Germany tended to give lower priority to these groups. Table 5 (panel B) shows that means-testing as instrument in allocating social benefits played the greatest role in the UK, Spain and Germany while having a limited role in other countries, particularly in the Czech Republic.

Table 6 indicates that private funding – whether mandatory or voluntary – had very different roles in the overall funding of social protection in NEGOTIATE countries. The role of private funding emerged as greatest in Switzerland and the United Kingdom and lowest in Poland, the Czech Republic and Spain.

Table 3: Total public spending on social protection as percentage of GDP, by year.

	1995	2000	2005	2010	2014
Bulgaria	-	-	14.2	16.5	17.9
Czech Republic	-	15.6	17.4	17.4	19.5
Germany	26.5	27.7	27.8	28.8	27.8
Greece	18.5	17.5	19.9	25.7	25.5
Norway	25.4	23.5	22.9	24.6	25.5
Poland	-	19.1	19.4	19.2	18.5
Spain	20.4	19.0	19.6	24.2	24.9
Switzerland	20.2	21.1	23.6	23.1	24.4
United Kingdom	23.2	23.0	24.9	28.2	27.2

Source: Eurostat Database

Table 4: Total public spending on social protection as purchase power standards (PPS)¹ per inhabitant, by year.

	2005	2010	2014
Bulgaria	1171	1939	2431
Czech Republic	3460	4185	4784
Germany	7524	8773	9906
Greece	4140	5667	5096
Norway	8454	10343	11797
Poland	2285	3274	3806
Spain	4610	5786	6009
Switzerland	7344	8493	10121
United Kingdom	7503	7621	7809

Table 5: The extent to which social spending was biased toward the older part of the population (A) and the extent to which the allocation of social benefits were based on means-testing, by country.

	A Share (%) of total public social spending going to old age & survivors		B Share (%) of total public social spending provided as means-tested benefits	
	2005	2014	2005	2014
Bulgaria	51	49	7	4
Czech Republic	42	47	5	3
Germany	43	39	12	12
Greece	58	65	3	5
Norway	31	36	6	4
Poland	59	60	6	4
Spain	42	49	13	14
Switzerland	46	48	6	7
United Kingdom	42	43	16	13

Source: Eurostat Database

Table 6: The role of private funding in the total system of social protection by country

	Gross private (mandated & voluntary) spending on social protection as % of gross public spending 1985, 1995, 2005 and 2013				Net private spending on social protection as % of net total social spending
	1985	1995	2005	2013	2013
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-	-
Czech Republic	-	1	2	3	3
Germany	13	12	11	13	10
Greece	0	11	8	8	7
Norway	5	8	10	10	7
Poland	-	-	0	0	0
Spain	1	1	2	2	2
Switzerland	21	35	36	35	23
United Kingdom	24	34	31	27	19

Source for data: OECD SocX database (OECD.Stat, 2017)

Note: Greece & Poland 2013 figures are from 2010

¹ Eurostat defines PPS as "a common currency that eliminates the differences in price levels between countries allowing meaningful volume comparisons of GDP between countries. Please note that the index, calculated from PPS figures and expressed with respect to EU28 = 100, is intended for cross-country comparisons rather than for temporal comparisons. (Eurostat, 2016)"

4.2.3 Labour market policy

Table 7 shows how the public spending on active labour market policies (ALMPs) varied in 2005 and 2014. We see that Germany and Norway were consistently among the countries that spent most on such measures, especially when we take into account the need for such measures (as indicated by the rate of unemployment). By contrast, Greece and the UK tended to be countries that spent the least on such measures relative to the need for them.

We get more or less the same picture when we look at the number of participants in active labour market policies. However, Spain comes out more favourably in 2005, and Poland more favourably in 2014.

Table 7: The levels of public spending on active labour markets policies in 2005 and 2014, by country.

	Spending on active labour market measures (in % of GDP) 2005			Spending on active labour market measures (in % of GDP) 2014		
	Total	Per rate of unemployment	Per rate of youth unemployment	Total	Per rate of unemployment	Per rate of youth unemployment
Bulgaria	0.395	0.039	0.002	0.175	0.016	0,007
Czech Republic	0.112	0.014	0.006	0.243	0.040	0.015
Germany	0.812	0.058	0,053	0.289	0.058	0.038
Greece	0.056	0.006	0.002	0.306	0.012	0.006
Norway	0.603	0.134	0.053	0.375	0.107	0.047
Poland	0.355	0.020	0.010	0.397	0.044	0.017
Spain	0.568	0.062	0.029	0.447	0.018	0.008
Switzerland	-	-	-	-	-	-
United Kingdom	0.047	0.010	0.003	0.075	0.010	0.004

Source for data: Eurostat Database

Table 8: The number of participants in active labour markets measures in 2005 and 2014, by country.

	Number of participants in active labour Market measures 2005			Number of participants in active labour Market measures 2014		
	Total	Per number of registered unemployed	Per number of registered jobseekers	Total	Per number of registered unemployed	Per number of registered jobseekers
Bulgaria	88,781	26.3	20.8	19,525	6.5	5.3
Czech Republic	59,809	14.6	11.6	82,787	25.6	14.9
Germany	1,614,714	35.8	23.8	1,284,965	61.5	25.6
Greece	41,646 (2006)	10.0	8.6	73,750 (2013)	5.6 (2013)	7.1 (2013)
Norway	64,344	58.1	-	52,616	54.8	21.0
Poland	494,319	16.3	17.4	564,465	36.0	30.3
Spain	1,860,895 (2004)	83.3	61.3	1,846,786	32.9	30.0
Switzerland	.	-	-	-	-	-
United Kingdom	64,344	4.3	7.2	71,167 (2009)	3.0 (2009)	4.7 (2009)

4.2.4 Heterogeneity in structural background, similarities in narrative

As is evident from the tables, there are great heterogeneity between our seven participating countries. When looking at who the interviewees are, the heterogeneity is even more striking. What could the life stories of the never-employed disabled Norwegian girl, the Greek grandfather that only recently lost his job of 30 years, the German neo-Nazi and the rebel Czech artist possibly have in common? Some of our storytellers come from financially secure families; others have had no contact with any family at all. Some are from ethnic minorities, some live with enormous care responsibilities and others are single. Our data cut across three cohorts and across a variety of ethnic, gender, class and other variables. Taken together, these stories may seem too disparate to discuss as belonging to one phenomenon. However, despite all this heterogeneity, some issues do stand out as almost universal across our qualitative data. This entails, for instance, the financial consequences of youth unemployment – meaning postponement of moving away from home and independent family formation, and difficulties in maintaining a social life. There are also definite shared aspects concerning what unemployment feels like, concerning stress on family and social life, and consequences to mental and physical health. Whether you are a Czech working class Roma or UK middle class, being without work entails burdens and problems that are not easy to solve. Evident throughout the interview summaries is that the interviewees see work as a value in and of itself, with positive consequences beyond putting food on the table. In the following, we discuss the subjective consequences of unemployment as they are told by the interviewees, through presenting four categories of unemployment narratives found in our interview summaries.

4.3 Four main narratives

The life-story part of the NEGOTIATE project is unusual in its scope and breadth, and we needed to develop methods of handling and analysing the large data set. To make sense of the extensive and extremely heterogenic narratives, told from a variety of vantage points and containing a multitude of stories, we needed to create broad categories for describing general points. These categories, which we have tentatively named the *Stumbler*, the *Precariat*, the *Messy Life*, and the *Great Crisis narrative*, have grown organically from reading the interview summaries, though not completely intuitively. Prior research using narrative analysis and similar approaches to understand individual consequences of unemployment have paved the way (Blustein et al., 2013; Gabriel, Gray, & Goregaokar, 2010).

The questions that the teams posed in interviews were deliberately tuned to focus on the situation directly after education, and consequences (in both the long and short perspective) of being unemployed. The interview guides also emphasised aspects of and individual relationships to governmental, institutional, and family support. This means we have solid data from most of the interviewees on the sometimes-difficult transition from school to work, and on different networks helping or hindering individuals through difficult times. Importantly, we have good data on the interviewees' own categorizations of unemployment's impact on their lives, whether positive or negative, catastrophic or passing, in the past or in the present.

The narrative categories as we present them here should be understood as analytical categories. They are ways for us to sort the data in a meaningful way. We hope the categories may point to interesting future ways of exploring the subjective experiences of unemployment.

The *Stumbler* narrative consists of youths telling of initial but passing troubles in the transition from education to labour. While the *Precariat* narrative may seem self-evidently named, we have for this report made the group wider than normal, including among other things, many narratives from minorities such as Roma and disabled youth. We will discuss this choice in 3.1.2. The next category, the *Messy Life* narrative, is distinguished by the telling of life trajectories that somehow got out of hand. Chaotic upbringings, ill health and abuse issues are among some of the themes that characterize this group of narratives. The last category, the *Great Crisis* narratives, portrays unemployment in a wider notion of catastrophic societal crisis and loss. These stories are marked by a sense of hopelessness, and the interviewees portray their fates as unemployed as almost completely out of their control.

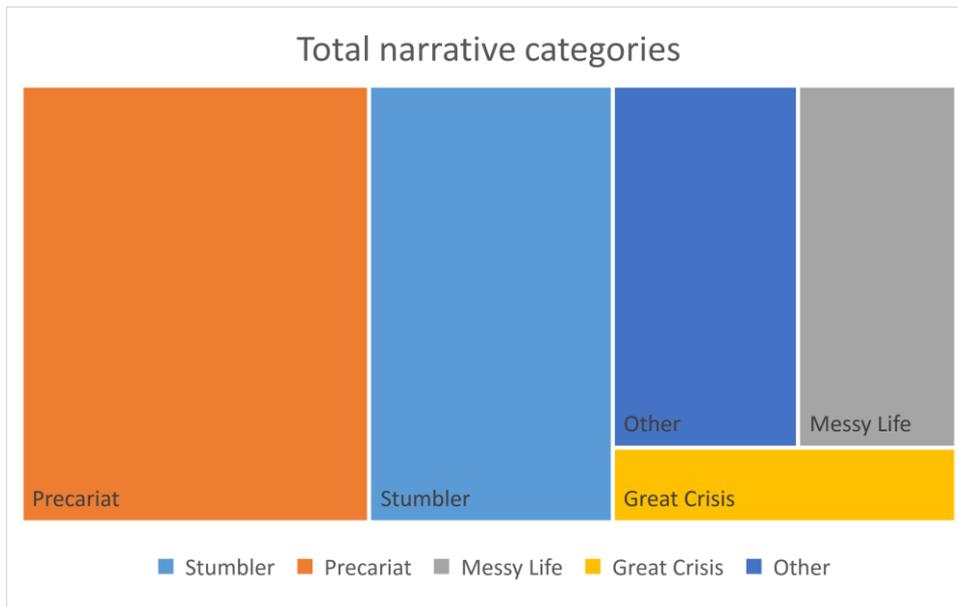
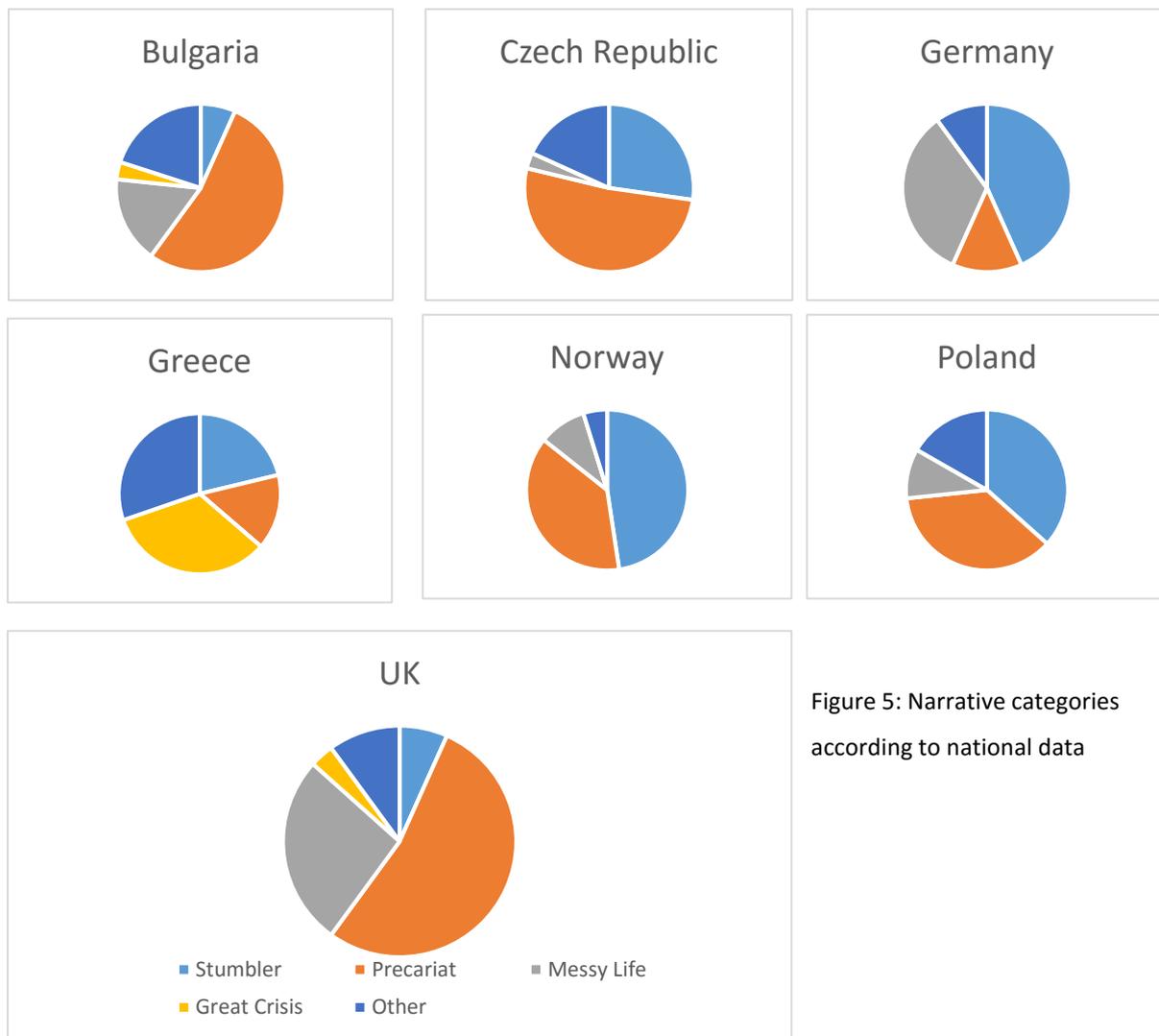


Figure 4: Narrative categories in total

As will be obvious from this simple diagram, what we have dubbed the Precariat Narrative is the biggest group by far. The second largest group is the Stumbler Narrative, followed by the uncategorised “Other” group, the Messy Life Narrative, and, finally, the Crisis Narrative. It may seem odd that we have included such a small category as the Crisis narratives in our discussion, but these narratives are so uniform and strong that they do deserve some attention.

The next illustrations, in figure 5, shows the proportions of narrative categories according to national data. It shows clearly that the Precariat narratives dominate the Bulgarian, Czech and UK data. For the first two data sets, this stems from the large proportion of interviewees of Roma descent.



The next illustrations, figure 6, shows narrative categories according to cohorts and gender. Notably, the 1990 cohort has an overrepresentation of narratives categorised as Stumbler. This is, perhaps, an indication that this group includes many young, unemployed people who are having troubles but are still somewhat optimistic and believe their unemployment will be short lived. We do not know yet whether or not these interviewees will secure a more permanent place in the labour market, or if they will transition into precarious employment careers. However, the narratives are placed in categories according to how they are told – where the interview summaries place weight.

Regarding gender, there is an overrepresentation of women in the “Other” category – these are to a large degree women with caring responsibilities hindering them in participation on the labour market.

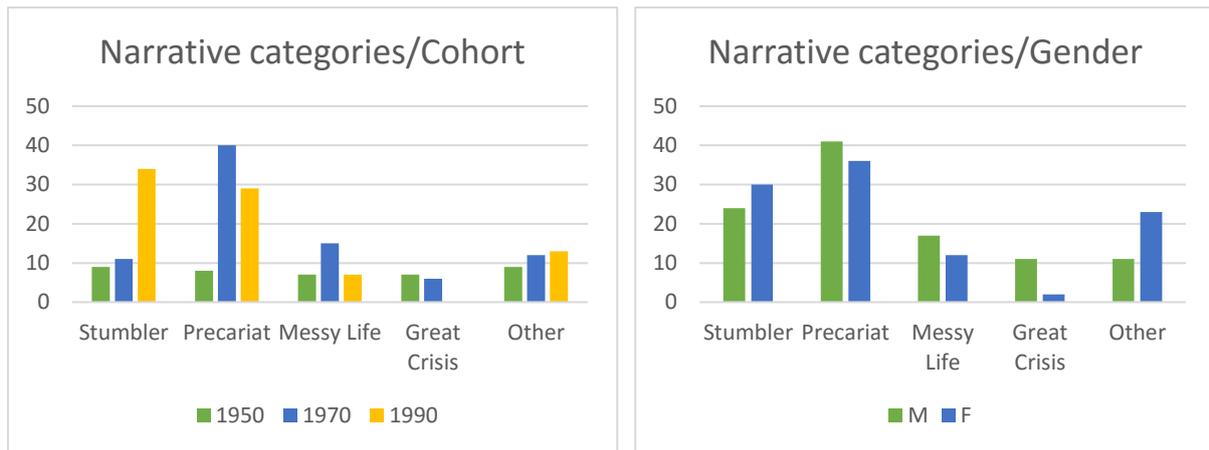


Figure 6: Narrative categories according to cohort and gender

In the proceeding sections, we discuss each narrative category at more length, and give examples of (shortened) life stories from all the national data sets.

4.3.1 The Stumbler Narrative

The transition from school to work is commonly considered to be one of the most important steps in the life trajectories of young Europeans (Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011). Besides independent family formation (moving out of the parental home, marriage and having children), it is often viewed as the most important part of becoming an adult. It is also a transition that often proves difficult to handle for the individual, especially during economic depressions.

According to Eurostat, in 2009, young people in the EU had an average of 6.5 months between leaving formal education and entering their first significant job. The shortest job-searching periods are found in countries such as the Netherlands and the UK, with an average of 3.5 months, while it is at its longest in Greece, Italy and Romania with averages of 10 to 13 months (Eurostat, 2015:147). A significant part of youth unemployment is that young people struggle at the step between education and working life. For some, this step proves too hard, and they are caught in semi-precarious positions on the labour market, spending extended periods alternating between temporary jobs and inactivity. Importantly, this may happen to the highly qualified as well as school drop-outs (O'Reilly et al., 2015:2).

For this study, we have chosen to call the stories about such a hiatus Stumbler narrative. Finding a job may take some time, and this stage of life may require both parental and governmental help. We find many varieties of this trajectory in our interview summaries, and the stumble may happen when entering the labour market after secondary school as well as after higher education. The stories in this category normally tell of short unemployment periods, but there are also some that last as long as a couple of years.

Most find work after some time, but the hiatus may nevertheless be seen as a significant one in the context of a life narrative. In the case of the narratives from the 1990 cohort, some are currently unemployed but expect to find work in the near future. It is necessary to stress that these periods, however brief they may be, may be experienced as very stressful, putting both financial and emotional stress on the individual. Sometimes, a prolonged stretch of unemployment after compulsory education will motivate youth to re-enter (higher) education; in other cases it may lead to a re-evaluation of career goals or a change of paths in other ways.

The life story interviews that fall within the category we have named Stumbler narrative have several parallels in other narrative research on unemployment. One example is found in Gabriel et al, who studied a group of unemployed managers and professionals in their fifties who were losing their jobs at the outset of the 2008 economic downturn. The focus was on how individuals sought to incorporate the painful disruption into their life stories. Of three types of narrative strategies, one was “to view their current unemployment as a temporary disruption, a setback, but one from which their career would eventually recover” (Gabriel et al., 2010-23). This is quite similar to how our Stumblers tend to frame their narrative renderings of life as unemployed. In some ways the Stumblers may also be compared to youth choosing more or less voluntarily to have a gap year before engaging in higher education (Heath, 2007). A small minority of the narratives in our data suggest some degree of intentional unemployment. Some of these may have planned a proper gap year, with voluntary work or creative education, and failed in that endeavour. Others of these temporarily and voluntarily unemployed narratives may fit within certain tabloid ideas of what unemployed youths are like. Terms such as to “nave” or to “hartzten” – derogatory slang in Norwegian and German – has sprung up in the last several years, placed on groups of the younger generation who are choosing the supposedly too generous benefits of NAV and Hartz-IV over gainful employment. This should not be an invitation to underestimate the seriousness of the circumstances of most of these young adults. On the contrary, moral panics over unemployed youth being lazy mostly add to the burden and solve nothing. Similarly, the fact that some of their peers are privileged enough to voluntarily take time off from education and the pursuit of an independent income, to engage in pleasurable activities, may be problematic in and of itself. On a more positive note, the de-standardization and individualization of transitions into adult status observed during at least the last decade (Walther, 2006) may help the Stumblers feel they are not alone in having a path previously seen as atypical (although this hopeful interpretation is not substantially backed by our data).

The Stumbler narratives point to many different causes of the troubles that can arise in the process of going from education to gainful employment. Some interviewees tell of educational choices that turned out to be unfit for the local labour market. Others narrate low-quality education that was ill

adapted or even useless for the demands of potential employers. In many instances, there seems simply not to be enough jobs on offer, and the lack of demand leads the job hunt to stretch out in time.

Ivo was born in 1988 in a big city in Bulgaria. When he graduated from high school he had a rather vague idea about his future. He started working as a security guard but after one year was shortened and for two and a half years was unemployed. After about 2 years, despite the lack of stable income, he left his parents' home and lived alone. Ivo has worked various casual jobs with uncertain income - some on a civil contract, others without a contract - in the informal sector. He has now taken important decisions to continue his education and acquire new knowledge and skills in different directions. He speculates that he must become more independent and autonomous and that:

... must take care alone for his survival and for securing himself and that literally ... I am the most interested in this thing and there is no point kidding myself and make illusions that someone else will give me what I need.

Ivo has come to the conclusion that should become more independent of the government and employers, and as a result at the age of 25 years he has created his own art school for children. In addition, he teaches art in elementary school.

BG 21 1990 M

Bruno was born in 1951 in Poland. He graduated from high school, and then made an unsuccessful attempt at getting into college. For one year out of work he was dependent on his parents to be able to re-take the exam to study. Ultimately, he did not take education at the technical university, but completed two and a half year College of Electronics while doing hard physical work to support himself and his family – work that at the time was better paid than academic positions in Poland. Later, he started his own family, and has been running his own multi-industry business. Bruno describes himself as a person with great abilities to adapt to a situation:

I always go out with the assumption that you need in life to be able to handle anything.

BL 08 1950 M

Gert is a German man in the 1970 cohort. His parents got divorced in his adolescence. He describes himself as completely disorientated when leaving lower secondary school and was unable to find any vocational training position. Following community service in a nursing home, which he needed to do as a result of minor delinquencies, he became interested in the care sector. In order to improve his chances on the labour market, and following the advice of the employment agency, Gert attained the qualifying lower secondary school-leaving qualification. However, he merely got fixed-term low-skilled contracts throughout Germany and took on different kinds of jobs (road construction, car wash) in order to earn money. The turning point in Gerts life was his conscription by the Federal Armed Forces. There, colleagues from the military hospital advised him to apply for vocational training as a geriatric nurse assistant and to subsequently upgrade his qualifications. He acted on the advice and started the training as a geriatric nurse assistant and subsequently completed geriatric nurse training as well as a social- / care management university degree.

Gert underlines that even though the short-term consequences of unemployment were hard on finances and mental health, the long-term consequences have been positive. It made him more ambitious in work, and education gained importance for him. He associates his continuous efforts to upgrade his qualifications with the experience of unemployment during his early adulthood.

GER 14 1970 M

Grażyna is a Polish woman of the 1990 cohort. After graduating from technical school, she performed mainly short-term work in the grey sector. Although she looked for legitimate work corresponding with her education, she mainly worked as a babysitter or in cleaning. These first years were not experienced as burdensome:

When I was young I did not pay too much attention to the problems. [...] The only thing you had to worry about was finding the next job.

Reflection on the professional position came later when she became a single mother and finding employment became harder. She slowly matured to the decision to change her professional position and economic situation. Grażyna is still living with her mother, but she has completed a bachelor's degree and is working in a kindergarten as a teacher's assistant. She plans to complete the additional master's studies and look for work in school.

PL 17 1970 F

Jarle was born in the 1950s in a small town in northern Norway. He quit upper secondary school halfway through because he did not like his school, and wanted to work:

I often say that I quit because of arbeidslyst [a desire to work], and I really believe that. (...) I really wanted to work, and I was tired of school.

However, with the exception of seasonal work in the spring seasonal fishery, he had troubles finding employment. He does not recall the period of unemployment – it only lasted some months – as difficult in any way, “It was just a phase I needed to get through”. Jarle finally got a position in the local post office and was later able to advance with education and different jobs within the same business. One of these opportunities was an administrative class in Oslo, which is why he ended up moving away from his hometown in rural north Norway.

NO 19 1950 M

4.3.2 The Precariat Narrative

What characterizes the Precariat narrative is that those telling such a story had or were still experiencing a life situation without the economic security a permanent position may offer. In general, the interviewees did not recount significant problems while growing up. Dramatic life events prior to adulthood were not included in this narrative. Many interviewees had completed upper secondary education, and some even higher education. Their insecure situations started when they experienced poor employment opportunities after finishing school. In this narrative, temporary employment with and without a contract emerges as a common factor. Their temporary employment situations turns into unemployment and back again into temporary, often part-time, not-well-paid jobs. The term precariat has been widely disseminated by Guy Standing. He writes that one defining characteristic of this group is the “so-called ‘flexible’ labour contracts; temporary jobs; labour as casuals, part-timers, or intermittently for labour brokers or employment agencies” (Standing, 2014:10). Standing defines the precariat as a new class of the population that occupies the space underneath the proletariat. He states that those who belong to the precariat have “no occupational narrative they can give to their lives” (ibid).

In this narrative the causes of unemployment are particularly tied to the lack of available jobs. Unemployment emerges as highly involuntary. One of the many consequences that the precarious situations of temporary employment and unemployment cause is that living independently of one’s parents is difficult. Thus, some continue to live with their parents due to lack of secure employment. And some narrate that establishing a family is not an option as long as they do not have the means to support children. If they do have children, they narrate about the constraints of poor economic

resources. In general, the interviewees rate their life situations lower than that of their parents when they were in their early twenties. Comparatively, they do not enjoy the same kind of economic security as their parents did.

Two sub-narratives are identified: one told by the Roma and one by people with disabilities. The Roma narrative stands out in terms of the low level of educational attainment, the early onset of family responsibility and the lack of economic means. Interviewees of Roma background are present in the Czech and Bulgarian data. The disability narrative is different in that in order to participate in the labour market some take part in governmental labour market measures, which in turn do not seem to improve the interviewees' employability. Some end up taking part in such measures for years – being forced to take part in one measure after another, changing employers every 3rd month. These measures result in a precarious situation for the interviewees.

Emil, who belongs to the 1990–95 cohorts, was born in Bulgaria. He dropped out of school as a 9-year-old due to poverty and the need to work. His parents did object, but he decided to drop out. One week after leaving school, with the help of friends he found seasonal work without a contract as a firewood loader. He had that job for three years and then Emil became a woodcutter for the same employer, still without a contract. He had this job for a few months but was laid off and was unemployed for more than half a year. Emil then started to work as a lumberjack. In the interim season with the help of friends, he found short-term precarious employment, without any protection of his labour rights. Now he is picking mushrooms, and has no contract and no employer.

BG 16 1990 M

Novak, who belongs to the 1970–75 cohorts, was born in the Czech Republic. He finished his apprenticeship for carpenter in 1989. He had preferred to be an auto mechanic but he could not due to health limitations. The first company that he worked for was closed down in 1989, and he moved with his wife to another city to look for jobs. He worked for three employers but there were difficult conditions with payment and sanctions. He became self-employed in 1996. He worked in a joiner's shop where he had to pay rent, but it was not bogus work. Novak described better and worse periods, depending on his ability to get commissions for furniture and the unemployment of his wife. He became unemployed in 2011 because he did not have enough commissions. Novak was very glad that the employment office paid insurance for him. When he was unemployed, he searched for jobs but was unsuccessful. Gradually, he started to be self-employed again.

CZ 27 1970 M

Astrid, who belongs to the 1990–95 cohorts, was born in Norway. She met obstacles in her education due to her school’s resistance or inability to facilitate for her physical disability. Still, she was able to finish an upper secondary school education (in health management). Since finishing her education, she has been living with her mother, applying for dozens of jobs without securing any. Astrid discloses her disability in her applications, and is worried that is the reason she is never invited to interviews. The public employment services put her in internship positions, but she would prefer a 50 % disability status, as that would put her in a position to apply for work on her own.

The system of internships such as job training is supposed to be a way into secure employment, but has not worked that way at all for Astrid. Sometimes they tell her immediately that they do not have room for her after the limited internship period. Looking for jobs outside her home region is impossible for her without the financial means to secure a home.

NO 04 1990 F

John, who belongs to the 1990 to 95 cohorts, was born in the UK At the age of 16, John left school with some entry-level vocational qualifications in vehicle fitting, although he really wanted to become a firefighter. He tried working as a mechanic; he hated it and the wages he felt were too low for the number of hours of work expected. He was working from 7 am until 6 pm for £250 a week. He became a father at 19. This was unplanned and a shock. For the next four years, John worked on building sites. He was constantly in and out of work. Sometimes he would have work for a few days or sometimes for longer; once he had a job for two months continuously. During this time, he lived with his partner first at her mother’s house and then at his mother’s house. It was hard to afford even basic needs. He did claim benefits for a short time, but as he often worked one or two days a week and the claims took too long to process in between times, he did not see the point.

John would borrow money from his parents and then try to pay them back when he was working, but this was difficult, as he was never in work long enough to pay off his debts and become self-sufficient. His relationship with his partner was strained. They were constantly arguing, and John was unable to provide for his family without the support of his own parents. Through the help of a family friend, John started a bricklaying course at college; he was more able than most students, as he had already learnt a lot of practical skills whilst being on the sites. When he was offered his current job, he stopped going to college. He is now ‘trained’ by the men at the sites and occasionally goes to the college for practical exams. He feels more settled and really enjoys the job.

UK 21 1990 M

4.3.3 The Messy Life Narrative

Among the life stories told in our NEGOTIATE qualitative data, some stand out as difficult to categorize or explain – or even sometimes to understand. These narratives tell of life trajectories that

have been unconventional in many ways, and we have chosen to put them together under the tentative title of Messy Life. Some of these are stories of young people starting out on a wrong foot due to parental neglect, abuse or absence. Some are stories of the interviewees choosing very extended gap years to pursue dreams or needs not related to career building. These stories entail both personal tragedy and happy endings, ill health, individual strength and substance abuse. It is not always clear what role employment or lack thereof has had in such examples of the Messy Life narrative. Sometimes, employment saves the interviewees from difficult circumstances. Other times, low-quality jobs seem to have caused the messiness. However, all these stories are identifiable by chaotic outer circumstances and the protagonists' by a mostly loose attachment to the labour market and lack of any credible career strategy. Indeed, many of these interviewees stress that they believe they would have benefited from having a plan earlier on in life (research on this subject show mixed results of such planning: "career planning has both its upsides and downsides" (Wanberg, 2012:378).

Some of the Messy Life narratives are stories of seemingly positive forces – such as creative personalities prioritizing other things in life over gainful employment. Others are stories of definite detrimental forces, such as abuse. There are stories of being abused by parents or partners, something that, not surprisingly, will affect ability to work. There are stories of dependency on alcohol, drugs – or even video games, as in the case of the young British man we have named Samuel (UK 27 1990 M). The Messy Life narrative may seem out of place with the overall themes of NEGOTIATE and our study of European youth unemployment through different economic crises. The interviewees may have been independently employed, or they may be NEETS. They are not necessarily examples of youth affected by the economic recessions, and they do not fit easily within the framework of the Youth Guarantees. Still, they are a group worth paying some attention to, as their narratives illustrate the complexities of unemployment, and the importance of keeping a holistic approach in understanding the various trajectories that may lead to individual unemployment. Intuitively, one may think that Messy Life narratives are primarily an issue in strong welfare states, and in recent decades, where individuals have found more cultural freedom to choose their own destinies. However, we find Messy Life narratives in all our cohorts, and across most of the national data.

Czesław, a Polish man of the 1950 cohort, have spent most of his professional life working in the informal economy. Among the short-term consequences of this, he listed higher than average earnings and a sense of freedom resulting from the fact that he did not comply with generally applicable rules under Polish socialism. Among the long-term consequences, he lists rather negatives: the lack of documented years of work and insecurity being a result of a weak social and economic position: criminality, homelessness and disability.

While working illegally, Czesław caused an accident and had to go to prison. Given his life experiences, he claimed to be 'glad I lived to 53 years'.

Czesław has health problems, but has not been seeking public assistance, as he feels that as a man he had to cope alone. He started the family twice and have two adult children, but is currently single. By adulthood respondent went through addictions (alcohol, drugs) and problems with the law. He has the status of a disabled person. Respondent is currently waiting for social housing.

PL 12 1950 M

Moritz' youth and early adulthood in Germany is characterized by a lack of motivation to pursue the occupational path that his education, experience and family offered him. He completed secondary school and vocational training and then entered several types of jobs only to quit later.

Moritz hitchhiked through Europe and survived by doing odd jobs, living on the streets and wanting to be free of societal pressure and to live "in the moment". He belonged to the punk rock scene and had a conflicted relationship to his parents. However, in the end, his father (a war refugee from Greece, himself distant from the labour market) was the one that managed to help him get a foothold in regular work. When Moritz reunited with his family in his mid-twenties, his father managed to get him a civilian service in a homeless shelter. With the boost from this experience, Moritz found an occupational orientation that suited him, and he is today educated in social work and a productive member of society with work in the homeless shelter.

Moritz stresses several times in his narrative that he was in real danger of becoming delinquent, and insists on the need for proper mentoring of young people in risk of dropping out.

GER 23 1950 M

Terri, born in the UK within the 1970-75 cohorts, was in care from the age of 15 to 18. At age 15, she left school with a few GCSEs and wanted to join the RAF; unfortunately, she failed the medical. From this time until she was 21, Terri worked in holiday camps. The work was seasonal and in the winter months, she received job seekers allowance. At 18, Terri left the children's home and struggled to cope on her own, as she received no transference support. She would have liked to go to college, but felt there was no support to do so. She wanted to go abroad to work, but was unable to afford a passport. She finally joined the Royal Air Force at age 21 after having an operation on her back. Terri describes this as the first time she had experienced stability in her life. However, following an accident, she was medically discharged. At 23, she was living with her partner in a coastal town in the northwest of England, and they had two children. When her partner left three years later, she found it difficult to support herself and provide for her children. She did numerous low-paying jobs. However, she was diagnosed with cancer and was unable complete her degree. She had another child at age 30 and relocated to London with her new partner.

Terri has suffered with depression and feels that without a good start when first leaving school, it is much more difficult to get a job. She thinks that employers discriminate against those that have been in care and those with gaps in their work history. Her current partner left her 8 months ago, and since then she has been diagnosed with and undergone treatment for cancer. She uses food banks regularly and receives disability benefits.

UK 17 1970 F

Olga was born in Bulgaria in the 1970-75 cohorts. She dropped out of school at 15 and began looking for a job in order to help her family financially:

I decided to get a job because I had no income but I did not want to stay at home doing nothing; I needed money to go out with friends, with my family. My mother was unemployed at that time and she couldn't support me. I could not sit at home without money; I was frustrated so I decided to start work after finishing 8th grade.

Olga's first job was packing food products, a part-time, low-skilled job. She worked for about a year and a half but had to quit because of downsizing and closing of the business. Later she had several jobs, sometimes long-lasting, with stints of unemployment inbetween. After being unemployed for 6 years she got a job as a school janitor, but left on her own accord because she did not get along with her boss.

At 34, Olga gave birth to twins. As she was unemployed and did not receive any support from the children's father, she had serious financial difficulties, and decided to place her children in a home for children deprived of parental care. She is still unemployed, and lives with her mother.

BG 19 1970 F

4.3.4 The Great Crisis Narrative

What we have named the Great Crisis Narrative is a category of narratives of people that have led what they narrate as rather “normal” lives before being hit by the catastrophe of unemployment. Most of the interviewees in this category have had many years in employment, and more or less successful careers. They come from a variety of regions and sectors – their life scripts and life experiences may have been very different. When economic crisis strikes and touches their lives, the narratives end up remarkably similar.

As Anders Ekström and Kyrre Kverndokk mention in their introduction to a collection on the culture of natural disasters, disasters are “not events but processes with unclear beginnings and no obvious endings” (Ekström & Kverndokk, 2015:356). This fits well also when speaking of disasters that are not natural, but economical and societal. However, when placing disaster within a narrative frame, beginnings and ends must be explained and made meaningful. For the interviewees, this sometimes takes the shape of comparison. For instance, much weight may be put on contrasting life before and after what Europe has come to know as the Great Recession. Other interviewees compare their life in the present with what their parents or grandparents went through during the war or in rural Greece in the post-war decades. Poverty now is compared to poverty then in order to make sense of how life conditions change. The result is not uplifting stories, and the interviewees tell of choosing not to start families, or they spend much of their life story interviews worrying about the future of their children.

The Great Crisis narrative consist of tales of being hit by forces that are perceived as totally beyond the individual’s control. The interviewees whose life story summaries we have put in this category have felt that what ever capabilities they have brought to the labour market have had no or very little impact – it is not their choices or personal circumstances that have put them in unemployment, but a greater crisis that is out of their range of influence.

Compared to the other narrative categories, some comfort is perhaps to be found in the fact that the narrators are not the only ones experiencing these troubles: the interviewees tell of seeing family and friends going through the exact same hardships. Unlike the other narrative categories, the Great Crisis narrative have, to a certain degree, got an underlying collective “we”. Related to this, they may be political – it is among these (mainly Greek) narratives that we find critique of the government, of institutions and structures. The Great Crisis narrative are the only ones in our interview summaries that mention political parties, and political organization.

We all strive to find meaning or at least coherence to our lives, and, as many argue, one of the most efficient ways to do that is through creating stories – about our individual experiences and about society (Gabriel et al., 2010:12). A grand crisis may affect our lives in unanticipated and catastrophic

ways, which may make it hard to handle both practically and emotionally. The upside is that in big crises, there are more people that may recognize and understand your plight.

Jimmy is from the UK and belongs to the 1970-75 cohorts. He left school with some GCSEs, and started a youth training scheme at 15 to learn bricklaying, a trade that other family members worked in. He gained his qualification in bricklaying and also passed an advanced diploma in brickwork. From age 18 to 22, he was easily able to find work as a brick-layer, and found the work satisfying and enjoyable. During the 1994 recession, he and many of his peer group who worked in the building trade and associated trades became unemployed. He applied for many jobs, including cleaning jobs, however as many other people were in a similar position; it was very difficult to find employment.

In late 1994, a friend who was a carpenter encouraged Jimmy to accompany him to Germany to work. Jimmy did this without hesitation and with great excitement. He used his time in Germany to learn a new trade, and became a suspended ceiling fitter. Jimmy has not been unemployed again since the 1994 recession and enjoys a good life style.

UK 07 1970 M

58-year-old **Alekos** is married and has an adult child. He has spent most of his career working in the pharmacy business in Athens. Aside from a short period of unemployment after military service in his youth, he has always had secure jobs. Now, with the crisis, the pharmacy business in Greece is failing, and he was fired after 30 years of service for the same company. Since 2013, it has been impossible for him to find employment.

Comparing his situation and achievements with that of his parents, he feels that he has not achieved as much as them. He is afraid that his son will have many difficulties in entering the labour market. He is in general pessimistic about the future.

GR 06 1950 M

Ferdinand belongs to the '50s generation that started their career in socialism, and has been hard hit by the emerging market economy after 1989 and the resulting shrinking of job opportunities and wages in Bulgaria. After finishing vocational school, Ferdinand had a job related to his education; afterwards he decided to train further for two new occupations - truck driver and heavy construction machinery driver. Thanks to that he was able to find work at home and abroad - something very difficult for the people from communist states. During socialism, Ferdinand had no problem finding a job, and changing jobs to improve working conditions and pay.

After 1989 he has worked as a guard at several companies without a contract. The only benefit of this type of work for the interviewee is the work uniforms he receives; he does not receive any salary or social security benefits. Ferdinand considers the opportunities provided by the state to people like him as much better under socialism and rather scarce in the period of democracy.

Before 1989 there was work for all; in agriculture, the fields were worked, everything done, crops were grown ... people had livestock, people in the villages had livestock, too. After 1989 everything was destroyed. The agriculture was destroyed, factories, the communists first stole them, then bought them for nothing, put security guards in them, many plants now have security but no production, everywhere just warehouses, shops, pubs and security guards

He subsequently worked as a laborer in a bakery in his hometown on a full-time employment contract. He receives part of his salary 'under the table' while his official salary is much lower.

BG 17 1950 M

Ioseph, a Greek man born in the 1970 cohort, completed only the first grade of Gymnasium (lower high school). From 1998 to 2007, he worked with lithography. The introduction of digital technology had an enormous impact on the sector, rendering his specialty obsolete. He found another position in a printing house where they were producing encyclopaedias; he stayed there for only two years because the company stopped production due to the cost and the fact that encyclopaedias exist free on the Internet.

Since 2011, Ioseph has just participated in two social work programmes launched by the public employment agency (OAED), and he is also working now and then as a free-lance photographer.

He feels lucky for not having children, because he thinks that his financial situation would not allow him to raise them properly. He regrets not being a hardworking student at school, because now he might have been in a better position professionally. He believes strongly that unemployment is not a personal issue, but a political one.

GR 17 1970 M

4.4 Differences and similarities across the narratives

So far, we have shown that the interview summaries can be interpreted as following four rather different narrative tracks. These categories are distributed fairly evenly across the countries (and according to other variables such as gender and cohort), with the exception of the Great Crisis Narrative, that is mainly the narratives of Greek men. Other aspects worth noting is that the German interview summaries stand out as having the largest proportion of the Messy Life narrative, while the Precariat narrative dominate especially in Bulgaria, but also in the Czech republic and the UK. In Bulgaria and the Czech Republic, this is explained by the high proportion of Roma interviewees (1/3 in each country). The interviewees are not representative of the population, but the relative proportion of narratives in each country may point for instance to what narratives are deemed culturally appropriate within each country – what explanations and cause-and-effect stories are common or visible.

Across the narrative categories, there are two other factors to consider: age (cohorts) and gender. These will be shortly touched upon in the following.

4.4.1 Cohorts

The different cohorts were chosen to capture three instances of European economic crises. In a way, we can see the history of post-war Europe through the narratives – with the 1950 cohort growing up in unprecedented economic progress, and almost all of these interviewees deeming their socioeconomic status as better than their parents. This did not necessarily mean that their narratives come off as content and secure. For instance, several of narratives of the Greek interviewees of the 1950 cohort were dominated by fear on behalf of their children. The woman we have named Chloe may serve as an example. When asked to compare her life to that of her mother, she answered that she was satisfied with her life compared to both her parents and to her own children. The interview summary describes that she is very concerned about the current crisis and its impact on her children's lives:

The situation now is terrible. My children will eat as much as my parents during the occupation, they will be in the same situation now. (GR 02 1950 F)

Another exception to the master narrative of progress, are to a certain degree the Roma interviewees of the 1970 cohort. Many of these interviewees stress that they feel the shift from communist to capitalist regimes have led to worsening condition for them as a minority, in other words they feel that life was easier for their parents. However, the opinion that communism had some advantages are not restricted to the Roma. For instance, Henryk, born in Poland within the 1970 cohort, did not work until he was 25 years old – due to bad health, but also because of lack of available jobs. He is quoted in the summary as saying that:

When my dad was at my age, it was easier to find a job. Under communism it was better. (PL 21 1970 M)

In addition to economic progress, Europe has seen a growth in welfare services throughout the period covered by our cohorts – until very recently. This is evident in the older cohorts reporting less help from governmental services, and rather speaking of dependency on parents – and more desperate poverty.

The most disheartening aspect of the narrative data in this project when looking at it from the perspective of the cohorts, is that the narratives of the younger cohorts are more likely to report loss of faith in the future – and speaking of placing themselves lower than their parents on a socioeconomic scale. Although some interviewees place themselves as lower for now, but say they expect things to get better and of having higher social positions in the end, the number of pessimistic youth makes for discouraging reading.

4.4.2 Gender

Gender aspects are visible throughout the interview summaries, but more on an aggravated level than as thematised by the interviewees. For instance, it is obvious that becoming a parent early in life can be a barrier both for finishing school and for employment – but this is almost solely an issue in the narratives of the women. Female interviewees include their children in all aspects of their employment choices. Sometimes, caring responsibilities also include other family member, as in the case of Petya. The interview summary describes her as graduating from school with a speciality as gardener, but never really being able to exercise her profession. She married early, and her husband insisted they stayed in the village to take care of his elderly parents. Although Petya would have had better chances of employment in the city, she has focused on caring for her family, especially the two children:

The main priority (...) soon proved to be the children. (BG 22 1950 F)

The responsibility of having a family, nonetheless, is also discussed by some male interviewees, in particularly addressed by some British men. Tim, from the 1970 cohort, claimed men are more affected by not bringing home an income than women as men are supposed to be breadwinners - see the section on life satisfaction.

5 Consequences of early job insecurity

5.1 Introduction

In this report, we investigate how the interviewees subjectively felt the effects of unemployment in two important aspects of European youths' lives: social trust and life satisfaction. The narrative data of the project touches upon both aspects in several ways, mainly through answers to interview questions on social standing, formal and informal support systems, and possibilities for individual agency.

Life satisfaction is perhaps the most widely used measure to assess well-being (Foregard, Jayawickreme, Kern, & Seligman, 2011). However, questions on life satisfaction are answered according to the individual's own standards and criteria for a good life, and because of that, life satisfaction may be high even if objective standards of wealth, etc. are not met, and vice versa. The World Happiness Reports published by the United Nations (UN) reveal such substantial differences in life evaluation or happiness (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2015). Table 9 'shows the average ladder score (the average answer to the Cantril ladder question, which asks individuals to evaluate the quality of their life on a scale of 0 to 10) for each country, averaged over the years 2013–2015' (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2016:18). The World Happiness Report 2016 Update also includes changes that occurred from 2005–2007 to 2013–2015, i.e. the period prior to and after the global recession. These numbers are also included in Table 9.

Table 9: Ranking of happiness and changes in happiness levels due to the recession

Country	Ranking* 2013–2015	The average ladder score	Changes from 2005–2007 to 2013–2015
Bulgaria	129	4.217	0.373
Czech Republic	27	6.596	0.126
Germany	16	6.994	0.486
Greece	99	5.033	- 1.294
Norway	4	7.498	0.082
Poland	57	5.835	0.098
UK	23	6.725	- 0.161

* The ranking included 157 countries (Helliwell et al., 2016:20-22 and 25-27)

Trust is an important aspect for the well-being of an individual and for the cohesiveness of local communities and even democracy (Warren, 1999). However, the causal relationships between these aspects are not clear (Bäck & Christensen, 2016). Critically, social trust is an important part of social capital (Newton, 2001). NEETs are half as likely to report trust issues compared to other youth (OECD, 2016b:128); thus, social trust is of essence in a study on the subjective outcomes of unemployment. Social trust is a difficult concept to define, and it has been studied from many angles and within many sciences. For this study, we used a working definition of social trust as an individual's belief that, in general, other members of society will do him or her no harm (Delhey & Newton, 2003:105). Social trust is to have faith in people, a belief that most people, most of the time, will behave with honesty and integrity.

There are different types of trust. Trust in the political system or in one's state is not necessarily the same as—or connected with—confidence in one's closest family members or neighbourhood circles (Kaase, 1999). However, for this analysis, we will touch upon both aspects, as both affect the lives of the interviewees, as observed in the interviews. Thus, we will concentrate on narratives that relate to the support needed from close social circles as well as state agencies.

5.2 Social trust

While one of the main effects of not having stable, gainful employment is a lower level of income, most of the interviewees highlighted the need to rely on other people. For instance, continuing to live in one's childhood home for longer than expected or planned is a recurrent theme in the interview summaries. In this way, being unemployed means having to trust close family members for a place to stay. Some interviewees described this as an unwanted, uncomfortable delay of independent adulthood. Others mentioned that living with family did not bother them at all. In some cases, the interviewees have moved away from home but are dependent on friends, spouses, siblings or other family members to pay their rent and keep food on the table. In other words, the social network of the individual becomes crucial in times of need. There are big differences between those who have such networks and those do not. For some, the loss of social networks (such as divorce, problems at home, loss of parents in some way) defined the turning point in their lives and was identified as one of the causes for their unemployed status.

Another important theme that the interviewees spoke of at length was having to approach state welfare agencies for help. In some countries, registering as unemployed is a prerequisite for obtaining health insurance. Others contact welfare agencies to get help to find or apply for work. Many contact state agencies to get financial benefits, although being young and unemployed often mean you cannot claim unemployment benefits.

The interview summaries show significant cross-national similarities, and the differences are often in degree, not in kind. There are no significant differences on the impact of unemployment on social trust between, for instance, Eastern and Western Europe. The main finding is that the interviewees described themselves as being hard at work to achieve financial and social independence; whether in the form of a concrete plan, a long-term goal or a more abstract but perhaps unattainable ideal, the interviewees spoke of their deep wish to be able to support themselves. However, as they wait for better times, they seek the support of their family, friends, and informal and formal networks in a variety of ways. As most other studies on unemployment since the 1933 study of Marienthal have shown, unemployment is seen as involuntary and problematic (Jahoda, Lazarsfeld, & Zeisel, 1971). Narratives, no matter how individually framed and told, are always deeply ingrained with cultural norms. Hence, it is not surprising that when unemployed individuals are asked about their lives and life situations, they tie their lives, choices and experiences to general societal ideas of work as being an important facet of adult life (Tanum & Krogstad, 2014:250).

Even though national systems differ vastly between countries and the interview summaries span almost five decades of unemployment experiences, the interviewees' attitudes towards and encounters with state support systems show a striking similarity across our interview summaries. Broadly speaking, there are two types of descriptions of the state support system: personal and impersonal. The first includes vague descriptions of a distant, abstract State, sometimes depicted as compassionate, sometimes as absent or merciless. The second includes narratives of interviewees who actually met with state representatives, with the outcome and evaluation of these encounters highly dependent on the personal abilities of the case managers. While the contrast between these two types of descriptions is stark, it does not seem to be state-, cohort- or gender-specific. Rather, it seems to depend on individual experiences and personality traits.

The present qualitative data allows for discussions on many aspects of social trust. Here, we have chosen to expand on the issues of dependency by discussing and analysing the interviewees' experiences of relying on their closest circles and the state support systems.

5.2.1 Relying on family and friends

When young people lack gainful employment, dependency on others more often than not equates to dependency on parents. It is easy to see how this tendency can curb an individual's social mobility, as youth, in such situations, are limited to the resources of their parents. Living off others' income does not usually allow for lavish spending. However, this is not the main point raised by the interviewees; rather than focusing on the financial troubles related to dependency, they speak of the emotional impact of relying on social networks.

Clearly, a close family unit is important for young Europeans in times of need, and this is not taken for granted. However, while many interviewees underlined their gratitude for the support given to them by their families, the support given was often not described at length, but rather alluded to in brief. For example, 1950s-born Brit Joseph, who spent more than a decade in unstable employment, comments that he and his wife:

... had support from families; we both come from big families. (UK 02 1950 M)

In a few words, this quote points to a bigger narrative, one of family being a safe haven, and a large family a safety net when times are tough.

However, being dependent on family puts restraints on individuals, and many interviewees elaborated on the strain of being in such a position. The story of a young Bulgarian man, Atanas, who belongs to the 1990–1995 cohort, may serve as an example here. His story belongs to the Stumblers narrative category, and his experience of unemployment is not one of catastrophic loss. Compared to many others, his time without employment was relatively short, and he was back on his feet within a year. Today, Atanas has a secure job and is applying to universities. However, looking back at his time without income, it seems clear that he views it as life-changing.

Atanas completed his secondary education in a sports specialty in Sofia. For a while, he relied completely on his parents, but then started looking for work. Through friends, he got his first job but was laid off after the probation period ended. Again, through friends, he found a new job as a construction worker. While he would have preferred to move out after secondary school, he continued to live with his parents due to financial constraints. While unemployed, he had to limit his social life substantially and be financially dependent on his parents. He felt embarrassed to take money from them, but he did not have the means to be independent:

Yes, in general, I have never asked for money. I managed by myself... [my parents] would want to give me money, but I would refuse... I feel embarrassed to take money from them in principle.

(...)

I would have felt better being, like, independent, and also to make it easier for them, after all. (BG 01 1990 M)

In other words, he considered not only his pride and desire for independence, but he also wanted to make life easier for his parents. To achieve this, he took both temporary and insecure jobs. The summary revealed how Atanas considers his friends his mainstay in life. Financially and morally relying on his parents and friends strengthened his connection with them. In other words, Atanas knows through experience that his family and friends will be there for him through difficult times. His

parents allowed him to stay in his childhood home, and all his jobs seem to have been a result of help from friends and acquaintances. This last point is important. We know that in many nations, and within many sectors in the labour market, employment is more easily found through informal rather than formal sources. However, when unemployment is prevalent everywhere, helpful friends become a scarce resource. Greek Philippa, another narrator of a Stumbler story, notes that although she is financially and morally supported by family and some friends, she has realised that some of her friends or colleagues may hide information regarding vacancies and public calls for positions that are announced. She feels that there is strong competition among friends.

Not all European youth have the level of social trust in their closest community to the degree that Atanas has. While Atanas was troubled by the fact that he was a burden to his parents, but still felt that the experience brought them closer, others have no parents, or parents that cannot or will not help them. Sometimes an individual may receive moral support from family and friends, but they do not have the economic means to help out, or they may be in a tight spot themselves and thus unwilling to offer information on job vacancies. At other times, even moral support runs short, as in the case of another Stumbler, Květa.

Czech Květa from the 1990–1995 cohort finished her vocational certificate as a cook, but her father insisted that she graduate from a school where she could pass the school-leaving exam, the GCE or the so-called ‘maturita’. She continued to pursue other studies, first at a business school, later as pastry-cook. Due to extreme psychological pressure from her father, she had a mental breakdown and was hospitalised, whereupon her father kicked her out of the apartment. Květa then had to support herself, and has been through rough times with a series of unstable jobs. Her housing situation has also changed, based on her part-time jobs, moving eight times in 3 years, most of the time living with roommates. Although her mother and grandmother helped Květa without her father’s knowledge, her main source of support has been her friends; they helped her with securing part-time jobs, but what Květa stresses most is support of a more intangible nature:

I filtered [out] my true friends... the ones that invited me for a beer and didn’t want me to pay them back... gave me some money... and were friends of mine even when I was totally broke... we were hanging out somewhere where we didn’t have to pay.
(CZ 20 1990 F)

Real economic support was not available to Květa, but at least she had the moral support. Likewise, for Jimmy, a British man from the 1970–1975 cohort, economic help could not be found in his closest circles, and neither could help with finding employment. He describes his network as going through the same problems as he did:

... they [were] financially [in] the same position as I was, really. So, obviously, they were struggling, they had mortgages; it was just survival for them, really. (UK 07 1970 M)

Another aspect of the potential help from family and friends is that they may not have the kind of contacts that unemployed youth need. Greek Stavros, classified as telling a Precariat narrative, was born in the 1990s. He started his career by working in the family business, a gas station, after he finished his lower high school. However, when the gas station closed down, no help could be found in his closest circles. He continued to live with his parents, but they could not help him find work in other sectors. They simply did not have any contacts.

In many ways, Stavros' story nicely illustrates Granovetter's classical thesis about strong and weak ties (Granovetter, 1973, 1983). Strong ties are those interpersonal relations that we cultivate on a semi-daily basis and form the closest circle. Granovetter classifies strong ties as those social bonds that combine emotional intensity, intimacy, time use and reciprocity (Granovetter, 1973:1361). These are the people we trust and know well, and they are important for our well-being. We may, in normal circumstances, live perfectly happily within this (often small) circle. However, when troubles arise, the strong ties may not be sufficient. Weak ties are the kind of ties we may have with former co-workers, people living elsewhere, sporadic acquaintances, or friends of friends. These are not people that we know well or usually trust with our personal affairs. Nevertheless, they are crucial in that they may have knowledge or contacts that are not available within the closest circle.

When Stavros' parents could not help him find a new job 'because they did not have enough contacts', he started to search for jobs on his own through newspaper advertisements, and eventually turned to the government.

5.2.2 Relying on the state

When the government and NGOs arrange for help in job searches, they, in effect, bridge the lack of connections between employees and employers; this is especially useful for individuals with weak ties to the labour market. For Stavros, this worked well, as the Greek public employment agency found him his current job.

They helped me a lot to find what I was searching [for]. The lady was very helpful. She [put in] great effort[s]. She searched continuously to find new positions for me; I was going to the appointments she was arranging for me. She offered me a lot. (GR 24 1990 M)

Looking at the interview summaries as a whole, we see the full span of trust in the state, ranging from interviewees having lost all faith in the state, to feeling fully confident that governmental services can offer them help when needed. Some interviewees said they have no trust in their

leaders—a sense of the people being all on their own—while others said they were happy and grateful for the work done by government agencies who help people going through hard times—a sense of everybody being in the same boat.

The differences between countries are not very large, as per our interview summaries, but there are huge differences within each country. For instance, Greece is the country in our sample hardest hit by the economic crisis, and it is not surprising to find Greek interviewees stating that they do not believe that Greece actually is a welfare state. But even there, we find people such as Stavros who have a rather high trust in and satisfaction with governmental services. However, Stumbler Nikoleta, who is of the same cohort as Stavros, said:

I have an opinion about the state, and it's not a positive one. I believe that things go from bad to worse. But OK. I can't do anything [about it], I can only discuss it. Certainly, my opinion about the state is affected by what's going on in the country.
(GR 25 1990 F)

Nikoleta was never entitled to an unemployment benefit, and was never accepted to the activation programme she applied to at the public employment agency. In short, she had to rely on her own abilities. She mentioned social media as her main source of information when trying to find employment. Nikoleta feels that, particularly in the public sector:

... there is no meritocracy and all positions are covered on the basis of personal contacts. (GR 25 1990 F)

When looking at Nikoleta and Stavros' experiences with governmental aid and their opinions on whether or not the government is to be trusted, it seems clear that their opinions are based on personal experience. However, there does not seem to be any automatic relationship between positive experiences and a generalised trust. For instance, the Norwegian Kristina, from the 1970–1975 cohort, had to fight to get the benefits she was entitled to. At one point, she was employed in a labour market scheme as a trainee in a library and worked full-time. Still, the salary was so low that she had to look for bottles (for container deposit money) in the library dustbins, and needed emergency help from social services to pay her rent. Still, she compares her situation then to the years she lived in the UK, and says that it has made her realise:

... how OK we really have it in Norway; it was bad, but we are better off. (NO 18 1970 F)

Thus, despite having bad experiences with Norway's governmental services, she recognises it as being better than other nations' systems, and she still trusts the Norwegian state to provide at least some sort of safety net. Her experiences have not made her entirely lose faith in her government, but she tries to make sure that she will never be dependent on it again. Norway is generally known

as a country with high social trust, and this is visible in the narratives. In Norway, it is clear that all interviewees regard governmental help as something they can rely on. When it does not offer help as expected, the interviewees considers it a fault to be mended, not a foundational sign that society is not to be trusted. A Norwegian male, Stig, from the 1990–1955 cohort has a psycho-social disability that has hindered him from acquiring a job in the competitive labour market. He has been struggling with finding a work training scheme suits his needs, and he has been struggling with depression and anxiety. Recently, he found a resource centre that has helped him.

I just expected to find somewhere like that, 'cause I reckoned that Norway is a good country [were] there [are] possibilities, sort of. So I waited; I actually thought like that. (NO 12 1990 M)

In other words, even Stig, who had serious problems of fitting into an inhospitable labour market, and with several negative experiences with governmental systems, kept his faith that something would turn up—there was help to be found, if he just went looking.

In general, the narrative data portrays the government in a personalised form, that is, in the form of encounters with government officials in local offices. Regardless of whether the outcome is positive or negative, the interviewees narrated their experiences through anecdotes of meeting helpful or unhelpful case workers.

It is important to stress that narratives of positive experiences with the state support system and meetings with helpful case workers do not necessarily depend on the help provided bearing fruit. Several of our interviewees have not been able to find jobs—or even substantial financial help—through their local welfare administrations, but they remain positive about the work such institutions are doing.

We know from previous research that social trust, both in one's closest social circle and in political entities, is expressed by different people for different reasons (Newton, 2001). Earlier investigations into correlations between social trust and other variables point in multiple directions, but in general, social trust does not correlate widely or strongly to the expected factors, such as income, education, class, gender and age. There is, however, a tendency for social trust to be found among what Newton calls the 'winners' in society, rather than the 'losers'. Social trust correlates, to a certain degree, with high income, education and social status (Orren, 1997; Newton, 1999a: 173, 2000): if an individual feels that he or she has done well in life, it is often usually for them to trust society.

5.3 Life satisfaction

The analysis of the interviewees' reflections on the consequences of unemployment is captured by the term 'life satisfaction'. We have focussed our analysis on the link between unemployment and life satisfaction. The main sub-topics that emerged from the interview summaries were:

- physical and mental health
- social relationships
- financial insecurity
- housing
- alcohol consumption
- psychological issues, e.g. low self-confidence, stress, the feeling of not being needed
- positive outcomes, such as getting to know oneself better

While interviewees from all the participating countries addressed these different areas, the interview summaries of some countries and some cohorts were more thematised than others. Bear in mind that we only have the summaries available for our analysis. Hence, each interviewee may have spoken on the various consequences of unemployment on life satisfaction without it being reflected in the interview synopses.

In addition, we examine financial insecurity, mental health and other psychological issues, and social relationships, as these three emerged as most important aspects, being most frequently addressed in the summaries. In addition, we briefly examine the unexpectedly positive outcomes of being unemployed, as pointed out by some of the interviewees. We also highlight variations in narrative experiences in the interview summaries.

5.3.1 Financial insecurity

If we were to rank the different life satisfaction areas, perhaps the most important one would be how unemployment and precarity affect people's financial security. The financial insecurity that comes with unemployment is a recurrent topic, especially in the interview summaries from Bulgaria, Greece and the Czech Republic. It is addressed especially in the Czech 1990–1955 cohort, the Bulgarian 1970–1975 cohort and the Greek 1950 and 1970–1975 cohorts.

How do the interviewees talk about financial insecurity? The following interview excerpt from Czech Květa shows how the lack of a stable job, and thus income, affect one's life situation in all aspects of everyday life, from housing to cultural activities:

You are working for a week, and then you have nothing for two weeks; this does not help your psyche... I lived in insecurity, [wondering] if I can pay my rent, if I will have

enough money for food, if I could go for a festival, if I can buy shoes... With this part-time work contract, I hope it gets better. That I will be more at ease ... (CZ 20 1990 F)

A Bulgarian interviewee, Kliment, links the lack of security to low self-esteem:

You start to think simply [of taking things] one day at a time... (...) Now, when a man has a permanent, secure job, a man can get confidence and have self-esteem. Now, being unemployed, he lives for the day. He might, for instance, have money to buy a loaf of bread today, but he won't tomorrow. He curls up into his shell. (BG 24 1970 M)

Many of the interviewees recount that not having the means needed to provide for oneself and one's family, and not knowing how long the state of insecurity will last, is very stressful. The following interview excerpt from the Greek Losif, who belongs to the 1970–1975 cohort, shows how stress integrates into so many life aspects:

You know, there is stress and this uncertainty about what am I doing, where am I going, what will happen tomorrow. And every day you think how long it is going to take. And for how long I will be like this. I had a car. They took my number plates. I don't use it any more. My financial condition is not the best, and for how long are we going to make it? What are we going to do? And this is every day. And it has a psychological impact, on your relationship with your partner, as long as you have a partner, and with other people. Things are tense. (GR 17 1970 M)

The large financial difficulties that may come with unemployment and precarity may, for some, lead to depression. Caring responsibilities may be an extra burden in these circumstances, but may also provide the strength needed to get through the period of unemployment. An excerpt from a Bulgarian mother, Silvia, who belongs to the 1990–1995 cohort, shows how serious the impact of financial difficulties may be; in her case, having parental responsibilities was the only thing that prevented her from committing suicide:

A year and a half ago, we were in a very difficult situation. We were without power at home because nobody worked and I was with the toddler. We were wondering how to [make] both ends [meet], and [we] asked everywhere for work. Nobody helped, absolutely none. I was going to explode. And so I closed the bathroom door and cried: What happens to us? To what extent are we fallen? And I was ready to kill myself (...) But at some point, my kid called me and I stopped because of the child. (BG 26 1990 F)

While such extreme poverty is not present in, for instance, the German, UK or Norwegian interview summaries, the lack of a regular income does affect the lives of the unemployed and/or people receiving a disability pension in these countries, too. A Norwegian interviewee, Rigmor, who belongs to the 1970 to 1975 cohort, summarises how unemployment impacts her opportunities of finding a life partner and having a family of her own. She recounted that it is difficult for people on a disability pension to find a partner due to the low social status attached to being a claimant. If you do not have

a partner, some Norwegian women—800 in 2016 (Dommerud & Tjernshaugen, 2017)—go to Denmark for assisted reproduction. But if your income is a disability pension, then you cannot afford to pay for such services and, hence, you will be unable to have children.

5.3.2 Mental health and psychological issues

Despair or depression is another important issue found in the interview summaries, as is evident from the excerpt above. Whereas unemployment may cause physical problems due to, for example, the lack of nutritious food, mental health problems are more often addressed. It is only in the Greek interview summaries that very few talked about depression and other serious mental health issues. Nonetheless, the larger category of psychological issues is present in the Greek interview summaries.

Mental health is a recurrent issue in all the countries. Moreover, it is particularly present in the German interview summaries among all the cohorts. German Adele, who belongs to the 1990 cohort, recounted that every time she is fired, the world collapses on her. She would, as a result, feel ashamed and inferior. Another German interviewee, Bastian, described instances of depression that resulted in doing less workouts and staying almost exclusively in bed, sleeping or watching TV. His day–night rhythm was disrupted. A German interviewee from the 1970–1975 cohort, Gert, stated that he had psychological problems during his period of unemployment; he felt less worthy and had low self-confidence. By engaging in part-time jobs, he had managed to improve his level of life satisfaction as he had at least something to do, though most of these jobs were not to his liking. Another German from the same cohort, Ingrid, said that she had suffered episodes of depression while unemployed, and that she had sought comfort in a theatre group; this group helped her tackle the psychological impact of unemployment and provided her with support. A 1950–1955 cohort German interviewee said that therapy had helped him when he suffered from depression. While many interviewees connected depression and other psychological issues to unemployment, others stated they suffered years of psychological problems prior to becoming unemployed. German Reinhard, who belongs to the 1950–1955 cohort, recounted that he had suffered from depression and insomnia in the early years of his childhood. These symptoms exacerbated during his period of unemployment.

British Angie, who belongs to the 1970–1975 cohort, recounted that she became depressed while she was unemployed. She could not accept the fact that she could not get a job. There was a stigma associated with going to the employment office, and she was embarrassed to claim jobseeker's allowance (JSA):

I didn't want to go to that employment office because I thought it was a terrible thing to do. Nobody had ever been out of work in my family before.

(...)

I remember feeling absolutely devastated that I had to go and sign on and say, 'I haven't got a job'. I even remember saying to the bloke, 'I won't be here very often. I am going to find a job. I am not like these people. I am going to find a job'. I was so distressed having to go this place. (UK 13 1970 F)

When Angie found a job after her second period of unemployment, her self-esteem was very low but she started to gain her confidence back over the two years she spent at that job.

A few interview summaries thematise the link between unemployment, mental health and gender roles. British Tim claims that men are more affected by unemployment than women are, as unemployment prevents them from fulfilling the provider role that society has placed on them:

Yes, I think mental health probably hasn't been great. Basically, just being treated rubbish in the workplace, and no opportunities out there that give you confidence and make you feel good. You can soon get pretty low, I think. I certainly think for families, or maybe for the male role of the family, I think it is quite detrimental on their mental health. (UK 20 1970 M)

This excerpt shows how interconnected the different areas of life satisfaction are, and highlights how unemployment affects people's social relationships.

5.3.3 Social relationships

Life satisfaction is said to be 'strongly influenced by the quality of the surrounding social norms and institutions' (Helliwell et al., 2015:6). The ways in which unemployment affects the interviewees' relationships with family and friends are addressed in the interview summaries. Financial insecurity and the lack of a generous welfare state can cause some to become economically dependent on their families. Moreover, many interviewees emphasise the non-economic support provided by parents, in particular:

I have no complaints about my family [my parents]; they have always supported me. I see friends of mine who receive nothing from their family. If you don't have your family by your side, I believe that you can easily get disappointed [by] life. (GR 25 1990 F).

Also, friends are described as sources of such support, and are portrayed as people who share, for instance, the happiness experienced when a job opportunity comes along, as in the case of the Bulgarian Branka from the 1970 cohort.

Nonetheless, economic, social and/or emotional support from family and friends may also be a big burden. A Polish interviewee, Agata, who belongs to the 1990 cohort, said she used to be independent prior to becoming unemployed, but then things changed:

I felt that I needed someone all the time. That I'm not self-sufficient. [...] When I was unemployed, I received much support from others and I felt totally dependent. (PL 03 1990 F)

Some of the interviewees said that they felt 'lousy' when they had to depend on others:

[A]fter all, you don't have a job, your friends ... at some point ... because they buy you various things, and at some point you feel embarrassed in front of them. And ... you feel really bad ... You simply feel lousy at that point ... when somebody has to buy you a Coca-Cola or a sandwich ... It's not nice. You just feel ashamed that they have to get you such things. (BG 01 1990 F).

To some, the lack of money limits one's social life, as mentioned by a Czech interviewee from the 1970 cohort, Radmila.

5.3.4 Positive outcomes of unemployment and job insecurity

Many of the interviewees also addressed positive outcomes of having experienced unemployment. Some emphasised that the struggles of finding a job make you understand that you must not 'take anything for granted', according to the Brit Tina (UK 04 1950 F). Some interviewees also commented that unemployment makes you realise that you actually have a drive to make use of your own capabilities: When you do not have a job, you are wasting your resources. Getting involved in voluntary work thus becomes a venue for both making a difference to others as well as practicing your social skills. Many of the interviewees spoke about engaging in voluntary work while searching for jobs.

Looking back at the period of unemployment, some of the youth who had entered working life said that this experience, however hard and tough it was, gave them a good understanding of who they are. Some said that the experience even made them more confident and that they obtained a deeper understanding of their own skills when things got tough. In sum, experiencing unemployment made some of the interviewees stronger, and helped them to realise that they are stronger than they thought they were.

As is evident in the Precariat narrative, to most of our interviewees, job insecurity had serious consequences. Nonetheless, a few also emphasised how job insecurity and temporary unemployment may have unexpected positive consequences. Bulgarian Ivo, for instance, said that he used his unemployment period to engage in his number one hobby: art, and specifically, painting. Having plenty of free time, he could engage in art activities and develop his talent. He also stressed that all the temporary precarious jobs he had—and with that, the unstable source of income—had given him a variety of qualifications that were important for his personal growth and maturation.

6 Interviewees' policy recommendations

A striking feature of the narratives emerging from the interview summaries of this project, is the degree of which the interviewees see their fates as individual and particular. There is no strong collective “we, the unemployed”, and there is surprisingly little blame being put on government and society. Such issues are mentioned, but not dwelt on in the majority of the interview summaries. However, when asked how policies could or should change to help people in their situation, some said that they did not have any opinions about policy or that this was knowledge they did not have; others expressed several different policy recommendations.

The policy recommendations of the interviewees can be grouped into at least three main areas: education, employment services and the practices of employers.

Education:

Across countries, interviewees voiced the need for better career counseling at school, whether by teachers, career counsellors - or even some sort of mentoring system. In particular, those telling a Messy Life Narrative expressed the need for guidance early in life.

The need for more and robust apprenticeships were also an important issue. As a solution to the problem of lack of apprenticeships, several interviewees suggested to encourage companies to a greater extent than today to take on young people. However, many stressed that this needs to be for a living wage, not as cheap labour. British Jimmy, from the 1970 cohort, said that his own company encourage sub-contractors to employ apprentices.

Employment services:

The interviewees called for better, individually tailored governmental services, rendered by employment agency caseworkers who do not only see you as a number, but as an individual. Many interviewees told of feeling that their skills and experiences were overlooked.

Furthermore, the interviewees expressed a need for the development of better active labour market measures that would enhance rather than reduce their employability. It is important to the interviewees not to be trapped by such measures, but to enter the competitive labour market as soon as possible.

For some interviewees, private employment agencies have been important, and many wish for these to be better incorporated in governmental policies. However, these agencies normally only provide temporary jobs that foster precariousness and poor working conditions. Hence, interviewees asked for better regulation.

Employers:

The recommendations that concerned employers centered around two main issues, namely the need to reduce discrimination and the need to improve work contracts.

Discrimination is mentioned especially in the narratives of Roma, of some of the women and some of the interviewees with disabilities. Roma interviewees referred to employers unwilling to take them on because of their ethnicity, and lamented the loss of protection after 1989. Interviewees with disabilities found it hard to find employers willing to accommodate their needs, even after completing all necessary education and training. Regarding discrimination of women, especially single mothers reported finding it difficult to secure reliable employment. The lack of affordable childcare clearly hindered the integration of women with caring responsibilities. Early motherhood was narrated as causing an interruption and a prolongation of the transition from school to work, with a lack of institutional support in all cohorts and almost all countries. Few proposed concrete solutions to the problem of discrimination, but some interviewees asked for more awareness and knowledge on behalf of employers, e.g. targeted efforts to reduce attitudinal barriers.

Irregular work, seasonal work and jobs without contracts were a major concern for the interviewees. Many spoke of such concepts as the grey sector and “junk” contracts – even experiences of not getting paid for their labour. Interviewees spoke of the need for better monitoring of existing legislation that is supposed to protect workers from precarity and exploitation by employers.

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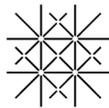
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