



**Young adults in insecure labour  
market positions in Italy**

**The results from a qualitative study**

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- i. to advance the knowledge base that underpins the formulation and implementation of relevant policies in Europe with the aim of enhancing the employment of young people and improving the social situation of young people who face labour market insecurities, and
- ii. to engage with relevant communities, stakeholders and practitioners in the research with a view to supporting relevant policies in Europe. Contributions to a dialogue about these results can be made through the project website <http://www.except-project.eu/>, or by following us on twitter @except\_eu.

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## Preface

The purpose of this Working Paper is to present the overall results arisen from the qualitative survey carried out under EXCEPT Project in Italy. The main objective of this project was to provide a comprehensive understanding of the consequences of youth labour market vulnerability to the risks of social exclusion in Europe.

The aim of the qualitative research has been to study in depth young people's experiences of labour market exclusion, insecurities and related risks of social exclusion, by focusing on the voice of particularly vulnerable groups of youths.

The Working Paper is divided in two sections and six separate parts with chapters and sub-chapters.

Section 1 offers an introduction to the research topic and a presentation of the existing Italian institutional context. In particular, this part focuses on Italian labour market and educational system, and on labour and family policies for young people.

Section 2 contains the description of the methodology used, with information about the sampling strategy and the data collection process. As the research is part of a European comparative qualitative study, this part contains information about the overall methodology, as the sampling plan and the interviews implementation process, but also information about the specificities in the Italian sample.

Section 3 contains the results of the analyses. It is organized in:

Part (a) includes the results arisen from the thematic analysis of interview answers that concerned the participants' educational and work experiences.

Part (b) is about the way young interviewees talk about their autonomy, their understanding of the concept, as well as the meanings they attribute to the notion of adulthood. The analysis focuses on housing, economic and psychological autonomy and on the strategies that young people use in their effort to cope with the lack of economic autonomy, connecting the lack of autonomy with feelings of social exclusion and marginalization.

Part (c) discusses the participants' self-perception of health and well-being in general and as a result of unemployment and/or job insecurity, as well as the micro, meso and macro risk factors affecting the quality of their every-day reality.

Part (d) focuses on the way interviewees understand the socioeconomic consequences of unemployment and precarious employment in short and long period.

Finally, Part (e) focuses on risks of Social Exclusion for Italian interviewees.

Part (f) presents young people's experience of their use of national policies for youth unemployment, their opinion on the existing system and their implications.

The Working Paper ends with a summary of suggestions and recommendations about how to ameliorate the offered youth policies.



## 1 Setting the context

In this section, we briefly describe the main features of the Italian labour market, the educational system, the family policies, the active and passive labour market policies, and the initiative to develop youth autonomy. Also we summarize some initiatives implemented by associations, bank foundations, and other third sector entities at the local level in order to have a better understanding of the interviews contexts, i.e. Turin (Northwestern Italy - Piedmont Region) and Catania (Southern Italy - Sicily).

### 1.1 National Labour Market

Following significant labour market reforms in the 1990s and early 2000s, labour market outcomes have improved substantially in Italy. Employment rates have increased, and the unemployment rate dropped to 6.1% in 2007 after a peak of over 12% in the mid-1990s (Schindler 2009). However, the 2008 crisis changed the scenario. According to ISTAT (Italian National Institute of Statistics), the unemployment rate increased from 6.7% in 2008 to 11.9% in 2015. In the same period, the inactivity rate remained stable (from 37.1% in 2004 to 36% in 2015). The unemployment rate has increased especially among young people: in 2015 the youth unemployment rate (aged 18-29) was 29.6% in Italy, 25.8% in Piedmont and 45.7% in Sicily.

The Italian labour market does not absorb all its labour supply, particularly young people and the female labour supply, as attested by the structurally high (and increasing) unemployment rates of these social categories. In the case of young people, among other factors, reasons deriving from social prejudices also explain their higher unemployment rates compared to adults. They have little labour experience and for this reason, they are less appealing to employers. In addition, not having family responsibilities (wife and/or children) particularly penalises men; having a family is considered an indicator of reliability, whereas women can be discriminated against in the labour market precisely because they have families (Reyneri, 2011). In the case of women, low employment rates in comparative and gender perspectives (and the scarce capacity of the national labour market to absorb all the potential female labour supply) are due, among other factors, to the low availability of part-time jobs, which in Italy are less widespread than in other European countries, and to the scarcity of policies supporting conciliation between paid work and family life. Structural incapacity to absorb a highly-educated and highly-skilled labour supply is another characteristic of the Italian labour market. The share of tertiary-educated young people in Italy is lower than the European average, in spite of which they have lower employment rates because the Italian economic and productive system is characterised by the predominance of small- and medium-size companies that often do not need graduates. Added to this is the structural incapacity of the Southern Italian labour market to absorb its labour supply because of the weakness of the economic background (industry is



historically underdeveloped in Southern regions) and because of the high incidence of irregular work.

The Italian labour market is characterised by a series of structural imbalances that increase the vulnerability of the categories briefly described below:

a) **High youth unemployment rate.** In 2015, the youth unemployment rate (aged 15-24) was 37.9%: due to the economic crisis it increased from 19.4% in 2008 to 2012 in 38.3% (Source: ISTAT). This picture had become more dramatic by the high rate of NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training): 21.4% in 2015 among 15-24 year-olds according to Eurostat (2016).

b) **Gender imbalance.** According to ISTAT, the female unemployment rate is higher than the male rate (12.7% versus 11.3% in 2015). Considering the activity rate, taking into account the latest data available (i.e. 2015), the gender gap has become clearer: the female activity rate (15-64 age groups) in 2015 was 54.1%, a decrease of 20% in comparison with men in the same age groups. In Italy, the traditional family model with the male breadwinner continued to be the predominant model: however there are some visible changes among the young generations, (Rosina and Fraboni, 2004; Saraceno, 2013).

c) **Significant territorial inequalities.** Italy continues to be characterised by a territorial heterogeneity according to the LM outcomes: Southern regions have lower employment rates and higher unemployment rates (especially for women) in comparison with the Northern ones (as seen previously), as well as a higher incidence of long-term unemployed and a higher rate of NEET young people (ISTAT, 2014, 2015) This data confirms a historical gap, which still exists due to the lack of efficient policies aimed at strongly modifying this situation (Isfol, 2009).

d) **High labour market segmentation and precarisation.** According to a lot of research, the mix of different regimes of employment protection and the liberalisation of atypical, temporary contracts increased segmentation of the labour market (Lucidi and Raitano, 2009), allocating the worst jobs to the most vulnerable categories, especially the young people and women, creating widespread effects of scarring and precarisation. In Southern European countries, deregulation policies throughout the past decades have been highly selective, burdening the already disadvantaged labour market outsiders while keeping the rights of the labour market insiders almost untouched. Mainly, this deregulation took place by relaxing the regulations for fixed-term employment. Given the strong protection guarantees for the “insiders”, flexibility was selectively transferred to those people without safe labour market anchorage, respectively those entering the labour market (Regini, 2002, i.e. youth; see Blossfeld et al., 2005, 2008, 2011b; Barbieri and Scherer, 2009), a strategy frequently referred to as a “flexibilization at the margins” (e.g. Buchholz, 2008).

e) **Highly-skilled mismatching.** The number of unemployed people with a university degree rose from 58,000 in 2007 to 128,000 in 2015: an increase of 120% (Source:





ISTAT). According to an OECD analysis, “...a positive relationship between tertiary education and skill mismatch is especially strong, possibly suggesting that high-skilled labour is misallocated” (OECD, 2015, 23). High levels of unemployment rates among tertiary education graduates was observed in other European countries affected by the economic crisis (e.g. Portugal, Spain, and Greece) (see Rokicka et al, 2015)

## 1.2 Active and Passive Labour Market Policies

Adverse macroeconomic conditions, including an overall unemployment rate that exceeded 12% during the late 1980s and Italy’s envisaged entry into the European Community in 1999, resulted in several reform measures starting in the early 1990s that liberalised the labour market (Blossfeld et al., 2012) with new laws regarding collective firing and the abolishment of the automatic indexation of wages to inflation. However, the Italian reform process is characterised by a “marginal and asymmetric process” (Boeri, 2012). “The reform process of the 1990s and early 2000s created a labour market that was fairly flexible for workers entering the labour market, namely youth and women. At the same time, prime-age workers, belonging to the “breadwinner generation”, were completely insured by the reform process. The reform process was thus marginal – in the sense that it applied only to new jobs, and asymmetric – in the sense that it affected only a fraction of the population; in other words, the reform process acted mainly through the labour market flows” (Garibaldi and Taddei, 2013, 19). In Italy, a very rapid introduction of temporary employment, combined with very low and targeted social protection, affected the life of young people differently than in other countries where such changes were slower or accompanied by higher levels of social protection (Bertolini, 2011).

The last reform is the the Law 150/2015 - inserted into the so-called “Jobs Act” reform – and it have reorganized the public employment services (PES) and labour policies in Italy. The Law 150/2015 assigned PES an active role in the management and monitoring of policies for work, while previously they aimed to inform and train the unemployed people. The PES are set up by the regions to assist unemployed workers and beneficiaries of income support instruments and at risk of unemployment, by providing personal guidance, help in looking for a job or an internship, mentoring and counselling for those who wants to start their own business.

This Law has also changed the active labour policies, but the reform is still ongoing. The agreement has also reported the availability of the applicant's participation in initiatives and workshops for the strengthening of their mandate and to accept job offers in line with their experience and expertise, at a reasonable distance from their home, with top pay of at least 20 percent of unemployment. The signing of the pact is a necessary condition in order to ask for the resettlement allowance. However, these changes are still going on and they have not produced any effects yet. Furthermore, in a dual and segmented labour market, young people - with more temporary and atypical contracts - often cannot have access to labour market policies. In particular, since the





passive labour market policies are a type of unemployment insurance, in Italy we still lack welfare benefits for young people looking for their first job.

Furthermore, the unemployment benefits have changed. The “Jobs Act” transformed the income supports into a “virtual” voucher (with an average value of about 1,500 euros) to “acquire” active employment services (e.g.: training or courses) through the Public Employment Services or other recognized private institutions. At the moment, this reform has had no effect on unemployed young people and these measures are not mentioned in the interviews, because they are undergoing implementation. Furthermore, this information and the training services are often inefficient, according to a McKinsey report: *only 31 percent of Italian youth report access to résumé preparation, application, and interview support; only 34 percent have access to information on wages and job prospects in different fields. Of those who did have access, a little more than half (56 to 59 percent) found such services helpful.* (McKinsey, 2014, 66).

In Italy, Youth Guarantee (2013) assumed a central role in youth labour-market inclusion, aiming at countering youth inactivity and promoting the entry of young people into the labour market. At the EU level, the Youth Guarantee initiative was designed to focus on the population aged 18-25, but Italy decided to extend access to the programme to young people aged 25-29. The implementation of this plan started with the opening of the National Portal Youth Guarantee on May 1, 2014. The national web portal dedicated to the initiative is one of the central elements of the link between the Ministry and the Regions/Autonomous Provinces. This platform is the “locus” where all the relevant information regarding young people registered in the programme converges. In this way, the availability and job research of all the young people becomes accessible to the public employment services throughout Italy. Youth Guarantee works as follows: young people register on the Youth Guarantee National Portal, insert their data and choose a region (or regions). Within sixty days after registration, the Public Employment Centre of one of the selected regions should contact the young person to arrange an interview (however, the high number of requests makes this very difficult). In the next step, the public employment centre proceeds to the definition of a path in which to insert the young person in a working position or to return to training/education. The meeting between the public employment centre operator and the young person, depending on organisational requirements at the regional level, is used to define a coherent individual path compatible with the user's educational and professional characteristics. Within four months after this interview, the services offer guidance and accompaniment to individualised work, an offer of inclusion/re-integration in education/training programmes or work experience. The paths are constructed using a package of actions established at the national level, which the various regional administrations implement according to the needs and specificities of their territory.



Focusing on the two areas of the Italian fieldwork, Turin and Catania, the interviews frequently refer to “Piazza dei Mestieri” (PdM), a private reality that exists in both Turin and in Catania. PdM offers a great variety of courses aimed at various beneficiaries: from courses dedicated to minors to courses for upgrading professional adults. The target groups are young people interested in vocational training in the economic sectors of catering and hospitality. They are mainly unemployed young men not enrolled in upper secondary school, but the Italian sample also included many young women involved in the PdM activities. Young people in financial difficulties are granted scholarships that guarantee their right to attend courses. The scholarships include a monthly salary to allow these young people to be able to follow all the courses without having to find another source of income. “Piazza dei Mestieri” is an excellent private initiative that has trained thousands of young people, giving them the skills to enter the catering-and-hospitality labour market. For better or worse, “Piazza dei Mestieri” has a business perspective, although its actions have social consequences, as hypothesised by the social innovation economy (Defourny, 2001; Hubert, 2010). This is the most recurring project in interviews, while the other one is the university job placement centres (offices to help young graduates find an internship or a job). Besides these, which are more or less common to many Italian regions, Turin is a city where many innovative projects are being developed by young people. For example, “Master of Talents” - which offers real work opportunities and international internships during the last year of upper secondary schools or many self-supporting, public and private entrepreneurship initiatives (such as “Torino Social Innovation” and “SocialFare”). These projects are often funded by bank foundations or other private local institutions. The situation in Catania is very different: there a few private local policies, aside from “Piazza dei Mestieri” - a “good practice” that came from Turin - there are no relevant local policies useful in understanding the interviews.

### 1.3 Family policies

Policy-makers in Italy have traditionally considered issues relating to the family (e.g. forming a couple, childbirth, and intergenerational care) as belonging to the private sphere (Saraceno, 2013; Ruspini and Leccardi, 2016). Thus, Italian family policies are often not explicit, and suffer from the lack of any unitary formulation. Rather, they are fragmented, exhibiting one of lowest levels of generosity in Europe, reflected in high rates of child poverty (in 2014, 2.9 million under 16 years of age were at risk of poverty, according to Eurostat), as well as a low level of public support for working parents. Moreover, the Italian welfare state displays notable deficits in the provision of care services, such as early childcare facilities and social services for frail elderly people (Bertolini, Hofacker, and Torrioni 2014). According to ISTAT data, in 2015 the per-capita expenditure on family support amounted to 313 euros, consisting of only 4.1% of the total social spending that amounted to 28.6% of the GDP (of which 50% went to the elderly). In Italy, family policy is based on an enlarged subsidiarity model and the



welfare state supports more elderly people (pensioners) than young families (with children).

From 2010 onwards, in response to the economic crisis, the Italian national government and many regional governments enhanced measures for families with children. Many different measures were formulated, albeit still fragmentary and limited. However, new measures were translated into new resources to support social policies. On the contrary, recent years have seen a steady reduction in funding for the National Fund for Social Policies, the main financial source for social policies, to finance social services and transfers to families. Therefore, municipalities increasingly fall back on their own resources and ask the beneficiary families to share some portion of the costs (Eurofound, 2016).

## 1.4 Autonomy policies

In Italy public policies to support the autonomy of young people are fragmented and uncoordinated, and here we state the main elements concerning housing benefits, micro credit, and subsistence benefits.

With regard to housing benefits, Italy is the least developed of the EU countries. The Italian peculiarity is that housing policies in the twentieth century facilitated home ownership in various ways: there was little investment in social rental housing, low support for private rental housing, and a high tolerance of unauthorised building, which encouraged many Italian families to build their own house (Filandri, 2015).

Another peculiarity is the lack of data on housing benefits. The housing policies in Italy are enacted at the regional level. The national level gives general indications and collects information via a centralised monitoring centre, the Observatory of Housing Conditions, which was created in 1999 (Ministerial Decree No. 205/1999) but which is not yet operative (Filandri, 2015). Therefore, in Italy, evaluation of housing policies can be carried out at the regional level and with a high heterogeneity of available data: for these reasons, we can only make some general observations. The National Fund for supporting access to rental dwellings (Law 431/1998) is a policy implemented in different ways by the Italian regions: indeed, application depends mainly on the choices by both the town and regional administrations (Bertolini et al., 2014). The outcome of this fragmented approach is that both eligibility criteria and the number of people benefitting from the service may vary considerably from one region or local context to another. Additionally, the high cost of rental housing prevents many youths from leaving their parental home and induces a sort of negative selection effect, leading to a separation of young lower-income individuals from the rental market. At the same time, in the last two decades some policy measures have been directed towards supporting the purchase of a house through mortgages, above all with fiscal incentives, for example at the moment of buying or refurbishing a house. In recent years, credit has also been supported by the creation of Guarantee Funds. As of October 1, 2014, a



Guarantee Fund for youth (married couples or single-parent families) has provided the opportunity to have access to loans for both the purchase of a first house and the refurbishing of flats. However, this measure was used in very few cases at the beginning (1 million euros disbursed of the 50 million planned) because banks had to apply a reduction in their lending interest rate, which did not make this transaction very profitable. When this rule was dropped, banks offered loans at the normal interest rate, and the Guarantee was more widely used.

Adequate income is central to supporting disadvantaged young people. Several studies in comparative welfare state research have highlighted the importance of providing minimum income support but emphasized the absence in Italy of a proper anti-poverty strategy and especially the lack of a Minimum Income Scheme (MIS). Others focussed on the failed attempt to introduce a national MIS in the late 1990s, while some scholars investigated the existence of several (still often meagre) local anti-poverty programmes.

Italy experienced a dramatic increase in poverty during the prolonged recession that followed the 2008 economic and financial crisis. Severe material deprivation increased from 7.3% (2009) to 11.6% (2014), compared to 8.2% and 8.9% for the EU-27 average in the same years. The Italian government recently launched a national plan to fight the increasing poverty and social exclusion. It could represent a first step towards the establishment of both a national minimum income scheme and an integrated social system of social services aimed at active inclusion. The proposed legislation (currently under scrutiny by the Senate) is the continuation of the national anti-poverty strategy launched with the 2016 Stability Law (Law No. 208/2015), which had already introduced a national *“Fund to fight poverty and social exclusion”*. Increased resources devoted to anti-poverty measures with the Triennial National Plan Against Poverty and Social Exclusion, extended the means-tested benefit named SIA (*“Sostegno per l’Inclusione Attiva”* – Support for Active Inclusion), which was implemented through the national strategy in September 2016. It is targeted at households that meet at least one of the following conditions: i) one child under 18 years of age; ii) a disabled child; iii) a pregnant woman. SIA combines a monetary benefit with social services aimed at active inclusion based on individualised plans. The amount of the cash benefit (credited on an electronic payment card) increases according to the number of household members. The eligibility criteria are numerous, including residency in Italy (min. 2 years), income, and assets. In order to avoid cross-regional variations, this benefit will constitute one of the so-called *“minimum levels of assistance”* envisaged by Laws No. 328/2000 and No. 3/2001. Nevertheless, criticism has been expressed by trade unions, experts, and opposition parties, mostly regarding the following issues: the allocated resources are limited; in contrast with the *“selective universalism”* principle mentioned in the newly proposed law – the SIA/Inclusion Income is a category-based measure; SIA eligibility conditions are numerous and extremely severe. Consequently, official figures from the government indicate that coverage is limited to only 1.1 million individuals out of the 4.6 million people in absolute poverty. Young people will benefit from the measure only if



they are minors. In the case of Turin, among the active inclusion actions combined with the monetary benefits, there are also Financial Literacy courses. These are provided by a Third sector association in cooperation with banking foundations and they are directed at having an impact on the budget management and the propensity to save at the family level: with their savings, families have to face an unemployment period or unexpected expenses (Busso et al., 2017).

Microcredit has always been present in Italy in the form of links between small firms and locally embedded banks and was crucially important for the Italian productive sector. Now, in the case of young people, there are two differences with respect to the past situation. On one hand, changes in the regulation on the banking sector following the Basel rules, in particular after the 2008 financial crisis, have made access to credit for economic activities more difficult. On the other, there has been a progressive shift to the private sector in the policy measures directed at unemployed people, given the restriction in the welfare state. Following European advice, access to credit is perceived by the Italian public authorities as a way for precarious workers to face an unemployment period, also when starting their own activity. Following this new framework, microcredit was regulated by Decree No. 176/2014 of the Ministry of Economy and Finance. Article 111 of Legislative Decree No. 141/2010 states that special subjects, enrolled in a special list, may grant loans to individuals, to enterprises, and to those starting up in self-employment. The rule echoes the EU concept of microcredit but adds eligible subjects such as professional studios. In fact, Italian norms divide the object of microcredit into financially vulnerable individuals for personal needs (*social microcredit*) and individuals or small firms in order to start up an enterprise or self-employment (*microcredit for enterprises*). A subsequent law (Legislative Decree 169/2012) further reinforces the dichotomy between the primary microcredit solution available for the launching of a micro-enterprise and the secondary type of micro-lending to individuals in difficulty, which was confirmed by Decree No. 176/2014 of the Ministry of Economy and Finance. In the case of Turin, the microcredit for enterprises can be proposed in relation with the measures for self-employment described above (e.g. “Mettersi in proprio” or “Torino Social Innovation - FaciliTO” ).

There are few programmes at the national level, 80% carried out at the local level. Piedmont and Sicily showed a similar situation (20 and 17 programmes, between 1,000 and 2,000 recipients) but, in 2013, in Northern Italy, the ratio between social credit programmes (number) and people at risk of poverty increased. Instead, it was halved in the South, whose data highlighted lesser potential impact on these measures in the South (for further information see Andreoni et al., 2013, Borgomeo&co, 2013, Bendig et al., 2014, Ente Nazionale per il Microcredito, 2013).

## 1.5 Educational system

In Italy, education is compulsory for ten years between the ages of 6 and 16. This covers the whole of the first cycle of education, which lasts eight years (five years of



primary school and three years of lower secondary school), and the first two years of the second cycle. After completion of the first cycle of education, the final two years of compulsory education (from 14 to 16 years of age) can be undertaken at a State upper secondary school (vocational institute, technical institute, or high school,), or on a three- (or four-) year training or vocational course which is within the jurisdiction of the Regions.

#### ITALIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

- pre-primary school (between 3 and 6 years of age);
- primary education (lasting 8 years), made up of:
  - primary education (lasting 5 years), for children between 6 and 11 years of age;
  - lower secondary school (lasting 3 years), for children between 11 and 14 years of age;
- secondary education offering two different pathways:
  - State upper secondary school (lasting 5 years) for students from 14 to 19 years of age. It is offered by high school, technical institutes, and vocational institutes;
  - Vocational training courses (IFP) organised by the Regions (3-4 years);
- tertiary education offered by universities, institutes of the Higher Education in Art and Music system, and Higher Technical Institutes.

In addition, everyone has the right to receive education for at least 12 years within the education system or until they have obtained a three-year vocational qualification by the age of 18. Finally, 15-year-olds can also spend the last year of compulsory education on an apprenticeship, upon a specific arrangement between the Regions, the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Education, and trade unions. Regional three-year vocational training courses are offered by the relevant training agencies.

Once young people have reached school-leaving age, and cannot continue with their studies, they receive a certificate of completion of compulsory education and the skills they have acquired. These skills contribute to training credits towards any professional qualification. Access to tertiary education is solely for students who have passed the final examination of upper secondary school.

Early childhood education consists of two different stages based on children's age groups. Provision for children aged 0-3 years, offered by nursery schools, is not part of the education system and is outside of the responsibilities of the Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR). The educational function of public nursery schools, as opposed to the merely utilitarian aspect of the service they provide for families, at this level of education is not compulsory and lasts up to three years (from 3 to 6 years of age).

Primary school is compulsory, lasts for a total of five years and is attended by pupils aged between 6 and 11. The aim of this level in the education system is to provide pupils with basic learning and the basic tools of active citizenship.





Secondary education is ordered into a compulsory lower level, called first-level secondary school (*scuola secondaria di primo grado*) and an upper level, called the second cycle of education (in Italia: “secondo ciclo di istruzione”).

Lower secondary school lasts for 3 years and is attended by pupils aged 11 to 14. Together with compulsory primary school, it make up the first cycle of education which lasts a total of eight years.

The upper level is made up of State and vocational upper secondary schools (in Italian: “*scuola secondaria di secondo grado*”) and vocational education and training (in Italian: “*Istruzione e formazione professionale – IFP*”) which are developed at the regional level. The first two years of the second cycle of education are still compulsory. Together with the eight obligatory years of the first cycle of education, they make up the 10 years of compulsory education (from 6 to 16 years of age) and can be undertaken at any of the State or regional second-cycle institutions.

Public upper secondary education offers general, technical, or vocational education. The overall length of these studies is 5 years (from 14 to 19 years of age). Vocational education and training (IFP) is the competence of the Regions and is organised into three or four year courses for those who have completed the first cycle of education and wish to complete their compulsory education in the vocational training system or receive a three-year qualification by their 18th birthday. Compared with pathways of mainstream education, these courses are shorter (3-4 years), make more use of workshops and work experience. State-run general and vocational upper secondary education schools have been reformed. The reform was applied in the 2010/2011 school year and began with first-year pupils. The whole process will have ended in the school year 2014/2015 when the new organisation will apply to all grades.

Regarding tertiary education, there are three types of institutions that offer higher education in Italy: universities (including polytechnic universities), institutes of Higher Education in Art and Music (in Italian: “*Alta formazione artistica e musicale – AFAM*”) and Higher technical institutes (in Italian: “*Istituti Tecnici Superiori – ITS*”). Universities and institutions for Higher Education in Art and Music (AFAM) have regulatory and organisational autonomy, which means that these institutions can issue their own charters and teaching regulations. All the main Italian Universities have their job placement services to help their students find an internship or a job. However, there are many problems in the connection between the labour market and educational system, which is difficult and there is a lack of communication between employers and education providers: *72% of education providers in Italy think that youths have the skills they need when they finish school; only 42% of employers agree.* (McKinsey 2014, 66).





## 2 Methodology

### 2.1 National sampling strategy: sampling plan and specificities in the Italian sample

Unito Team adopted the general outline provided by WP3 in the Deliverable “D3.1 - Overall survey and sampling strategy” to construct the “National Sampling Plan”. The main elements that Unito team had to specify in order to reach a Sampling plan that was coherent with the logic of EXCEPT project concerned the following aspects: sample size, people involved in targeted policies, gender, age, occupational status, level of education, legal status in the host country. Other important issues concerned the identification of the national risk group(s) and of the geographical context(s) that each are choices that national team had to do.

**Therefore, the process to design an Italian National sample plan purposeful for the research questions of the EXCEPT project, taking into account country specificities, was made up through a three step process:**

1. translating the EXCEPT – D3.1 criteria into a **national sampling strategy**. That meant to implement these criteria adapting them to the specific institutional context. It required taking into account the youth characteristics and conditions, but also the country-specific analytical and cognitive questions that arise from those characteristics and conditions. The national sampling strategy was illustrated in the “National sampling plan” (internal delivered in December, 15 2015).
2. translating the national sampling strategy into a **scheme** giving the number of people to be approximately interviewed for each profile with specific characteristics (such as gender, age, etc.). At this stage, taking into account the nested variables was a particularly crucial and sensitive point (see Annex 1).
3. implementing the sampling plan in the **fieldwork**, respecting as much as possible the indications about the sample adopted by Unito team.

These three steps are synthesized in the following table (Tab. 1). For each sample feature (first column), the table illustrates the numbers -or the bracket of- interviewees to be reached accordingly to the Deliverable 3.1 “Overall sample and sample strategy” (second column), accordingly to the Unito National Sampling Plan (third column) and, finally, the effective numbers of interviewees reached in the fieldwork (fourth column).

Then the necessary adjustments in the sampling that took place during the fieldwork will be explained.



Table 1 From Deliverable 3.1 to the Unito final sample

<b>Sample features</b>	<b>EXCEPT - D3.1 Indications from the overall sampling strategy</b>	<b>UNITO sampling plan Design</b>	<b>UNITO sample Implementation</b>
<b>Sample size: number of interviews</b>	almost 40 interviewees	50 interviewees	50 interviewees
<b>People involved in targeted policies</b>	almost 20 interviewees	almost 20 interviewees	27 interviewees
<b>Gender</b>	“well balanced”	25 young men, 25 young women	25 young men, 25 young women
<b>Age</b>	18-30 age bracket, oversampling 18-24 years old	30-32 aged 18-24 years, 18-20 aged 25-30 years	25 aged 18-24 years, 25 aged 25-30 years
<b>Occupational Status</b>	to be included: temporary workers unemployed people not contractual workers NEET some successful stories	21 - 24 temporary workers, 15 -18 unemployed people & non contractual workers, 7-9 NEET young people, 2-3 successful stories	17 temporary workers, 21 unemployed people & non contractual workers, 6 NEET young people, 6 successful stories
<b>Level of education</b>	all education levels, oversampling low educated	20-22 youth ISCED 0-2 16-18 youth ISCED 3-4 12-14 youth ISCED 5-6	12 youth ISCED 0-2 26 youth ISCED 3-4 (25 ISCED 3) 12 youth ISCED 5-6
<b>Legal status in the host country</b>	to include ethnic minorities or migrant groups	8-10 interviewees belonging to ethnic minorities or immigrant groups	7 interviewees belonging to ethnic minorities or immigrant groups
<b>Geographical context</b>	to have <i>two different areas</i> with various characteristics in order to take into account the territorial cleavages relevant in each country	considering the North-South divide in two big cities: Turin in North Italy (30 interviewees) and Catania in South Italy (20 interviewees)	Turin (31 interviewees) and Catania (19 interviewees)
<b>National risk group</b>	to include specific risk groups (about 10%)	we consider as vulnerable groups NEET youths in Catania and youths belonging to ethnic minorities or immigrant groups in Turin (at least 5 interviewees)	10 interviewees (20%)

The first and most important observation concerns the **criteria about age and level of education**. The divergence of the final sample from the sampling plan is due to necessary adjustments during the fieldwork. The age 18-24 appeared particularly difficult to meet in case of men, so we preferred to respect the gender balance, and people with a level of education lower than ISCEE 2 (lower secondary, in Italy “licenza media”) are very difficult to meet given the national rules about compulsory school (in



Italy, it is compulsory to stay in school at least until 16 years old). Unito team has assessed these problems through its monthly internal meetings during the interviews implementation process, as well explained in the specific session below. In general, during the recruitment process we preferred information-rich cases, also giving more space to youths belonging to the risk groups and youth involved in policies, in order to reach a significant theoretical saturation. **The analytical issue of interest for the Italian case is, in fact, to tackle problems of social exclusion of youth.** In order to well address this issue and to be able to formulate adequate policy proposal, we aimed at selecting information-rich cases for our in depth qualitative study, systematically sorting out youths with risk profiles and youths who took part in specific policy programs. Furthermore, these objectives meet the requests of D3.1 about the selective sample.

**Regarding the occupational status**, we considered as “**temporary workers**” those employed with fixed-term contracts and with atypical contract, for example temporary agency work, seasonal work, job on call.

In the category of “**unemployed**” we included also youths who are working without a regular employment contract: this is a very widespread situation in Italy, usually together with a high risks of job loss and an increasing exposition to job insecurity. We did not consider a minimum length of unemployment, because this choice could have conducted us to exclude a significant category of disadvantaged young people from the sample, given the Italian context. In fact, among Italian young people, shifts from an occupational status to another (e.g. from temporary job to unemployment or to a job without a regular contract) are frequent and they shape vicious circles of cumulative disadvantages. Nevertheless, we were careful to include in the sample also young people unemployed for a relative long period at the time of interview.

We included a number of “**NEET**” defining them as people who do not look for a job and are not involved in training or education. This is often connected to relative long periods of pointless search of job and the so called “discouragement effect”. Given the high number of NEET in the Italian context, to study this phenomenon appears particularly relevant. However, to intercept NEET was not easy.

Concerning the “**specific risk groups**”, we consider as vulnerable groups: NEET and young belonging to ethnic minorities or immigrant groups. We decided to concentrate the recruitment of these categories in the two geographical context contemplated in the fieldwork, as explained below.

**Regarding the geographical context**, in Italy it is fundamental to consider the historically crucial North-South divide. For this reason, we identified two different cities, the first one in the North, Turin, and the second one, in the South, Catania. The differences between the two cities are high, but there are also interesting similarities (see Annex 2 for more detail): above all, the incidence of 18-30 years old people is very similar, as well as the percentage of married people. The share of young people with a



low level of education is an important difference between the two cities: it is higher in comparison to the national average in Catania, lower in Turin. In both cases the unemployment rate among youth is very high, but in Catania higher than the average national value, and the same happens in the case of NEET people. For this reason, we decided to adopt NEET as risk group in the case of Catania. Another significant difference is the percentage of migrant people, which in Catania is very low. Therefore, we decided to identify migrants as risk group only in the case of Turin.

From the point of view of policies, Turin and Catania show differences in terms of the implementation of EU policies. Catania is in the Region of Sicily, that, as being a „Special Status Region“ (*Regione a statuto speciale*), allows for a more independent regulation. Above all, in Sicily the labour policies show some difficulties in terms of implementation. On the contrary, Turin is in the Region of Piedmont, which is particularly virtuous in term of labour policies in respect to the other Italian Regions.

**Given these similarities and differences, by choosing Turin and Catania we meet our goal to consider the North-South divide especially for what concerns labour policies framing:** one is an example of „good institutional practices“ and the other is an example of weaker policies implementation, but they both show a weak participation of young people in the local labour market.

As indicated in D.3.1, occupational status, age and gender **are considered nested within each other**. We calculate the nested quotes for the two geographical context in order to have a more efficient control of the sample construction during the interviews implementation process (Tab. 2 and Tab. 3).

Table 2 *Sampling strategy and final sample - Turin*

Gender	15 women						15 men					
Age	9-10 (age 18-24)			5-6 (age 25-30)			9-10 (age 18-24)			5-6 (age 25-30)		
Occ. Status	3-5 temp.	2-4 unempl.	1 NEET	2-3 temp.	2-3 unempl.	1 NEET	3-5 temp.	2-4 unempl.	1 NEET	2-3 temp.	2-3 unempl.	1 NEET
Interviewees	4	4	1	5	4		4	2	1	4	2	
	18						13					
Education	Interviewees											
	12-14 ISCED 0-2						11					
	10-12 ISCED 3-4						15					
	6-8 ISCED 5-8						5					



In the grey cells, the number of interviews actually performed with people with the indicated characteristics.

The “success stories” are 4 youths with a secure job: 1 woman (age 25-30) and 3 men (1 man age 18-24; 2 men age 25-30).

Table 3 Sampling strategy and final sample – Catania (19 young people)

Gender	10 women						10 men					
	6-7 (age 18-24)			3-4 (age 25-30)			6-7 (age 18-24)			3-4 (age 25-30)		
Age	2-3 temp.	1-2 unempl.	1 NEET	2-3 temp.	1-2 unempl.	1 NEET	2-3 temp.	1-2 unempl.	1 NEET	2-3 temp.	1-2 unempl.	0 NEET
Interviewees	0	3	1	1	1	1	3	2	1	3	3	0
	7						12					
Education							Interviewees					
	12-14 ISCED 0-2						4					
	10-12 ISCED 3-4						10					
	6-8 ISCED 5-8						5					

The “success stories” are 2 youths with a secure job: 2 men (age 25-30).

Finally, concerning the specificities in the Italian sample, we have to underline the **difficulties to find youths who leaved the parental home**, in coherence with the national context. At the monthly check in April 2016, we had only three young people not living at the parental home: to overcome this bias, we paid particular attention to this aspect in the following recruitment process, reaching the number of 14 out 50 youths not living at parental home at the end of the fieldwork.

## 2.2 Interviews’ implementation process

The Italian qualitative fieldwork was conducted by three researchers of the Italian EXCEPT team: Valentina Moiso and Magda Bolzoni carried out the interviews in Turin, Rosy Musumeci in Catania. The three researchers hold PhDs respectively in Comparative Research for Social Sciences, Sociology and Political Science, and Sociology and Methods of Social Sciences. They are all experts in qualitative research and in conducting and analysing qualitative semi-structured interviews.



### 2.2.1 Recruitment process and channels

In both geographical contexts, the sample was built by adopting formal and informal recruitment channels, to diversify the entrance points and catch different profiles. Overall, 30 interviews were obtained through formal channels, while 20 through informal ones.

In the case of formal recruitment channels, relevant public offices, associations and training institutions were contacted in the two geographical contexts to explain the project and ask for their availability to identify potential interviewees and provide lists of contacts. The profile and relevant characteristics of the potential interviewees were described and it was asked to the institutions to contact them checking their availability to participate before transmitting their contacts to the EXCEPT team. In case of contacts obtained through formal channels, the potential interviewees received a presentation of the project with a formal request to participate (by telephone or email) and were only then contacted by the interviewers.

As mentioned, also informal channels were used: in this sense, contacts were informally suggested after explaining the project to people of the personal network of the EXCEPT team, colleagues or students. A snowball sampling strategy was then adopted.

In the case of Turin, 10 of the interviewees' contacts were obtained through informal channels while 21 through formal ones. More specifically, a fruitful relationship was developed with the Employment Office of the Metropolitan City of Turin, the Piedmont Region Labour Office (*Agenzia Piemonte Lavoro*), Piazza dei Mestieri, and ASAI association. Piazza dei Mestieri is a private not-for-profit foundation and association that deals with youth education and training and it has the aim to support job orientation and the inclusion of young generation into the job market, also through professional training. ASAI is a not-for-profit voluntary association established in Turin in 1995 offering cultural activities to children, teenagers and young adults and especially working on intercultural communication and social marginalities. The participation of representatives of local institutional offices to the EXCEPT Advisory Board facilitated the contacts, and so did the organization of a workshop held at the University of Turin at the end of January 2016 to present the project to the public, in which representatives of Piedmont Region Labour Office, Turin Metropolitan City, SocialFare, Cuneo Commerce Union were invited to discuss the key issues of the project. This event was also the chance to reinforce connections with relevant offices of the city of Turin.

In the case of Catania, 9 of the interviewees' were reached through formal channels, other 10 through informal ones. The Employment Office of the City played here a key role and it was the main formal channel adopted.



Table 4 Recruitment channels

	<b>Turin</b>	<b>Catania</b>	<b>Overall</b>
<b>Formal channel</b>	21 (68%)	9 (47%)	<b>30 (60%)</b>
<b>Informal channel</b>	10 (32%)	10 (53%)	<b>20 (40%)</b>
<b>Overall</b>	31 (100%)	19 (100%)	50 (100%)

As mentioned, in the case of formal channels, the perspective interviewees were firstly formally contacted by phone or email by the institutions or associations. After this first contact, the interview process developed similarly for interviews obtained through formal and informal recruitment channels. The interviewers contacted the potential interviewees by phone, explaining the research project and checking for their actual availability to take part to it. In some cases, more than one phone call was needed to reach the potential interviewee and to schedule the appointment. During these first contacts, a part from an overall description of the research project, the main topics of the interview were sketched and information about the duration of the interview and the handling of sensitive data were provided. Usually, between the first phone calls and the actual meeting for the interview, few other additional communications, mainly through text messages, took place between interviewer and the prospective interviewee, to further check their availability, and to remind the date and location of the appointment.

In the case of Turin, most of the interviews took place at the University Campus Luigi Einaudi, where the offices of the Italian EXCEPT team are based. Separate, private rooms were used to meet the interviewees. The interviewees were free to decide where the interview was going to take place and to propose a setting of their choice in case they were not comfortable to come to the University. Indeed, few interviews were carried out in parks, cafés or neighbourhood cultural centres, upon the interviewees' request. In the case of Catania, all the interviews obtained through formal channels were conducted in a dedicate room at the Employment Office. The location, together with the fact that the employees of the Employment Office had a first contact with the perspective interviewees, may had confused some interviewees, who thought that they were going to have a job interview. However, in these cases, the interviewer, when she met them in person, explained the situation better and checked again for their willingness to participate before going ahead with the interview. The interviews obtained through informal channels were collected in parks, at interviewees' houses or at the University.

At the beginning of each interview, the interviewers explained the aims of the research project and the rules of participating. They underlined the possibility to stop the interview at any time, they illustrated how the sensitive data would be handled and the





storage and use of the collected material. The informed consent form was explained and signed and then the recorded interview started.

### **2.2.2 Timing**

In both geographical contexts, institutions and associations have been involved in the recruitment process since September 2015. To assure the collaboration of the institutional offices and local associations in the construction of the sample, the EXCEPT team had several meetings with official representatives, in order to explain the research and the sampling strategy. Between others, the Italian EXCEPT team met local representatives of the Employment Offices of the Metropolitan City of Turin at the beginning of December 2015, the director and the staff of Piazza dei Mestieri in January 2016 and other representatives of the Metropolitan City of Turin and of the regional Labour Office in March 2016. With the same purpose, teleconference meetings were also held at distance with offices in Catania. As mentioned, the public meeting held in January 2016 at the University of Turin to present the research to the public saw the involvement of relevant offices of the city and the region of Turin and it was also an occasion to strengthen the relationships.

At the same time, informal recruitment channels have been pursued, both to expand the entrance points in building the sample, as mentioned above, and to support the interview process. Indeed, also because of bureaucratic constraints, lists of potential interviewees was transmitted by formal recruitment channels only in February 2016, and it seemed therefore relevant to start collecting interviews through informal ones. Pilot interviews were carried out in Turin in September 2015 thanks to contacts obtained through ASAI, while the 50 interviews of the sample were collected between December 2015 and September 2016. Most of the interviews were carried out during the first 6 months of 2016; however, few of them were postponed after the summer to meet the availability of the interviewees. To collect the interviews in Catania, three research trips were realized, in December 2015, April and June 2016.

### **2.2.3 Choices, challenges, difficulties.**

We have identified two main fields in which challenges emerged. The first one is the sample construction and the recruitment process, the second attains the conduction of the interview.

The recruitment process has been highly time-consuming, as contacts have been often complex to obtain and in some cases the initial willingness to take part to the project turn into unavailability and cancellation of the meetings even in the very day in which the interview was scheduled. Around fifteen young people who firstly agreed to the interview then withdrew their participation.

Moreover, despite differences between the two geographical contexts, we encountered difficulties in pursuing interviewees especially with some specific characteristics,



making it complex to respect the initial sampling strategy as mentioned above. Indeed, we noticed a certain difficulty in getting in contact and collecting interviews with those youth populations that, accordingly to their social background, might have been the most marginal ones. For example, out of the 7 people with a migrant/foreign origin that constitute the risk group investigated in Turin, only 2 of them were first generation migrants. Generally speaking, it seems that the recruitment channels that were activated hardly had contact with (or provided the contacts of) this specific segment and they rather shared references of youth with a migrant background but who spent most of their life in Italy, often speaking Italian with only a light or none foreign accent and presenting no visa-related issues.. The question is, of course, whether this happened by chance or whether the institutions and offices in charge to support the job inclusion of young generations miss to offer their services to such marginal populations. A similar issue comes up also with very low educated people, as low educated youth (especially male in Turin and female in Catania) have been an especially difficult target to reach. One of the reasons was that only few of the contacts obtained through formal and informal channels presented these characteristics. Moreover, in Turin many drop outs, namely perspective interviewees who had decided not to participate to the project in a moment between the first contact and the scheduled interview, were actually people with lower-secondary education only. In Catania, a target difficult to reach has been that of youth with fixed-term employment contracts, given the high unemployment rate and the large diffusion of non contractual jobs, while the majority of drop-outs were women with medium level of education.

Relevant issues also emerged in the conduction of the interviews. First of all, the interview outline was quite composite and covered different areas of the interviewees' life. As for any qualitative interview touching upon the interviewees' own life story and asking them to describe and reflect on it, it potentially involved sensitive issues and delicate moments. In order to develop it properly, and to support a positive experience of the interviewees, it felt relevant to give time and space to the interviewees to articulate the discourse and to elaborate their story and feelings in their own way. In this sense, the interviews were always approached as informal and open talks. At the beginning of the interview, the purpose of the research was explained as well as the rules for participating, and the interviewees were also informed that they were free to interrupt the interview at any time or to skip any questions they wouldn't feel like replying. The use of timelines was however very useful to introduce some reference points in the story, through time references and connections between the educational and working path.

All this considered, a fruitful development of the interview would require, between others, few elements that in some occasions we felt were missing: availability of time, an actual willingness to engage and the establishment of a interviewee-interviewer relationship positive enough for the interviewees to entrust the interviewers with their story. The second and latter elements, even if they are conceptually different, are not



so easy to distinguish in the actual experience. In some cases we recorded a certain elusive and evasive attitude, together with a scarce availability to elaborate the answers. Another element that somehow relates to the relationship that develops during the interview is that of social desirability, known as the (aware or unaware) tendency of interviewees to answer in a manner that would be viewed favourably, and, more generally, the often present tendency to project a desired/desirable image of themselves, or an image the interviewees feel they are expected to present. This would mean for example to stress some positive or negative elements and aspects of one's story, feelings or meanings (accordingly to the kind of narrative the interviewees intend to transmit), while hiding others. To unfold these issues, it is relevant to consider that an interview is always a social interaction and, as such, the personal characteristics of the interviewers may affect its development.

Finally, the issue of time was, of course, crucial. Scheduling the interview, the interviewees were informed that the interview would have lasted between 1 hour and 1 hour and a half and asked to choose the day of the meeting taking this element into account. However, some of them ended up having a different availability, or the interview itself was taking more than the expected time and there was the need to wrap it up more quickly than what would have been desirable. Therefore, in some few cases the conduction of the interview was affected by time constraints.

### 2.3 Specificities in the analysis

The specificities in the analysis for the Italian case concern the following aspects: an adjunctive topic in the interviews outline, five emerging codes in the codebook, the coding process through Atlas.Ti and the construction of inter-subjectivity among researchers involved in the analysis.

**Additional topic in the interview outline.** Unito team decided to include in the interview outline questions to investigate the spatial dimension, a relevant topic in the literature on social exclusion. The questions were not mandatory and had to be addressed only if there was clearly time enough. A first spatial focus was developed in relation to housing, inquiring where the interviewees were living, used to live, and/or wanted to live, while asking information about their accommodation situation. Another focus was added in the frame of lifestyle, in the final part of the interview, and it was aimed at understanding what urban areas the interviewees used or identified as relevant for their free time and practices of consumption.

**Emerging codes in the codebook.** Unito team decided to add few additional codes to label quotations about work, autonomy and past conditions in a more specific and purposeful way. The new codes are the following ones, with their sequential number in the codebook and their explanations:

#### 2. Work



## **2.1 Unemployment**

Use it to code references to unemployment experiences. Use it in association with H. Cross-thematic code: Past, to codify references to past unemployment experiences. When you use this code without also G. Cross-thematic code: Future or H. Cross-thematic code: Past it means that the reference is to the present.

## **4. Autonomy**

Use it to code references to autonomy (and/or lack of), especially in the three considered dimensions: housing autonomy, psychological autonomy, economic autonomy. Relevant issues may be: adulthood, transitions and turning points related to the three dimensions of autonomy, housing (past, present and future) and living conditions.

### **4.1 Housing autonomy**

Use it to code description of housing situation. This would also include expectations by relevant others, discussion with relevant others on this issue, comparison of own situations with situation or experiences of relevant others. Use it in association with the H. Cross-thematic code: Past to codify references to past housing situation. When you use this code without also G. Cross-thematic code: Future or H. Cross-thematic code: Past it means that the reference is to the present. To code perceptions, meanings, expectations, related to housing autonomy as concept/sphere of life, as well as references to cultural and social norms, judgments related to the individual's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with his/her housing situation use it in association with E. Cross-thematic code: Meanings and Judgements. To code desires and plans about housing autonomy use it in association with G. Cross-thematic code: Future.

### **4.2 Economic autonomy**

Use it to code experiences about salary and other resources other than salary. More specifically: to have (or not) sufficient income to the face the expenses in everyday life, amount and regularity of earnings; difficulties in making ends meet, deprivations, renunciations; worry about income insecurity; family inter-generational transfers (from and to), access to credit; going into debts; Investments, saving, insurance. To code perceptions, meanings, expectations about what is a "sufficient income", related to economic autonomy, as well as references to cultural and social norms, judgments related to the individual's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with his/her economic situation use it in association with E. Cross-thematic code: Meanings and Judgements. To code desires and plans about



economic autonomy use it in association with G. Cross-thematic code: Future.

#### 4.3 Psychological autonomy

Use it to code: the desire/the perceptions to self-organize experience and behaviour; the desire/the perceptions to have activity concordant with one's sense of self when his or her behaviour is experienced as willingly enacted and when he or she fully endorses; the extent to which one accepts, endorses, or stands behind one's actions; the desire/ the perception/the feeling of freedom to decide for themselves; the desire/ the perception/the feeling of act in accord with their authentic interests or integrated values and desires; the effective possibility to act in accord with their authentic interest, values and desires (also a consequence of the social and economic conditions and, in the transition to adulthood, this aspect is strictly related to the work conditions).

#### H. Cross-thematic code: Past

Use it to code wishes, expectations and/or concrete experiences about own past in regard with personal, family, educational and working life.

During the coding process, the researchers of the Unito team shared also a set of "memos" to highlight parts of interview that seemed to be of particular interest, in addition to existing codes.. A list of the most used memos is the following:

- **Self-representation:** interviewees' definitions of own skills, abilities and characteristics, including references to social expectations and normative perspectives.
- **Institutional context:** characteristics of the institutions with which the respondent was in contact.
- **Adulthood:** transition to adult life, both in terms of experiences as meaning (in this case use also the code *Meaning and Judgement*).

These decisions about codes and memos were taken thanks to the **construction of inter-subjectivity among researchers involved in the analysis, at inter and intra country level**. In particular, it was necessary to do in-depth interdisciplinary discussion in order to distinguish between "Protective factors" and "Coping strategies" in order to meet the psychological and sociological points of view: a meeting with AUTH team was fruitful to clarify it and to share the clarifications with all the partners, also during the Bamberg meeting. Regarding to the internal Unito team discussion, in June 2016 all the researches involved in qualitative analysis read the interview UNITO01 and coded it: a meeting to discuss the individual choices about coding was scheduled in June 10th, 2016, and further confrontations were carried out along the whole summer 2016.



**Coding process through Atlas.Ti.** The coding process was done using the software Atlas.Ti. This program allowed us a friendly-use of the codes and, above all, a friendly creation of emerging codes and memos, supporting the standardisation of the coding process, the sharing of the same codebook among the researchers involved, as well as to manage smoothly the process of extraction of quotations given specific criteria to be inserted in the synopses. 9 researchers of the Italian EXCEPT team in total were involved in the coding process. In June 2016 two researchers of Unito team (involved also in the coding process) held a meeting entirely devoted to the training of the groups of researchers about the use of Atlas.Ti. In addition to this, a researcher from Unito team was in charge to systematize all the information useful for the concrete coding process into guidelines then shared within the team, to prepare the material for each researcher involved in the coding process and to merge all the material after the individual coding; she was available during the entire process for individual advices in case of specific needs.



## 3 Results of thematic analysis of the interviews

### 3.1 Educational and working trajectories

#### 3.1.1 Brief overview of the Italian sample

The empirical material used in this report is made up of 50 interviews conducted in December 2015-September 2016 with the same number of young people, aged 18-30. The interviews were carried out in two different geographical contexts: 31 participants out of the total sample (N=50) were living in the city of Turin (in Northern Italy) at the time of the interviews and 19 in Catania (in Southern Italy). The overall sample is well balanced in terms of gender, with exactly 25 young men and 25 young women interviewed, and also in terms of involvement in targeted policies: more than the half of interviewees (27) is (or has been) involved in some measures aimed at avoiding the risk of social exclusion and 23 participants have not participated in any such measures. With respect to the age group, 25 interviewees out of the total sample were aged 18-24 years at the time of the interview, while the other 25 were aged 25-30. Regarding their educational level, most of the boys and girls interviewed (26 out of 50) had a secondary level of education (ISCED 3 in all the cases except for one, who had a level of education classified in ISCED 4), and the rest had a tertiary education (university degree, ISCED 5-6) (12) or a low educational level (ISCED 0-2) (12). Regarding their occupational status, 17 were temporary workers at the time of the interview (people employed with fixed-term contracts and atypical contracts, e.g. temporary agency work, seasonal work, jobs on call, and so on), 21 were unemployed or working without a regular employment contract (non-contractual/undeclared workers), 6 were NEET young people, and another 6 were permanent workers (success stories). Regarding the interviewees' housing situation, 36 interviewees live in the parental home, while 14 live in a separate household alone, with flatmates or their partner. 7 young people belong to ethnic minorities or immigrant groups (for details on the National sampling strategy, Interview implementation process and Specificities in the analysis see the UNITO team – Italian methodological report in D3.3 *A methodological report*).

#### 3.1.2 Interviewees' educational and working trajectories

This paragraph shortly summarizes the main characteristics of the interviewees' educational and working paths. In reconstructing and describing these paths, we considered them as sequences highlighting the main turning points. In particular, to reconstruct the interviewees' educational and working paths retrospectively, we looked at some aspects and characteristics of both as they emerged through the interviews indicated in the Annex 4.





As seen in the previous Brief overview, the larger part in the overall sample (26 out of 50) is composed of boys and girls who had a secondary level of education; the rest of the interviewees had (in equal share: about 1/4) a tertiary education or a low educational level<sup>1</sup>. Among the group of young people who have a tertiary education, the most common courses of study were in humanities which have less chance of employability in the Italian labour market with respect to courses of study in the so-called “strong” disciplines (for example, engineering or informatics) according to the Italian literature (Franchi, 2005). These degrees are poorly professionalizing in the sense that they do not clearly and immediately give the individual “neat” professions. Only a few interviewees earned a “strong” university degree, for example, in the cases of Gianpiero (28, M, PE) and Costantino (29, M, PE) in Catania, and Veronica (27, F, U) in Turin, who respectively graduated in Engineering, Informatics, and Molecular Biotechnology. Most of the interviewees had attended one or more training courses and internships in their life after or during upper secondary school or university, and in some cases these experiences reached a consistent number. These training experiences concern a wide range of areas spanning from courses aimed at improving linguistic and computer skills to more specialized courses in many areas/fields (fashion, hospitality, tourism, and so on).

Many interviewees do not have “linear” educational paths: their school-careers are fragmented and characterized by interruptions and/or changes in the courses of study that they were enrolled in. Among the causes behind these interruptions and changes that the interviewees referred, the lack of effective orientation to the choice of the “right” course of study in the crucial phase of the passage between lower secondary school and upper secondary school and from this last to university is recurrent in some interviews. But according to previous studies, there are also motivations linked to a kind of “double uncertainty”, “internal” and “external” to the individual: on one hand, there is the great difficulty in understanding both personal attitudes and desires (“what one wants to study, who wants to become in life”) and the inability to recognize their own capacities (what one is good at); on the other hand, there is a great difficulty in understanding the concrete occupational opportunities linked to their hard-earned educational choices (especially when the course of study is poorly professionalizing) which means for the individual to have the capacity to clearly understand what the characteristics of the labour market are and its requests in terms of professional figures (Cavalli, 1996).

For example, Mara (29, F, U) has changed her mind a number of times and now she is 29 years old and she is unemployed, although she worked as shop assistant and in the post office, with temporary or informal jobs. She finished high school as a tourist operator. At the end of her second year of high school she considered changing and

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<sup>1</sup>For the definition of the levels of education, see the previous paragraph “Brief overview of the sample”.



enrolling at a socio-psycho-pedagogic high school, but she realized she wouldn't be able to study all the different subjects in one summer. Right after finishing high school, she enrolled at university (in 2005). She took the access test for the course in Professional Educator and the one in Educational Science, but she didn't pass them, therefore she enrolled in the BA program of Social Services. After two years of university (2007), she started to work with a temporary but full-time job at the Post Office. She kept studying but she slowed down a lot and she realized she would prefer to keep working. Therefore, in 2010 she quit university, when she still needed to do 10 exams and a thesis. She now thinks it might be useful to finish university, but she doesn't have the mind-set to do so. To justify herself, she also says that, basically it's not worth it, because a degree doesn't assure you of any improvement in the job market.

The individuals are required to have not only the capacity to understand the characteristics of the labour market and its requests when they choose their educational/training paths but also to have the capacity to foresee how a firm's requests change over time till the end of their studies: in a flexible labour market where changes happen rapidly, it is possible that a certain degree (which seemed like a good choice at the beginning) could be "outdated" or result "anachronistic" in the very moment one has obtained it.

In addition to this, the Italian labour market appears as an opaque entity. Many seem to ignore the real characteristics of the labour market and ignore the existence of occupational opportunities in the public sector, taking for granted and looking for opportunities mainly (when not exclusively) in the private sector; even in Catania, a Southern Italian city where the "myth" of the public employment is considered to be the "stronghold" of a stable and guaranteed job was traditionally strong.

So faced with this uncertainty the educational choices of some interviewees appear crushed at the present. In fact, a reason behind the choice of some interviewees to change their course of study or to quit it or to stop with a low or medium level of education is linked to the belief that the choice to not continue to invest in education could allow them to find a job in shorter time and, in the end, that education, and in particular a high level of education, is not much appreciated in the Italian labour market (and thus the underlying idea that studying is a waste of time). For example, Mara declared that a degree doesn't assure any improvement in the labour market, to justify herself for having quit university:

*"So I... decided to drop out. That at the moment it might be... to start again might be the most appropriate thing to do, but, at 30 years of age I don't have any desire to... [...] and then, I mean, I don't have the mind-set, to set myself to studying again, and then if you think about it, after all, a degree is not all that, it's not that it gets you that much*



*further than a high-school diploma, at the moment. Because there are even people who have degrees... who work in the cleaning services". (F, 29, U)*

In addition to this, in other cases, the reasons for changing courses of study or interrupting them appear to vary according to the level of education: in the cases of university courses, the reason to quit or change is often to discover that they are not really interested in the course previously chosen, and in the case of high school, the choice of not going to school anymore or to change a course of study was also motivated in the interviewees by the fact that (like in Elena's or Aurelio's cases) they were not comfortable with their classes.

With respect to the working trajectories of our 50 interviewees, as seen in the previous paragraph 1, regarding the occupational status, about half of the interviewees had a job at the time of the interviews: 17 were working with a temporary contract, 6 (those we have defined as the success stories) had an open-ended employment contract; a small group worked without a regular employment contract. Among this group of workers, most were employed in the service sector and often with low and sometimes medium qualified jobs (computer consultant, call centre operator, waiter, animator, saleswoman, salesman, and so on). In only a very few cases, the content of the job was highly qualified (such as in the case of Gianpiero, who works with an open-ended labour contract as an engineer). Then, many interviewees had labour contracts that should not bind them to work a precise number of working hours but to reach a goal (for example co.co.co. or co.pro project). Despite this, in many cases the interviewees worked full time. Only a small group of young people worked part-time; some did this formally, having a part-time labour contract but then concretely put in more hours than the hours on their employment contract. In most cases, the net income earned was low with respect to the Italian average. With regard to human capital resources, the qualifications obtained by the respondents were often incongruent with respect to their current profession.

But if these are the main characteristics of the current job of the interviewees who were employed at the time of the interviews, what can we say about the configuration of the overall previous working trajectories of all the 50 young interviewees (that is, of both those interviewees that were employed at the time of the interviews and of those who had no work at that time)?

First of all we can say that a common aspect of many interviewees' working paths is their "non-linearity" compared to the "typical" working career of the past decades: in their lifetime, many interviewees, some even if very young, have experienced all the occupational conditions (employed, unemployed, inactive) passing from one to another and often experiencing "grey" areas, or "intermediate" occupational conditions where the boundaries between the occupational categories (working and not working, studying and working) are far from being clearly distinct and separate. This reflects the



segmentation of the Italian labour market (see paragraph 1). Some respondents are at the beginning of their employment career; others have already far exceeded the stage of first entry in the world of work and several have mature careers (sometimes for more than decade). In some cases, their current job is practically the only one they've had, since their previous jobs had been one or two at most, of very short duration, and quite random. Only a few interviewees have *upward career paths*. In this group we find interviewees who have succeeded in obtaining an open-ended labour of contract mainly passing from job to job in the labour market and evolving over time from a situation of instability to one of stability, more rarely through an internal career in the same company (as in Gianpiero's case). All but one are men and often (though not always) have clear interests and a linear and good educational path and high level of education. But can these young interviewees be considered as outside the precarity trap and/or really be successful cases? In some cases it seems not; for example, Aurelio (28, M, PE) does not feel secure about his job despite the open-ended contract because, he declares, the new Italian law (Jobs Act) does not protect the worker from the risk of being fired, especially after three years of work. So he does not perceive this present job as permanent even though he continues to work hard at the current company and trusts his employers. Or Dario (29, M, PE) who "pays" the price of the privilege of having an open-ended labour contract with some extra hours "under the table", concretely doing more hours than the hours he should do according his part-time employment contract. In most of the other cases, the interviewees have, in the better cases, *stable career paths*, not changing very much over the years as to both the level and type of educational and working experiences and occupational conditions, *downward career path* worsened by these things or, finally, *circular paths*. In this last group of interviewees, we find young boys and girls with very different educational and working paths. They appear to be individuals at risk of being trapped in precarity since the disorder that characterized the educational and working paths of these young people does not allow them to accumulate (on the contrary, this results in a waste of) competences and knowledges that could improve their employability over time. The working trajectories of our interviewees reflect important territorial and educational differences: in fact, it is among the interviewees in Catania in southern Italy and the low-educated (even if is very much widespread among young people with higher level of education) that this type of working path prevails.

In conclusion, as previous studies have already pointed out, once again we find that in Italy it is very important for a young person to have a very coherent idea of what they want to do. In particular, it is crucial to develop a subsequent educational and working path. However, this attitude does not assure the success of these paths: it is a necessary but insufficient condition, because in some cases, the context is so difficult that simply having a clear idea is not enough. Sometimes being oriented it is not enough. For example, Franco is very proactive, and he had chosen a kind of work very linked to his degree, but after his internship he is currently working without contract, even though his employer had promised him a very good future. Franco has good



ability at making his entry into the labour market pertinent (current job) in connection to his thesis on edible products in the Catania area:

*“Well, besides the idea of graphic design, and (...) it is inherent, because just as I have done in my thesis, it deals with valorising the area through the promotion of local products, and food and wine tourism. And indeed here \*\*\* (name of the startup where he is employed) for example, we deal with promoting and selling typical local products and therefore products that represent the territory. Such as pistachios from Bronte.*

*The internship ended, then after the internship had been over for a few months, I also graduated, and then, however, in agreement with the owner of \*\*\*, I offered my availability, my willingness to continue this project and earn a little something and (...), perhaps with the idea of (...) of helping this startup to catch on and maybe, when things get better, when it gets better for the start-up, it will also get better for me.” (29, M, U – non contractual job)*

### 3.1.3 Meanings of work

#### Meaning of work and precarity

Not surprisingly, a number of concepts and themes have emerged as revolving around the field of work. From the interviews, we can identify at least the following ones: work as a means towards autonomy and independency, often strictly related to an economic dimension; work as a means for personal (psychological, cultural, social) improvement, development, awareness, growth, and self-realization; work as a duty, slavery, obligation; work as a social contribution; work as an activity that gives a structure and a meaning to their everyday life. Generally speaking, therefore, we may find an instrumental as well as an expressive orientation. Moreover, work is a condition that appears connected to adulthood and to the full transition to it. Of course, in many cases more than one meaning is assigned to work by the same interviewee and different dimensions appear to be overlapping.

For the majority of the young people interviewed, work means autonomy, possibility for living her/his own life. This emerges equally between men and women.

The idea of a permanent job is still very persistent in the young Italian generation, even though the labour market is very changed. In addition, as in the previous generation, the idea that you can plan your life only if you have a permanent contract is still present. Young people see their future as very traditional, for example, having a child only when they have permanent contract: Giulia (26, F, PE) now that she has an open-ended contract, within the next five years she wants to have her first child, buy a car, and then a house.



At the same time, compared to previous research, the permanent job is so far-fetched that young people seem to just look for a job, feeling that it is better that to be unemployed, and permanent work is seen as a *mirage*.

Young people also consider it to be important to find a harmony between earning their income and leisure time:

*“Now that I’m working, I have a kind of balance in my life. I have money to spend because I have a job. And I have free time to spend it because it is no good working all the time and putting money aside without having any chance to spend it. And then find your own equilibrium, that now with the work I’m doing, I saw that I would have anyway, well rightly, money because it is a job, and I would have a bit of time because, rightly so, if you work forever, so you have, all this money aside but then you can enjoy it... because it is only a job, but you should not live just to work, I also have my personal life: we have to work to live but there is more in life than just work.”* (Giulia, 26, F, PE)

Young people with a higher level of education look more for their ideal job, and they invest more in the expressive part of job, even if in Italy they experiment high level of uncertainty like the lower educated young people. For example, for Franco doing the job he likes (and not just any job) is important for his own well-being:

*“So I think for work, it is important to find a job you like, where you can... which allows you to, that is, where you are able to express what you want to do, what you can do. So, in summary, I think work is something that allows you to live, but that allows you to live well, live well not only economically, but also to feel good about yourself.”* (Franco, 29, M, U – non contractual job)

*“To me, work means (...) having something to do, having both a purpose and objectives (...) managing to make a contribution and being able to create something, so it's not just doing something for remuneration, to live, but also doing something in the hope that it is useful, or in any case, something you like doing, which is part of your life.”*(Costantino, 26, M, PE).

According to some of the interviews, the relational dimension in their work is very important. When asked about his ideal job, Carlo replies, *“something creative”* referring to his vocation for drawing, but then points out that he likes the idea of working in a social cooperative, *“an affective good”* is one of the expressions he used to indicate the cooperative he currently works for.





### Subjective perception of job insecurity

In some cases, young people are able to use precarity as a period of experimentation or to earn money for having time to attend courses. They use multiple strategies, doing a low profile job for having money to specialize themselves. These people have proactive behaviour, rather than passive/reactive behaviour. They are oriented toward one specific profession. This is the case of Giulia who has a degree in nursing and, after doing odd jobs and simultaneously attending a course, now works as a receptionist in a health clinic; she started this job about two weeks after the interview. She obtained an open-ended contract and the promise of becoming a dental assistant. She finds this job very satisfactory because of the type of contract and working hours.

For some, to enter a flexible labour market means changing many jobs, not coherent with their low profile, and in the end, with risks of depression.

Regarding the issue of job insecurity, Carlo flaunts his tranquillity, his peace of mind in thinking that he will nonetheless find job opportunities, but at a certain point in the interview he expressed some concern:

*“I’ve reached my last renewal with the cooperative, either it will trigger being hired or they might not renew (my contract) ... Even if they don’t renew it, I think I’ll find something else... When they call me from the restaurant, for example, I work for vouchers.*

*(Later, while talking about the future) obviously, I’d rather have some tranquillity... a regular salary etc. It doesn’t make you feel very good when you start thinking ‘shit, as of next month, I might not have a job any longer, that is to say, the cooperative could be shut down”* (Carlo, 25, M, TE)

Precarity for some also means trying to work a lot to be hired. In the case of Carlo, willingness to work many more hours in hopes of being hired: a strategy, however, that has not brought about the desired results:

*“I was just a trainee and I was putting in maybe twice as many hours, all for the cause of aiming at being hired, without receiving any extra money”* (Carlo, 25, M, TE).

For young people, the meaning of work can also be connected to elements related to self-fulfillment, and often the desire to enter the labour market is linked to wanting to gain experience, whatever the contractual conditions may be.





*“For me, work is experience, it is not only for earning. So much so that I NEVER ask what they'll pay me, I have not yet learned to ask that.”* (Anna, F, 27, TE)

For some young people offering unpaid additional hours or accepting very unfavourable initial conditions from an economic viewpoint is a strategy to get a better remunerated and/or more stable contract: *“I was just a trainee and I was putting in maybe twice as many hours, all for the cause of aiming at being hired, without receiving any extra money”* (Carlo, M, 26, TE).

In these cases, their expectations almost always meet with disappointment, their contract does not improve or never appears, and their extra work only went to benefit their employer: at this point, the respondents withdraw their availability, perhaps even resign, and in some cases, for example, those of Carlo and Elena, also consult the unions. These are young people for whom work is a source of self-realization, some also perform a creative or socially useful job, whose meaning is not pervasive, as in the case of Anna, reported previously: work must nevertheless first of all provide economic autonomy, that is to say, it must be remunerated properly: *“I'm fed up with working for free!”* (Margherita, F, 24, U).

*“What does work mean to me? First of all, respect, being thankful for the job you have, I mean work is work, everyone has to start at the bottom, that's perfectly fine, but always with respect, and you can't be underpaid up to a certain point”* (Elena, F, 28, U).

### **3.1.4 Coping with job insecurity**

The Italian young people involved in the EXCEPT project coping with job insecurity in different ways. Regarding the problem focused coping strategies, more or less a third of the young people involved in this research consider the strategy of training. This kind of coping strategy is not used only by people with high educational attainment but also by people who want to improve their professional skills in some more practical professions. This is the main strategy used by youth, not with the aim of immediately resolving their problem of unemployment but with the aim of improving their employability. In a couple of cases, young people have returned to the educational system to conclude their studies and receive a diploma. In other cases, young people seem to have found a job related to a specific vocational course attained and this is the most immediate positive effect of the training choice. In order to improve employability, in two cases the young people have also obtained their professional qualification (after graduation).

Training experience abroad (Erasmus or similar), considered as a way to enrich their experience and their curriculum vitae, is taken into account only by the most educated



interviewees. Always in order to enhance their employability, during their educational path, a lot of people interviewed carried out odd jobs to improve their experience and not just to have money for small expenses. Having previous work experiences is considered to be a protective factor.

Concerning the direct strategies to cope with unemployment, most of the young people interviewed considered the use of Internet (specific websites such as Subito.it, or other information resources) as a way of finding job offers. Except for less relevant work (temporary and low-prestige jobs), this type of coping does not seem to have any particular return, like sending out curriculum vitae without any particular strategy. The lack of return of this kind of coping generates particular discomfort because it increases the feelings of impotence, expands the sense of perceived injustice, and cancels the hope of getting out of unemployment.

Associated with this experience, some respondents show that in Italy the most effective coping strategy is to have recommendations: knowing important people who may find them a job. This aspect is sometimes considered only a “simple fact”, sometimes young people denounce a kind of malpractice that seems not to have been reduced by the new job search strategies.

The coping strategies used by people also seem to depend on the young people's attitude toward precarity, that is, not merely associated to the main personal characteristics of the people but which also, in turn, depend on the experiences lived regarding their job search and on the protective relational factors. Simplifying, it seems that the people who are the most depressed or frightened by insecurity, have less targeted and less clear job search strategies. They (mainly people with a low educational level) send out their curriculum vitae without having any specific goal, thus resulting in a discontinuous working path made up of little work experiences that are not consistent with one another.

People with a high level of education, even if in some cases they are worried about job loss and job search, pay more attention to finding a job coherent with their education and have a clearer strategy and more motivation to have a job consistent with their interests. Regarding their attitude toward job insecurity, although some young people are really anxious or depressed, some (at least five people) are not afraid of the insecurity, and they maintain adequate levels of energy and optimism; a few consider as positive the (job's) possibility of reducing boredom and having an active life (especially people with high educational attainment).

In some cases, informal work is considered as a coping strategy to overcome economic problems linked to unemployment, but it is also considered as a strategy to enrich the professional skills associated to a desired job. This strategy has important emotional consequences: when a job is consistent with their interest, it enhances their well-being perceived in relation to work, but this may have a negative effect in the future, with respect to middle and long term economic consequences; when a job is not



consistent with one's interest, there are short and middle term negative consequences like malaise associated with a strong sense of injustice. In some cases, the attitude also emerges (directly or indirectly) towards intensification of work during informal or temporary contracts with the aim of having more chance of obtaining a formal contract or a renewal contract. There are two sides to this aspect because it doesn't guarantee the continuity of the job and it may have negative consequences on their well-being (and, consequently, on their performance). As some respondents declare, this can also feed a culture of the youth labour exploitation (see also Meaning of work).

In the young people's direct narratives, the absence of any references to the employment agencies, very present in Italy, is surprising.

The interviews show that a necessary precondition to put into place effective coping strategies is the knowledge of what people want to "become", in terms of interests to be realized and the available resources.

In some cases (five interviews), entrepreneurship is considered as a possible solution to overcome job insecurity but only one of the interviewees is actually self-employed and, for the others that consider this possibility, no specific project emerges but only the idea that this may be a solution, even if a very complex one.

Another coping strategy considered is volunteer work (only by 3 people): this strategy aims to cope with the absence of a job in which it is possible to identify themselves (or because of unemployment or because the job is not coherent with their personal interest). Volunteer activities also have the positive consequences of improving some skills and enriching their network of relationships.

Only a few respondents refer to the possibility of going to work abroad but no-one has a concrete plan to do so. Less frequent is also the use of multiple jobs at once, to deal with the situation of economic uncertainty

The psychological characteristics associated with the more effective coping pathways are related to: awareness of interests and resources, self-confidence and assertiveness, determination, networking ability, adaptability and flexibility, attitude toward planning, and use of irony.

At the meso-level, the coping strategy considered the most effective in job search processes is that of *word of mouth* and the use of interpersonal relationships: in the words of one interviewee, friends are their *favourite employment agency*. Furthermore, in all cases where this is possible, the family support (emotional as well as financial) is used as an intermediate tool to proceed with their training or to accept jobs that are precarious but consistent with their training even if poorly paid, in order to build a more uniform career path and a more solid development of skills and abilities. In a few cases, the use of social support from family is conceived in a more passive way, as a total delegation to the family of the decision-making processes related to education and employment (renunciation of decision-making autonomy; see psychological autonomy).



At the macro-level, as better illustrated in another section of the report, coping with job insecurity by using policies is very poorly considered by youth who don't evaluate their utility positively and don't see the advantages deriving from them. Only in a few cases Youth Guarantee was a concrete opportunity to have a job. In other cases, the expectation to learn strategies to better contact possible employers was disappointed.

The case of the “private social groups” or vocational training institutions is different, but they are placed precisely alongside training and seem viable for building bridges between the development of applicable knowledge and its actual application in work contexts.

Italian young people refer not only to positive coping strategies but also to emotion focused or avoidance coping strategies. In several interviews, the theme of the “denial of the problem” emerges with different variations. The most *positive* variation is typical of people who have a job (temporary or permanent but in a context of a critical market) and who where focused on their current job, trying to limit their negative thoughts about the future but at the same time working effectively to gain experience and skills useful for their future job search. Another variation is when unemployed people, while actively seeking a job, use a relaxation processes to overcome concerns, or “normalize” their thoughts, considering unemployment as a widespread condition. The most negative variation is typical of unemployed people with a low educational level that have few work experiences and little family support: in these cases, denial is the renunciation of searching for a possible solution, it is loneliness and abdication of the future, it is, in its extreme form, the denial of themselves in a depressive state, their failure in coping with precariousness.

At least, it's surprisingly that two young people, in an almost playful way, talk about the hope of not returning “*to the Middle Ages when they chose for you as a partner someone who had money*”. This “coping strategy” is only mentioned jokingly but we all know that wit may hide a true thought or fear about the future.

### 3.1.5 Conclusion

Many interviewees do not have “linear” educational paths: their school-careers are fragmented and characterized by interruptions and/or changes in the courses of study that they were enrolled in. Among the causes behind these interruptions and changes that the interviewees referred, the lack of effective orientation to the choice of the “right” course of study in the crucial phase of the passage between lower secondary school and upper secondary school and from this last to university is recurrent in some interviews. There are also motivations linked to a kind of “double uncertainty”, “internal” and “external” to the individual: on one hand, there is the great difficulty in understanding both personal attitudes and desires (“what one wants to study, who wants to become in life”) and the inability to recognize their own capacities (“what one is good at”). On the other hand, there is a great difficulty in understanding the concrete



occupational opportunities linked to their hard-earned educational choices (especially when the course of study is poorly professionalizing) which means for the individual to have the capacity to clearly understand what the characteristics of the labour market and its requests in terms of professional figures are.

With respect to the working trajectories of 50 Italian interviewees, a common aspect of many youth' working paths is the "non-linearity": in their lifetime, many interviewees, some even if very young, have experienced all the occupational conditions (employed, unemployed, inactive) passing from one to another and often experiencing "grey areas", or "intermediate" occupational conditions where the boundaries between the occupational categories (working and not working, studying and working) are far from being clearly distinct and separate. Only a few interviewees have *upward career paths*. In this group we find interviewees who have succeeded in obtaining an open-ended labour of contract mainly passing from job to job in the labour market and evolving over time from a situation of instability to one of stability, more rarely through an internal career in the same company. All but one are men and often (though not always) have clear interests and a linear and good educational path and high level of education. In most of the other cases, the interviewees have: *stable career paths*, not changing very much over the years as both the level and type of educational and working experiences and occupational conditions; *downward career path* worsened by these things or, finally, *circular paths*. In this last group of interviewees, we find young boys and girls with very different educational and working paths. They appear to be individuals at risk of being trapped in precarity since the disorder that characterized the educational and working careers of these young people does not allow them to accumulate (on the contrary, this results in a waste of) competences and knowledges that could improve their employability over time. The working trajectories of our interviewees reflect important territorial and educational differences: in fact, it is among the interviewees in Catania in Southern Italy and the low-educated (even if is very much widespread among young people with higher level of education) that this type of working path prevails.

As previous studies have already pointed out, once again we find that in Italy it is very important for a young person to have a coherent idea of what they want to do. In particular, it is crucial to develop a subsequent educational and working path. However, this attitude does not assure the success in term of labour market: it is a necessary but insufficient condition, because in some cases, the context is so difficult that simply having a clear idea and being oriented is not enough.

For the majority of the Italian young people interviewed, work means autonomy, possibility for living her/his own life. The idea of a permanent job is still very persistent in the young Italian interviewees, even though the labour market is really changed. In addition, as in the previous generation, the idea that you can plan your life only if you have a permanent contract is still present. At the same time, compared to previous research, the permanent job is so far-fetched that young people seem to just look for a



job, feeling that it is better that to be unemployed, and permanent work is seen as a *mirage*.

The Italian young people involved in the EXCEPT project coping with job insecurity in different ways. More or less a third of the young people involved in this research consider the strategy of training. This kind of coping strategy is not used only by people with high educational attainment but also by people who want to improve their professional skills in some more practical professions. This is the main strategy used by youth, not with the aim of immediately resolving their problem of unemployment but with the aim of improving their employability. Training experience abroad (Erasmus or similar), considered as a way to enrich their experience and their curriculum vitae, is taken into account only by the most educated interviewees.

Always in order to enhance their employability, during their educational path, a lot of people interviewed carried out odd jobs to improve their experience and not just to have money for small expenses. Having previous work experiences is considered to be a protective factor.

Concerning the strategies to cope with unemployment, most of the young people interviewed considered the use of Internet as a way of finding job offers. Except for less relevant work (temporary and low-prestige jobs), this type of coping does not seem to have any particular return, like sending out curriculum vitae without any particular strategy. The lack of return of this kind of coping generates particular discomfort because it increases the feelings of impotence, expands the sense of perceived injustice, and cancels the hope of getting out of unemployment.

Associated with this experience, some respondents show that in Italy the most effective coping strategy is to have recommendations: knowing important people who may find them a job. This aspect is sometimes considered only a “simple fact”, sometimes young people denounce a kind of malpractice that seems not to have been reduced by the new job search strategies.

In some cases, informal work is considered as a coping strategy to overcome economic problems linked to unemployment, but it is also considered as a strategy to enrich the professional skills associated to a desired job. This strategy has important emotional consequences: when a job is consistent with their interest, it enhances their well-being perceived in relation to work, but this may have a negative effect in the future, with respect to middle and long term economic consequences; when a job is not consistent with one's interest, there are short and middle term negative consequences like malaise associated with a strong sense of injustice. In some cases, the attitude also emerges (directly or indirectly) towards intensification of work during informal or temporary contracts with the aim of having more chance of obtaining a formal contract or a renewal contract. There are two sides to this aspect because it doesn't guarantee the continuity of the job and it may have negative consequences on their well-being





(and, consequently, on their performance). As some respondents declare, this can also feed a culture of the youth labour exploitation.

In the young people's direct narratives, the absence of any references to the employment agencies, present in Italy, is surprising.

In some cases (five interviews), entrepreneurship is considered as a possible solution to overcome job insecurity but only one of the interviewees is actually self-employed and, for the others that consider this possibility, no specific project emerges but only the idea that this may be a solution, even if a very complex one.

Another coping strategy considered is volunteer work (only by 3 people): this strategy aims to cope with the absence of a job in which it is possible to identify themselves (or because of unemployment or because the job is not coherent with their personal interest). Volunteer activities also have the positive consequences of improving some skills and enriching their network of relationships.

Less frequent is also the use of multiple jobs at once, to deal with the situation of economic uncertainty.

The psychological characteristics associated with the more effective coping pathways are related to: awareness of interests and resources, self-confidence and assertiveness, determination, networking ability, adaptability and flexibility, attitude toward planning, and use of irony.

At the meso-level, in all cases where this is possible, the family support (emotional as well as financial) is used as an intermediate tool to proceed with their training or to accept jobs that are precarious but consistent with their training even if poorly paid, in order to build a more uniform career path and a more solid development of skills and abilities. In a few cases, the use of social support from family is conceived in a more passive way, as a total delegation to the family of the decision-making processes related to education and employment (renunciation of decision-making autonomy).

At the macro-level, coping with job insecurity by using policies is very poorly considered by youth who don't evaluate their utility positively and don't see the advantages deriving from them. Only in a few cases Youth Guarantee was a concrete opportunity to have a job. In other cases, the expectation to learn strategies to better contact possible employers was disappointed.

Italian young people refer not only to positive coping strategies but also to emotion focused or avoidance coping strategies. In several interviews, the theme of the "denial of the problem" emerges with different variations. The most *positive* variation is typical of people who have a job (temporary or permanent but in a context of a critical market) and who where focused on their current job, trying to limit their negative thoughts about the future but at the same time working effectively to gain experience and skills useful for their future job search. Another variation is when unemployed people, while actively seeking a job, use a relaxation processes to overcome concerns, or "normalize" their





thoughts, considering unemployment as a widespread condition. The most negative variation is typical of unemployed people with a low educational level that have few work experiences and little family support: in these cases, denial is the renunciation of searching for a possible solution, it is loneliness and abdication of the future, it is, in its extreme form, the denial of themselves in a depressive state, their failure in coping with precariousness.

At least, it's surprisingly that two young people, in an almost playful way, talk about the hope of not returning "*to the Middle Ages when they chose for you as a partner someone who had money*". This "coping strategy" is only mentioned jokingly in one case (but we all know that wit may hide a true thought or fear about the future) and in another one instead is a real strategy to cope with the negative consequences of job insecurity.

## 3.2 Job insecurity and autonomy

### 3.2.1 Introduction

In this report we try to answer to one of the main questions of the EXCEPT project by looking at the interrelation among subjective/objective job insecurity and housing, economic and psychological autonomy of young people. This raises a question of how the labour market careers of young people and, in particular, the experiences of unemployment or unstable and insecure employment, affect their transition toward adulthood and the process to gain autonomy, not only the housing autonomy, but also economic and psychological autonomy. In fact, we have to take into account that today the transition to adult life is a multifaceted process, in relation to the complexity of the labour market that young people face, and overall we need to enrich our tools for analysis to better understand this process.

In this part of the report we have data that is more focused on subjective job insecurity. The *subjective perception of work uncertainty* is very important, perhaps more than an objective perspective, in defining opportunities and constraints within which individuals make their work and family decisions. Through the interviews, we can reconstruct how people feel about their position in the labour market, if they feel secure about keeping their job position; about finding another job if they lose theirs or when the contract will finish; and about the full continuity of income even if they are precarious, and how all these aspects affect their decisions on autonomy.

Then, we briefly introduce the theoretical shared definitions on autonomy, referring to its various facets. The notion of youth autonomy refers to a multifaceted construct. It involves steps towards crossing vis-à-vis the independence regarding the family, the ability to create one's own universe, to govern one's own life through relevant choices. The different definitions of autonomy have accumulated over time without having been replaced (Cicchelli 2013; Baranowska *et al.* 2015). Therefore, they cover many aspects



of young people's lives, making autonomy a central issue for young people and their transition to adult life.

These definitions have oriented the construction of data collection tools and are the conceptual guide to reading the research results.

Housing autonomy can be considered a particularly important event because, among other things, it explicitly marks the achievement of individual independence and the assumption of roles of responsibility. Living independently is considered a step towards adulthood that is related to taking fuller responsibility for actions and being able to create an identity, independently from that of the parents (Nilsson and Strandh 1999). Leaving the parental home is also a transition that makes other key transitions to adulthood possible. For many young people, leaving home is seen, for instance, as a precondition for getting married and having children.

Powerful meanings and expectations are associated with leaving the parental home: it signifies freedom and privacy (Rusconi 2006) and is the beginning of the process of forming an independent household, which is the focal point for several developmental progresses (Bendit 1999).

In the EXCEPT project, we are interested in the relation between labour market attachment and housing autonomy, and in general, in the condition and mechanisms that allow young people to leave the parental home or make the decision to live at home longer. In fact, job insecurity quite often has an impact on life courses. Evidence from recent research has shown that job insecurity puts off decisions regarding a transition to adult life such as leaving the parental home (Blossfeld et al, 2005; Blossfeld et al., 2012; Jansen, 2011; Nazio, 2008; Bertolini, 2012; Bertolini, Hofacker, Torrioni, 2012). The problem being that long-term career and – consequently – private life planning becomes difficult, if not impossible, when working with short-term contracts. But having to halt planning because you don't know what will happen next, once your contract has ended, may induce an attitude, that is, *playing for time*, which then spreads to other dimensions of life.

The concept of economic autonomy is difficult to define: in literature there is no clear, univocal and standardized definition and what can be found is mainly negative (deprivation, poverty, economic stress, financial vulnerability, etc). In the EXCEPT project, we defined economic autonomy as having one's own economic resources that are *sufficient* to face one's own needs. We can say that *Economic autonomy* is not dependent on a fixed threshold, but on the relative coherence between the amount of earnings and/or economic resources and the amount of the expenses in the personal accounting. Income sufficiency to deal with expenses needed to cover one's own needs is self-assessed. This is a first basic definition highlighting the financial aspect of young people's autonomy that emerged from the qualitative interviews.

The acquisition of economic autonomy emerged as an important factor to support leaving the parental home, because it is a precondition for renting or buying a house.



Employment precariousness affects this situation from various points of view. This depends not only on family wealth, but also on the structure of values and economic socialization (Bourdieu 1963; Zelizer 1994; Roy 2006).

After leaving home, young people have to pay their housing expenses and all the other costs not yet sustained by their parents. Managing money, programming the outflow in coherence with their own income requires economic and financial competencies and this is a difficult practice to learn, especially in the presence of instability in the employment situation, when the income is not regular. In case of the lack of wages, due to temporary unemployment or training needs, young people have to draw upon other financial resources such as savings or going into debt.

Therefore, economic autonomy can be seen as the ability of young people to consistently meet their needs with minimal or no informal financial support or subsidies from public or private organizations. In fact, we must take into account that young people's economic autonomy depends not only on one's own economic resources (at an individual level), linked to their job, their occupational status and life paths (such as educational and working paths), but also on the resources they have at their disposal within their family (the household level). If an individual lives in a household which is at risk of poverty, he/she can hardly define him/herself as economically autonomous, even if he/she perceives a personal income (which is very low or anyway not sufficient for avoiding poverty). However, a young person can be able to cover their needs, if unemployed or a temporary worker, thanks to their parent's financial support.

Autonomy is a fundamental psychological need in emerging adulthood, linked with well-being (Baranowska et al. 2016; Deci and Ryan 2000, 2008; Inguglia *et al.* 2015; Ryff and Singer 1998).

In accordance with the Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci and Ryan 1985; Ryan and Deci 2000), people from all cultures share basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When these needs are supported by social contexts and are able to be fulfilled by individuals, well-being is enhanced. Instead, when cultural, situational or contextual intrapsychic forces block or frustrate the fulfillment of the basic need for autonomy, well-being is diminished.

Autonomy can be defined as the sense of volition, the desire to self-organize experience and behavior, and to have activity concordant with one's integrated sense of self (Inguglia *et al.* 2015): a person is autonomous when his or her behavior is willingly enacted and when he or she fully endorses the actions in which he or she is engaged and/or the values expressed by them (Baranowska et al. 2016). In other words, the issue of autonomy concerns the extent to which one accepts, endorses, or stands behind one's actions (Deci and Ryan 1985, 2000).

People are therefore most autonomous when they act in accordance with their authentic interests or integrated values and desires (Deci and Ryan 1985, 2000; Ryan 1995). The opportunity to act respecting their authentic interest, values, and desires is



not only an individual «fact» but also a consequence of the social and economic conditions and this aspect is strictly related to the working conditions.

### 3.2.2 Housing autonomy

In this section of the report, we consider a specific aspect of youth autonomy, *housing autonomy*. In particular, we are interested at the relation between labour market attachment and housing autonomy, and in general at the condition and mechanisms that allow young people to leave the parental home or make the decision to live at home longer. In fact, job insecurity quite often has an impact on life courses. Evidence from recent research has shown that job insecurity puts off decisions regarding transition to adult life (Blossfeld et al, 2005; Blossfeld et al., 2012; Jansen, 2011; Nazio, 2008; Bertolini, 2012; Bertolini, Hofacker, Torrioni, 2012). The problem being that career and – consequently – private life long-term planning becomes difficult, if not impossible, when working on short-term contracts. But having to halt planning because you don't know what will happen next, once your contract has ended, may induce an attitude, that is, *playing for time*, which then spreads to other dimensions of life.

In this section, we address youths' perceptions and decision-making in Italy with reference to a specific transition, i.e. leaving the family of origin, in connection with the specific Italian institutional context, which provide young people with opportunities and binds them to specific legal, cultural and economic norms.

We will start by describing housing conditions in our sample, in connection with their job situation mainly, to specifically explore mechanisms present in the Italian institutional context today.

#### **Job and housing situation**

As mentioned in paragraph 2.a.1 (Brief overview of the Italian sample), most part of the interviewees lived in the parental house at the time of the interview (36). The group aged 18-24 years was slightly wider than the older group. As expected, autonomous living was more widespread in the 25 or older group: indeed, considering the two age groups, most interviewees of the 18-24 group still lived in the parental house (21), while 10 out of the 25 interviewees of the older group had already moved out. Considering the educational level of the interviewees, we could hardly see any specific trend. However, those living in the parental house (23) had a medium level of education in large part.

All subjects living outside the parental house lived in Turin (except one). Interestingly enough, their group and that formed by who had a permanent contract were not totally overlapping groups: not all those living autonomously had a permanent contract and not all those on permanent contracts, or with a relatively steady job, lived outside the parental house. Of those living autonomously, indeed, most had a temporary occupation, while 3 were unemployed at the time of the interview. On the contrary, only 2 out of the 6 people having a permanent contract did live outside the parental house.



Of those living in the parental house, most were unemployed or NEET, 13 had a temporary or non contractual job, while 4 had a permanent contract.

Considering the accommodation of those living outside the parental house, 3 shared their apartment with flatmates, 5 lived on their own, while the rest lived with their partner and, in two cases, with a child. The most common type of housing was a rented apartment (9), a few interviewees lived in an apartment owned by either their parents, or a larger family or, in one case, the partner; they did that mostly for free or else paying for some expenses (e.g., bills, refurbishing, etc.). More specifically, the latter was the situation the two families with children lived in. Parental support seems necessary for at least half of those living autonomously, who needed help from parents in paying the rent, bills, or living expenses, or stayed in a family property for free. In short, family support appeared crucial in most cases.

### **Job insecurity and housing autonomy**

Broadly speaking, our sample often seemed to have a quite clear and codified view of the steps needed to achieve independent living and that appeared to hold true among those still living in the parental house especially. In this respect, we can generalize and say that young people still consider having a stable job and economic autonomy a prerequisite for housing autonomy in Italy today. At the same time, they usually believe that moving out from the parental house implies to start a new family. That is undoubtedly a very traditional notion of the transition to adult life, particularly when compared to previous generations, but it still seems to be present present in the country, as an ideal path at least. The interviewees who were living outside the parental house, however, showed a different story. In fact, the experience of living in a house shared with flatmates was quite common between them (even among those who lived with the partner or by themselves at the time of the interview). That is something totally new for Italian young people, who in the past where not used to it, and it often happens when moving to a different city to attend to the University. Even some of those living in the parental house shared the experience because they had moved out for some periods in the past, mainly to enter the University or have other educational/working experiences in a city different from theirs. The choice of sharing a house with other people is grounded in a lifestyle they consider connected to a younger stage (in which being outside the parental house does not imply thinking about starting a nuclear family either with a partner or by themselves) and often anchored to economic reasons (co-habitation allows sharing expenses with other people). Therefore, we may notice that while a codified view of the transition to an autonomous living is very present, partial and temporary experiences of housing autonomy are present in the concrete cases.

Looking at the 36 interviewees living in the parental house, it's visibile that their perception and elaboration of housing autonomy varied deeply. Indeed, it seems that age, gender and job situation affected how they perceived their housing situation, as these variables play a relevant role in shaping both the structure of their social ties and



life opportunities, on the one hand, and the social meaning (and pressure) attributed to the transition to independent living, on the other. As we will see, geographical provenience might play an important role as well.

For the interviewees belonging to the younger age group, it seems that often leaving the parental house was not perceived as an urgent need, but it was rather an idea which they translated into a more practical plan when engaged in stable relationships. In some cases, such an idea was considered a step which would have taken place some time in the future, under the right conditions (i.e., job/money). In some others, it simply hadn't been taken into account yet. Indeed, even the idea that moving out implies having a bad relationship with your parents, and that such a bad relation would be the only reason to take your decision, was sometime entertained:

*“For now I’m not even considering (to move out), because I have got, I mean, I have a beautiful relationship with my mother, so it’s an idea that has never crossed my mind, so I’m, I’m fine like this”* (Mohammed, M, 20, U)

On the other hand, it also appears that permanence into the parental house may be in some cases taken for granted, as the natural way of things in connection to young age no matter your job situation: *“I’m not old. It’s not that I’m 30 and I’m still at home. I’m 22 and I’m forming and I’m trying to create my future, right?”* (Renata, F, 22, U).

Considering the 25 or older who still live in the parental house, there is a change in perspective. The desire of moving out was usually expressed as more urgent, while living in the parental house seemed something that needed an explanation and some motives. Transition to autonomous living was seen as a step towards adulthood and expectations that it would actually take place become all the more relevant as time passed by. Therefore, the feeling of being unable to take it, on the one hand, or the decision to postpone it despite a favourable juncture, on the other, seemed to need explanation and justification.

For those having a job, an adduced reason was often related to the fact that you need to either save enough money to afford housing autonomy (see Result – Part b2 Economic autonomy), or to be sure to be able to support yourself in the future before moving out. However, also motivations connected to the family situation were put forward:

*“I have also thought about going to live alone, but then I also thought that, for now, anyway, since my parents are also at a certain age, then, perhaps, seeing as one of my siblings comes and goes and the other one has now moved away, so, maybe... I’m in no rush for now, I also like staying there. They have given me so much, so I think it is*





*right to give them something too. Then when I need to leave, because I'll have a partner, then, of course I will. That's all.*" (Franco, M, 29, TE)

*"If I think about how I would live, of course, undoubtedly I'd like to be able to live more independently, precisely to be autonomous with regard to housing. It's something that excites me, that I'd like to be able to do even now. In fact, as I said, if I'm not doing it right now it is only because I'm waiting for something bigger"* (Dario, M, 29, PE).

Older interviewees without a job described the issue in even more pressing terms. Moving out appeared to them a strongly desired, but painfully unreachable step:

*I: "What would make you decide to move out? What is lacking now?"*

*R: "The money"*

*I: "The money"*

*R: "The money, really, the money"*

*I: "Only that, is not anything else that..."*

*R: "No, no, no... I mean, I love them, there will be chances to see each other, but... no, it's only the money, otherwise I would have been out already. Because at a certain point, you arrive to an age in which... you really need to be by yourself... or with someone else you choose to be with".* (Mara, F, 29, U)

Taking into account territorial differences, it is interesting to note that young people living in Catania considered normal and took for granted living with their families until a concrete plan to create a new family occurs. They linked exiting the parental home with the creation of a stable partner relationship and the decision to marry and have children. In short, the importance of family obligations (Finch, 1989; 2007) and the persistence of a traditional view of what leaving the parental home amounts to is more evident in the Catania sample than in Turin sample. In the former case, there was a sort of expectation linking parents and children that made it more difficult for young people to become responsible, autonomous and protagonist of their lives. In this sample it seems that having a job (temporary or stable) was not deemed sufficient a condition to leave the parental home. In fact, only 10 out of 19 of those who were employed lived away. And if we consider the two interviewees from Catania with a stable job position, both lived in the parental home. With respect to housing autonomy, we may then state that cultural norms and parents' expectations seem to play a crucial role in the decisional process to leave the parental home: moving out for reasons different from starting a new family might indeed be perceived as a sort of betrayal by parents.





*“The fact that I still live with my (parents) I do not know, maybe in Sicily is a normal thing because only when I get married I can go out from my parental home. /This is something normal in Sicilian (tradition)/ (laughing) For us it is NORMAL. [...] For now, I consider a normal thing living with my parents because all of my friends are living with their parents but also when someone is employed, he/she cannot go away from home because we are in Sicily and /one can not escape from parental home/ (laughing). Only for that. So I live in a very normal way this thing to live with my family.” (Concita, F, 23, U).*

### **Decision mechanisms**

As to the mechanisms which link a weak attachment in the job market to postponing exiting the parental home, the interviews showed that attitudes have changed compared to those highlighted in previous research. Indeed, job insecurity is likely to make it impossible for young people to make optimal decision as to their lives: *halting decision-making* appears to be the mechanism young people use to manage high insecurity and uncertainty. Moreover, it's not just that juveniles postpone decision-making about transition into adulthood (say: because it requires time and money), for their decisions are also and most importantly affected by a range change: decision-making becomes short-term and *self-binding decisions* get problematic.

In Italy, rather than taking their decisions under *risk conditions* (i.e., in situations where they can take into account and estimate the probability of each possible result), young people make their decisions under *insecure conditions* (i.e., some probabilities are unknown). Simply, the institutional context they are embedded in doesn't allow them to understand how and why to get a steady job and a secure income, which they nonetheless deem essential to even plan leaving their family of origin, let alone start theirs.

Exiting your family of origin and creating your own, then, it's not just postponed (as evidenced by some previous research conducted in Italy), but it is pushed further on in time and mostly “dreamed about” rather than actually planned. Indeed, the interviewees didn't have any clear notion of the intermediate steps they should be taking to achieve it, nor did they have an idea of the instruments and tools that such process would require:

*“And... to have a family. (...) Having a job /a steady job/ (underlining), and a son... also having a bit of time to spend with your family. That's being... adult, in quotation marks, for me.”(Dante, M, 19, U).*

It is relevant here to stress, once again, that housing autonomy was perceived as ideally consequent to having achieved economic autonomy and job stability, even if it



was not at all clear how exactly to find out that stability. Lacking such understanding, every decision seemed halted. In addition, we found that housing autonomy is strictly linked to the idea of secure income:

*“I really wanted to go and live alone in Turin. I've never taken this step, because first, I have a brother who is ill and so we try to help him, and secondly, because I'm often away, and it is useless to pay rent if I'm gone, because I have no fixed income.”* (Anna, F, 27, TE)

Knowing that you won't be able to get any allowances in case your income decreases and an understanding of the fact that parental support is linked to leaving under the same roof certainly appears to be driving all young people in Anna's direction in Italy. Indeed, the very idea of getting independent housing and at the same time asking for help to your parents while looking for work is not so much endorsed. To sum up: it appears that housing autonomy is not key to the meaning of the concept of autonomy in Italy at present. In our sample, some exceptions could nevertheless be found in those who had moved to another city to attend University and stayed there even after graduation looking for a job helped by their parents.

Indeed, perhaps in connection with ever decreasing job opportunities due to the economic crisis, it appears that job insecurity in Italy prompts youth to consider either the most immediate present or the foreseeable future (which – as we have already noted – is dreamed about rather than planned).

In this view, you have to focus entirely on the present; consequently, autonomy is limited both in time and space. And that's exactly what prevents young people from making up their mind and decide to leave their family of origin. For our sample, being autonomous mostly meant managing daily or short-term economic problems and decisions (see Economic Autonomy), and paying for your leisure time expenses or little more:

*And becoming autonomous? What is autonomy for you?”*

*R: “The autonomy of... basically of not relying on anybody, I mean, everything you do is up to you, or maybe if you have some little problem yes, you can let them help you, but you have to deal with it by yourself”.*

*I: “And how do you assess your degree of autonomy today?”*

*R: “Today it's OK. Cause I have already worked a little, I have put a little money aside so... I'm autonomous let's say”* (Marius, M, 23, U)



*“And not, in fact, a job. I still want that, I want to work, I want to be independent. And I tell you, for now... (in order) to be independent, I'm trying to get my driver's license, precisely so that my father won't have to accompany me back and forth (Dante, M, 19, U).*

But which are the mechanisms that lead young people when finally they go out from parental home?

Deciding to leave the parental household was chiefly linked to two motivational mechanisms which differed depending on educational training. For young people with medium-high educational (i.e., the vast majority in our sample), exiting your parental home was strictly linked to necessities concerning education completion, which might have asked them to move far away from where they lived. We found that parents were very supportive during the transition in these cases: they gave economic and material support and created the condition for their children to improve their autonomy as whole. In particular, it is important to underline that these transitions were planned and organized by both the children and their parents.

On the other hand, youths with a low education level (5 interviewees) deemed it necessary to leave the family of origin for becoming economically autonomous: job search was compulsory and often linked to complex dynamics. For some interviewees, an important drive was the lack of sufficient economic resources coming inside the parental home, while for others the decision was connected with an unplanned pregnancy, and for others still with preparing to start a new family.

The examples of residential autonomy, as it emerges from our sample, are interesting for several reasons. First of all, only for very few of those living outside the parental home, such independent living implied they had achieved job stability and economic independence. In most cases, parental support was still crucial, although discontinuous, depending on the availability of work income: in the transition from education to work, as well as in phases of unemployment, permanence outside the parental home is made possible by familiar support. Here it is relevant to underline that almost no policies helping the young generations in their transition into an autonomous living accommodation are available in Italy today (refer to the paragraph on the institutional context and that on autonomy and policy perception), that being one of the reasons why familiar support appears so crucial at this stage. The institutional dimension appears to be completely absent from the housing autonomy context.

Given how relevant familiar support is in enjoying independent living, housing autonomy cannot be fully intended as a proxy of economic autonomy, as it is sometimes nevertheless unjustifiably assumed. Some youth in our sample, and a few older interviewees in particular, felt the gap between housing autonomy and economic autonomy was sensible. It might be relevant to note that some of them came from other parts of Italy originally and moved to Turin to attend University: transition into



autonomous living corresponded to a phase in their educational path during which economic support from their family was considered acceptable. To put it differently, for a group of highly educated people, both males and females, relying on parental and familiar economic support during their education and even after, i.e., when they were looking for a job in line with their studies, was considered rather normal:

*“I mean, I don’t know, to me it seems quite normal that a family, if they can, would support their child during the University. [...] I realize that to stay here in Turin, outside from my parents’ house... I need the economic support of my parents, in this very moment, I mean, partially at least, not totally, but yes, partially. So... I mean I don’t, I don’t feel totally independent, that’s for sure [...] Now that I’ve worked a little bit... I’ve still some money left (from my last job), so a little bit I can do it by myself, but before (during the University) it was totally on them.”* (Veronica, F, 26, U)

However, a full transition to autonomy (i.e., housing and living expenses can be fully covered) and its relevance were often underlined.

*“To me autonomy and independency go very much hand in hand, so... then this is a personal discourse of mine, of individual conscience, but to know that, I don’t know, that my parents anyway pay for my rent... it’s something that, for my individual conscience... it creates senses of guilt, or, better, it creates fractures, between what is my autonomous self and... I mean, what I would like to be, completely autonomous, [...] Once that this, let’s say, base of money, that comes from my family, is going to be removed, I think that... once that I found a job, I can define myself quite autonomous”.* (Alessandro, M, 27, U).

Another common important aspect in the “residentially autonomous” group was the meaning they assign to autonomy.

In their representation, living independently was a step towards adulthood and it was related to taking fuller responsibility for actions and being able to create an identity. Cohabitation was almost always described as a choice. Leaving the parental home also appeared to be a major transition making other key-transitions into adulthood possible. Moreover, in their view, autonomy was not only economic independence but also a more general ability, i.e., it encompassed knowing how to manage your needs and problems without asking any help, from both a practical and psychological point of view. Clearly economic aspects played a crucial role in activating the transition into housing autonomy in our interviewees; however, being autonomous, was more than to be employed or to have money for them:



*“Autonomy means to be... able to deal with your own expenses... deal with your own needs, I mean like... mmm... I don't know... to clean the house, to cook... things like these, or also, to be able to solve problems, some problems, or situation anyway, by your own. This is autonomy, not... not to ring up and call... maybe not your mum and dad, but to call the friend, to call.. the boyfriend, that's not autonomy, if you expect that others will solve your problem. And... that's it. I mean, to be able to be independent, to be independent to... to deal with your own need in any moment.”* (Chiara, F, 28, TE)

*“Well, autonomy is being able to, in short,... to satisfy your needs, without having to ask anyone for help. Without having to depend on someone else, or in any case, without having to give explanations about your own expenses or on everything to someone else. It is not only economic independence, but also physical, and moral, in the sense that... you are taking care of yourself, [...] “Namely, independence on the economic level is not total independence, that is, you have to be able to be independent not only economically but also precisely with the other aspects, in the sense that you are actually managing your life by yourself.”* (Lorenza, F, 22, U)

A third important aspect was the risk of remaining “under parental care” even when you were residentially autonomous. That was particularly evident when exiting the parental home was linked with the *transition toward parenthood*. In general, the parents' willingness to host their children and their partners was crucial because it allowed young people to temporarily solve housing problems and often it enabled them to find a job, arrange a new home, and in general prepare themselves to become parents, thus revealing the role of the family during one of the most important stages in life – child-bearing.

*“Whereupon, when I arrived at home telling my father that I am expecting this child, suddenly my fathers-in-law and my parents gathered to look for a better accommodation for me and my wife, ok? And thus, since concerning my wife's family there are some uncles who have got empty houses which they rent in certain periods of time...they proposed me to go in one of their houses. I only had to buy the furnishings, but it was an extraneous house. Then, my father-in-law, since he has got a house here and another one at \*\*\* (name of a small fraction in Province of Catania), 2 flats, one over the other, and he said ‘Let's do a thing, I go to (name of a small fraction in Province of Catania) and you remain here, in my house’”.* (Paolo, M, 22, TE).

In our findings, parental help plays a decisive role and we may say that if it is absolutely necessary in prompting transition into autonomy, it also runs the risks of



becoming a negative factor, a sort of trap, when prolonged in time. The risk is, for youths, to lack their autonomy in several important areas of choice (e.g., concerning the care of their babies).

Finally, let's emphasize the fact that living outside the parental home did not exclude any form of dependence from parents even in our sample<sup>2</sup>. As previously mentioned, we found it quite common for our respondents to receive their economic and informal support from their parents (or other family members) when leaving the parental home and during the first period of their residential autonomy as well<sup>3</sup>.

Moreover, there were some young adults in the sample who had not left home in a definite manner – their transition was tentative. Some of them indeed considered returning to their parents if something went wrong in their life. Clearly, most of them didn't show a linear transition model, that is, a pattern where the achievement of adulthood is the accumulation of a series of sequential and ritualized stages (e.g., school, work, conjugality, parenthood), but rather a fragmented emancipation pattern from their parents. There were sequential transitions, which multiplied and became reversible, fragmented and concomitant.

In these cases, the parental home is described as a *safe place* in which to move back, should one of several negative events take place, for instance: a couple disruption, or during a psychological breakdown, or simply because another living arrangement is no longer there.

*"The big problems at a personal level, in the couple, started when I changed working hours: we hardly ever saw each other. [...] This made us grow apart little by little till it was over [...] professionally I still like them (the working hours). I understood that the fact of feeling so so was due to our relationship as a couple [...]. At that point, keeping my own place wasn't advantageous because I could barely make it financially, I said 'why not, I'll move back in with my parents, I'll be relaxed again'"<sup>4</sup>. (Max, M, 27, PE).*

### 3.2.3 Economic autonomy

Concerning labour market flexibilisation, it must be noted how low labour market attachment affects a particular dimension of autonomy severely: the economic autonomy.

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<sup>2</sup> That aspect is well-known in the literature. According to Walther et al., today situations of youth-like dependency and adult autonomy may co-exist simultaneously within the same biography (Walther et al. 2002). According to Fokkema et al. (2008), the percentage of parents, aged 50-plus, providing financial support to their children ranges from 25% in the wealthiest countries of northern Europe to 15% in southern Europe.

<sup>3</sup> It can be argued that these are example of a process of de-cohabitation from parents very similar to French one (Cicchelli 2013; Van De Velde, 2008; Bertolini, Hofäcker, and Torrioni, 2015) in which residential autonomy is not linked with economic independence and perhaps also with psychological.

<sup>4</sup> At the moment of interview Max is living with the new girlfriend.





We found that young people can lose and get back their economic autonomy several times and to different degrees, for their work status is not clearly defined in most cases (see Results Part a - Interviewees' educational and working trajectories). Also, it appeared to be strongly linked to salary instability and inadequate income not being balanced by an appropriate welfare system:

*"I'm concerned with economic insecurity, not with job insecurity. Yeah, I'll find something sooner or later, I know that! Maybe, I'll just rake leaves for cash. But, see: that's not enough to live well"* (Anna, F, 27, TE).

Three groups of youths can be identified in the Italian sample according to their economic status: *fully autonomous*, *partially autonomous* and *little or not at all autonomous*. We have classified young people taking into account their economic resources (e.g., income, money transfer from the family, allowances, etc.) and endorsing the fact that income *sufficiency* is subjective, in the sense that it depends on the socialization, the socio-economic context, the peer groups and the desired lifestyle with reference to their own needs.

It emerged that economic and housing autonomy are not one and the same thing: in what follows, we will consider each group emphasizing the emergent patterns.

**Fully economically autonomous:** it's a group who thought their labour income<sup>5</sup> was adequate because it satisfied all their needs without having to call for parental or institutional support. Income adequacy was, therefore, openly stated by the interviewees. Housing and economic autonomy didn't match completely: some fully economically autonomous youths lived in their parental home, but helped paying for housing expenses like (or even more than) everybody else in the family. They never drew upon family resources to manage their personal expenses.

This group is very small in the Italian sample.

**Partially economically autonomous:** it's a group who had an income but didn't think it was sufficient to meet all their needs, so they turned to their parents for economic and social support. They defined themselves as not fully autonomous and explicitly declared they had parental support. On this score, we must remark that Italian institutions recognize and grant unemployment or similar benefits to people whose income is not sufficient only in relation to the stability of their contract. Now, since our interviewees have mostly atypical contracts, they have experience of a problematic access to social protection.

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<sup>5</sup>Actually, no participant reported their capital income, e.g. money from rent; so, it was always labour income in our interviews.





As to housing, there were some partially economically autonomous young people among those who had left their parental home, that's because job insecurity made it necessary for them to resort to parental support. Those who had a relatively stable job and steady income but who lived with their parents were mostly to be found in the partially economically autonomous group: parents managed and thoroughly took care of all house expenses and at the same time expected their children to save money for the future.

Partially autonomous juveniles are the larger group in the Italian sample.

**Little or not at all economically autonomous:** it's a group who had no income and lived on parental support. Some young people in this category integrated their income with institutional allowances. Youths who exited the parental home to attend University or enrol in other educational training programmes (i.e., residentially autonomous subjects) did belong to the group. Naming it simply *not at all economically autonomous* hasn't been possible because the vast majority of our interviewees falling in this group thought of themselves as a little autonomous.

The interviewees who defined themselves as not at all economically autonomous had never had a stable job for long and had almost no experience in managing their own money. It's youths who were primarily identified in Southern Italy, in the City of Catania, albeit some cases showed up North as well, in the City of Turin. Geography aside, looking at the group as a whole has been highly informative regarding social exclusion risks and socio-economic consequences stemming from job insecurity (see Result part b - Job insecurity, autonomy and social exclusion).

#### **“The way people meet their material needs”: coping strategies and contexts**

Go deeper into how economic autonomy was attained and/or maintained, we have discovered several coping strategies our young interviewees used to manage their financial resources. It is possible to distinguish between long-term and short-term coping strategies.

With respect to the latter, respondents found it difficult to coherently match *accounting time* and *shopping time* and tried to balance them with strategies aimed at reducing costs according to estimated expenses. Many strategies did not included accounting and were limited to shopping: in such cases, interviewees only bought goods on sale or else cheap items, avoiding expensive shops and looking for free recreational activities:

*“Oh my expenses ... let's just say I'm keeping my safety belt very, very tight. So there can be everyday expenses, such as gasoline for getting around with your own car, or shopping at the supermarket, or having a drink with friends, but even there, in fact, I always take keep my eye on the price”.* (Costantino, M, 27, TE).



But there were different strategies that include accounting. Indeed, *budget constraint* emerged as the most widespread strategy, and it was enforced in its most literal and direct meaning: subjects used cash only and spread their salary across the entire month by limiting its availability in the house. Mara's mother, for instance, was used to withdraw 200€ from her bank account each Friday, which had to be enough to cover all expenses in that week. Often, respondents didn't follow their self-imposed limitations and some *ex-post* adjustments were called for:

*"When I do spend too much then maybe for a while I 'resize', that is, I try to balance things in this regard"* (Franco, M, 29, U – non contractual job).

As regards long-term strategies concerning savings and investments, the respondents usually split their salary into two shares: cash for daily expenses and bank deposits for any future emergency, most notably linked to worries about losing their job:

*"Money matters... it matters a lot... I spend, but not stupidly, in the sense that fortunately I'm the kind of person who puts money aside to use later, I'm responsible about things like that and still have some money in the bank left over from McDonald's although I haven't worked there for months"* (Andrea, M, 24, U).

It's pivotal to notice here that such strategies are not completely differentiated between young people living outside the parental home and those who lived inside, rather between who was fully autonomous and who wasn't. The few who were fully (or – anyway – pretty fully) economically autonomous routinely relied on their income and not on parental support, so they had to keep expenditure and its planning both in check:

*"I support myself financially [...] I created a file, in Excel (laughing), I put in income and expenditure, so that I can make a forecast"* (Emma, F, 20, TE).

Interviewees who were little or not at all economically autonomous couldn't plan anything, especially if unemployed, and were thoroughly dependent on their parents: *"when I need something they just give it to me"* (Franco, M, 29, U – non contractual job). At the same time, many of them, although dependent and unemployed, had *competences* about how to manage their economic resources in the present and in the long-term also. That was Andrea's case, who was supported by his parents and lived



with them, but was simultaneously paying for his expenses with savings he accrued while he had been working (see the quote a few paragraphs above).

The key variable in money management seems to be the socialization to the money management within the family. For example, Emma, who lived by herself and had a 4-year apprenticeship contract, was given her Excel file (i.e., the one she referred to in the passage we have just quoted) from her father, and used it following in her mum's footsteps:

*“My mum works in an accounting practice (...) she manages everything (...) then she's always taught me, (...) and so the administration side of things, I got to see a bit of that with my mum, it helped me”.* (Emma, F, 20, TE).

On the contrary, Margherita was unemployed and lived with her parents. She had learnt from them, especially from her mother, to manage money sparingly in view of potential emergencies. Her mother managed their monthly budget, her father their family bank accounts. Her mother's salary was for daily expenses, whereas her father put his into their bank accounts for *“the futures”*, and set 10 Euros aside *“forgetting about it”* each month. Indeed, savings enabled him and his family to overcome his unemployment curse. As her parents, Margherita had opened her own pension fund: *“if things keep going on like this, best to cover you back by yourself, I mean really BY YOURSELF”* (Margherita, F, 24, U), but she was unable to save because of her precarious work.

### **On playing down economic autonomy**

Many young people reported they were not high demanding consumers with respect to lifestyles, consumption and goods since childhood. So they made do with their own income, no matter how limited it was, and didn't actually see any big gap between them, their peers. Carlo presented himself as economically independent and was content to live with the money he made with his part-time job:

*“For me the important thing is being able to pay rent, eat, and buy cigarettes without having to ask anybody for anything. If I achieve that amount, I'm relieved, for the bills and the rent. Then the rest, everything else is ... extra... [...] It's not that I'm a big spender, other than eating a sandwich when I'm out, or another beer ... eating dinner out, going to discos - zero, I also don't travel much, that is, I'll take a train, stay with friends that can host me”* (Carlo, M, 26, TE).



In this quotation as in others we collected, it is possible to see a tendency to *downplay economic autonomy*, in other words to have a very narrow meaning of what (economic) autonomy is and allows to do, which young people acquire through the consumption practices within the family and their own life experiences. In this frame, young people activate some coping strategies in order to face strong budget constraints, that is, by crossing out expenses they don't deem so essential, such as holidays, unexpected purchases and worn-out item replacement. Also, leisure activities are very often regarded as expenses that can be reduced as well (see Result part b - Job insecurity, autonomy and social exclusion):

*“For many things I like to do, money is not necessary. If you want to go to cinema, you need money, or if you want to go bowling, but I do not like these activities, I do not care... I like more have a walk and I can do when I want to; this is a kind of thing that also people without money can do”* (Concita, F, 23, U).

Both young people living by themselves and those living with their parents had such a weaker notion of economic autonomy, but downplaying was associated to strong vulnerability in case of unforeseen expenses in the first group. Carlo is a case at hand: he is a male breadwinner in the Southern Italian. When his car broke, he was forced to put off his wedding because he had to buy a new car with the money he saved for his wedding ceremony, notwithstanding the fact he really had longed for it.

### **The partially autonomous youth**

In the Italian sample, partially autonomous young people comprised the largest and most varied category in that youths appeared to live their partial economic autonomy as either a snare or an opportunity: they wanted to either be *at least partially autonomous* or *at most partially autonomous*. To understand what that means is essential to underline that a connection emerged between economic autonomy management and domestic practices management in the interviews, the latter one being broader and calling for commitment, responsibility, money and/or a job.

Etymologically speaking, the word 'economy' comes from the Greek οἶκος (oikos), 'house', and νόμος (nomos) 'law' (i.e., what is right, what sets the rule), and it originally indicates a way of conducting your household and managing its goods. That's what was meant by *economic* in most interviews:

*“You're autonomous when you have a job so you can earn and you can provide for yourself, also wash and iron your, mhm clothes so ok then you are able to manage the everyday life”* (Luigi, M, 29, U – non contractual job).



*“Me, I iron my stuff at home, just to say. It’s really... there are many things that let you become independent and adult. One of them is also to... to be independent on your own stuff, no? To get by yourself, really ... at 100 per cent, to clean, to wash... to iron... everything. To make the bed by yourself, from time to time” (Mara, F, 30, U).*

Again, such statements testify to a short-term meaning of autonomy: young people lack any clear notion of the future and bind autonomy to the present moment tightly (see Result part b - Job insecurity, autonomy and social exclusion). Moreover, it appears that autonomy is enacted adopting a peculiar attitude, by minding your own business, do *“your own stuff”*, pass the burden of managing the household as a whole to your parents – your mum, in particular.

We found that such a limited management of domestic practices was widespread among young people who hadn’t left the parental home. No young person we interviewed intended their living with their parents as an adult cohabitation, that is, they didn’t take management responsibility of the household. We argue that they were hosted at home, in a state of *limbo* in the transition to adulthood, where young Italians are given the opportunity to save money:

*“As for the salary, for example... when you know you can be independent... although at this moment I’m living with my parents, so it’s a sort of limbo situation... however, also the simple fact of being able to save something, to know that someone pays you to do something [...] so you are also part of something of more general and wider [...] this is something that makes you more responsible [...] Since I live with my parents, my housing expenses are almost non-existent ” (Dario, M, 28, PE).*

*“Considering that I still live with my parents, I have tried to set aside at least a good 60% of my monthly salary (about €1,000 a month net)” (Costantino, M, 27, TE).*

*“The subject of money has never been a taboo in the family, so when you need (it) you say so” (Lara, F, 27, U – non contractual job).*

Sometimes it’s Camilla who helps her parents by paying for their medical visits or the expenses for their car. Sometimes the money is a loan, and at other times, a gift. For her this type of economic support is not incoherent with the adulthood:

*I: “In your opinion, what does it mean to become an adult?”*

*R: “Having self-awareness, to ask for help if necessary, not to do: ‘ah I’m big, I’m adult now, I don’t need to ask anyone for anything” (Camilla, F, 23, U – non contractual job).*



Also, it appeared that young people never took the burden of a particular invoice or expenditure even when they gave part of their salary to their parents and did that to take care of them and their difficulties, which were due to unemployment in the majority of the cases. Their narratives show that they experienced their support in a frame of reciprocity:

*“In my family we've always been like ‘any money that come in is everybody's”* (Margherita, F, 24, U).

*“They are always available for me and I'm too. It is a reciprocal help: if there is no help within the family, to whom one could ask for being supported?”* (Giacomo, M, 20, TE).

In fact, since parents manage the parental home, it's always them who allocate money:

*“I regularly give 200-300 euro a month – when I'm working, naturally; when I'm not working, I can't do that... but now that I have money in the bank and my mother needs it, I can (help her) (...) she runs the house and keeps the books”* (Andrea, M, 24, U).

Respondents didn't feel embarrassed in being hosted by their families, especially when they had partial or total autonomy; indeed, quite the contrary was true: they felt free and justified not to devote their resources to household management both time-wise (because their attention was focused on their career vision and development) and money-wise (because they were saving money with a view to their future “activation” once they started their own family). According to our analysis, it's that type of youths who want to be *at most partially autonomous*. Moreover, older interviews appeared to feel even more justified in taking for granted that parents had to manage their home; indeed, they felt annoyed because they were still living with their parents (see Results – Part b Housing Autonomy), and focused their efforts, including their economic resources, almost entirely on leaving the house. Giulia's words are a crystal clear example of such general attitude:

*“(my mum) cooks and washes and I don't have to do all those things...[...] I say that's fine, but at the moment we are putting money aside and then I can do these things, then I can also consider getting somebody to clean the house (smiling)... if I can afford it. [...] it is something belonging to you, [...] my idea is that I want to buy a house, I want to buy a car, so I save money, and so then I can buy this thing”* (Giulia, F, 27, E).





On the other hand, it seemed that parents themselves didn't ask for support nor money in the hope their children acquired stability and left the parental home.

These findings are consistent with other evidence in the literature, which has shown that postponing leaving the family home is, in the Italian context, a major strategy to find a job matching your expectations and educational training (Negri e Filandri, 2010; Reyneri, 2011). However, our report widens the scope of previous studies because the analysis lens we have adopted in reading the findings (i.e., micro strategies) notably adds to our knowledge of autonomy and transition into adulthood. In fact, money management in the family is not a particularly well developed area of study in Italy (Facchini, 2008) and – above all – research hasn't addressed micro strategies for managing income instability so far. But now, we know that Financial Literacy courses and training programmes matched to income support are being provided for (Busso et al., 2017) and that means you need to teach people affected by job insecurity how to manage their money to cover recurring expenses such as heating costs or tyre change, and save part of it to cope with unemployment or big unexpected expenses should they happen. Therefore, highlighting micro-practices and strategies used to manage family money becomes all the more important and that is so even with reference to policy definitions (see Lazarus, 2016).

It's important to notice that we interviewed young temporary workers who didn't seem unprepared to manage their money: actually, they *were able* to put a lot of strategies into place in order to provide for their needs, embedded as they were in their environment. Also, they appeared to be able to adapt their material living conditions to their context and its socio-economic features. Their ability, however, was strongly limited and conditioned by their job insecurity: their available income was either low or occasional, so they directed their efforts primarily to short-term management of daily expenditure. In fact, long-term strategies such as saving or investment are indeed possible if and only if young people don't have to take care of their daily needs, that is, if and only if they lose their economic autonomy and rely on their parents for support.

Hence, we can see that two distinct phenomena are taking place in Italy today, both of which are disturbingly alarming. On one hand, Italian young lack long-term vision. That it is so clearly emerged from most interviews as our respondents reported not being able to plan their future because of their insecure job situation. They live and act within a short-term time horizon, where everything seems brief and/or near (see Social Exclusion for an in-depth analysis of the topic). On the other hand, this condition implies losing your autonomy. Once an individual has achieved their economic autonomy they have in effect to keep it going in the long run through daily money management practices. In short, managing such things as house expenses, bills, traffic fines, unnecessary or frivolous consumer products, savings and investments for the future asks an individual to have mastered some practice or other to deal with such things *across* time. But Italian young people are simply denied that. When they get a job in a labour market which actually rejects them, with minimum wage and just above





their poverty threshold even for the luckiest, they see their money running away from them too quickly because they have to pay for daily needs and any emergency, or, in case they rely on parental support, they use it to accrue some savings. Money self-management is a dream they wish to come true once they have acquired full economic autonomy, which, being a long-term goal and not their current situation, is no more in sight.

In conclusion, the *fully autonomous young people*, maintained their economic autonomy with significant efforts only and showed high levels of socio-economic vulnerability. Some people in the group were involved in a patchwork of various different jobs which took their time away from important domains such as self-care and interpersonal relationships, while others downplayed economic autonomy and maintained it solely through adoption of lifestyles characterized by sacrifices and self-imposed limitations.

As for *partially economically autonomous* young people, it must be emphasized their life situation appeared to make a clean break with past generations and seemed associated with labour market and welfare system changes taking place in Italy. Therefore, it has been little studied in all its implications so far. Besides, partially autonomous juveniles form a group whose defining characteristic is perceived incoherence between desired lifestyles and currently attainable lifestyles – typically, we detected that middle class children in particular experience difficulties at maintaining their parents' social status. But we already know that such difficulties are associated with a broader phenomenon which has stimulated several studies in the last decade (e.g., Bagnasco, 2008; Meo, 2011) and directed public opinion to attend to it.

As we have already noted, *not at all autonomous juveniles* believed they were in large measure *a little* economically autonomous. That was a partially unexpected finding and we consider it extremely interesting because it opens the way to an analysis of the way young people assess their own autonomy. The reason why some interviewees said they were at least a little autonomous was that they had worked for at least some months in the past and were able to manage their money and economic resources autonomously (e.g., Marius). In other words, they thought they had acquired some *competence* and still retained it, although in a silent mode, because of external circumstances preventing them to make present use of it. And they couldn't wait but to use it again. Moreover, some of them helped their family providing for essential services and goods through personal resources such as time and energies rather than money (e.g., Mara).

Consequently, we may well conclude that addressing economic autonomy while studying adulthood is a promisingly original prospective to adopt in the Italian context. Indeed, researchers have analysed young people in Italy by focusing on their entrance into the job market and their transition into adulthood so far. They have never brought to the fore that turning into a worker doesn't always amount(s) to becoming



economically autonomous; nor have they shown that discontinuity of work and discontinuity of income often do not coincide and neither that difficulties in managing accessible economic resources have a deep impact on youth, their perceived autonomy, their very definition of autonomy and – more generally – on adulthood.

### **Meaning of economic autonomy**

Most interviewees made it clear that there is an economic aspect to autonomy: we asked them to define general autonomy and they answered by limiting responsibility taking to adulthood while casting their descriptions in terms of economic independence intended as labour income.

That definition turned out to be utterly abstract, especially in the case of young people who hadn't had much experience in managing their financial resources before the interview, which clearly adds to the idea that young Italians are denied the *opportunity to practice* their economic autonomy because of unemployment and extended job instability. For them, economic autonomy still remains in the frame of the future situations and desired lifestyles, rather than in the current effectual planning, quite the same for the notion of starting your own family:

*“I mean at the end of the day if you have no money, you can't do nothing, it's all a big circle and that's where you get stuck. You have no money, you can't do nothing”* (Elena, F, 28, U).

*“The only problem is that unfortunately supporting yourself comes from paid work. It is a vicious circle: if there is no work, there is no money and if there is no money, there is no possibility of supporting yourself”* (Graziano, M, 23, U)

*“So I'm afraid I'll spend all my life in precarious jobs without any security or economic stability – and economic stability gives psychological stability. If you don't have the first you don't have the second, you're always in a state of anxiety because you don't know how the month is going to end, if you have debts you don't know what's going to happen, and if something unexpected happens... Because... unfortunately I can see that money is very important, it's extremely difficult to go into society without it... even on the level of friendship. It's hard to be friends, it's hard to find a girl...”* (Andrea, M, 24, U).

Despite they had allegedly attributed significant importance to autonomy in its economic dimension, most young people in the Italian sample considered their personal income actually *not sufficient* to provide them with things and services they needed in daily life. Unfortunately, that picture has already extended into a generational dimension in Italy today.



It is thus all the more fundamental to note that a new notion of autonomy is emerging nowadays, where the economic component is weakened and work itself is downsized in comparison to other aspects of life, despite its being conceived of as the proper locus where to express oneself. Indeed, it's the very idea of adulthood which is being redefined here. Lara's case exemplifies the point we are making. She still lives with her mum, supports herself with private tutoring and is committed to being trained to dance as a therapeutic tool to foster personal and social integration. But she not only considers having a steady job and achieve economic autonomy as goals not accomplishable in the short term, she also doesn't desire them with certainty – *“for today I have money, maybe not tomorrow, so you spend it on what you like. I would like, it would be enough, in theory”* – because such longing and its satisfaction will imply destroying her own world and the mental framework she lives in:

*“(to have a stable job and the property of an house is) another world compared to mine [...] We probably need to learn a little about how to deal with this... /liquidity/ (laughing) [...] on the one hand, I like it because I do not see, I don't see myself doing the same things, [...] If I reach the age of 40, I don't want to be frustrated, having had children just to have them, I don't know, or having a car and a house, I don't give a damn! I would like to find myself in a situation where it is a life that I have built for myself, where I have put many small pieces together, so when I look around, I like it, I'm satisfied, it is an environment where I'm fine, and if I had children, I would let them grow up in an environment that I have built.”* (Lara, F, 27, U – non contractual job).

As regards managing “liquidity”, we found it's mainly young people holding higher education degrees, and often having high social capital and a cosmopolitan attitude as well, who showed they mastered copying strategies to manage occasional income and saving/consumption or work/leisure time changeovers during both “hot” and “cold” periods of time:

*“I am multitasking... because I have done a thousand different things always building myself, many pieces of me. [...] When you work hard [...] (in) two weeks (...) you earn as much as someone who works in an office earns in a month (...) and for another two weeks you can do other jobs or stay home. (...) you must learn to manage yourself (...) you learn to put (everything) away, to collect everything that comes along, (...) because I know that anyway... maybe in a month, there will be a cold period, and I have nothing.”* (Anna, F, 27, TE).



In the Italian sample, however, these young people might be labelled as *autonomous at risk*: in fact, it appeared that they were referring to foreign countries (e.g., France), where public support for the unemployed is strongly provided:

*“many people have this kind of lifestyle in France [...] because there, since there are unemployment benefits, you can do seasonal work and then get unemployment benefits, and then you can do whatever you want, because you can live well, live with dignity, and then when it expires, you resume working”* (Lara, F, 27, U – non contractual job).

Now, as it has highlighted all along this report, public support for the unemployed is indeed what young Italian people are very much missing.

### 3.2.4 Psychological autonomy

#### Job insecurity and psychological autonomy

A link has emerged from interviews suggesting a strong relation between employment situation and psychological autonomy, although international research studies haven't elaborated on it that much. For our young interviewees, autonomy appears to be a chief element in the process of building their identity framework, especially when it is regarded as both an opportunity for responsible self-determined decision-making (Deci and Ryan, 2000) and an ability to live self-directed lives (vs. being directed). At present, there is no qualitative evidence regarding how young Italians experience the tie between their employment situation and their psychological autonomy in their life. They describe psychological autonomy not only as a life condition where they seize their own life, indulging responsibly in their desires, but also as a stepwise acquisition process which grows into independence gradually and its empowered by having a job and sufficient means. Such a process appears to transform desires into life projects by facing dreams with reality. There is a volitional dimension to it and it's connected to one wanting to become oneself. The volitional dimension is strongly intertwined with a relational dimension, along which support coming from others reduces up to when independence is achieved, and, on entering adulthood, responsibility for others is taken (at times, at least, and both in the direction of children and parents).

Also, a significant link between autonomy and well-being has emerged: consistent with theories of psychological well-being in adult life (Ryff and Singer, 1998), autonomy seems a fundamental defining component of balancing life with overall wellness.



### **Describing psychological autonomy**

Our young participants described autonomy primarily as being able to take care of oneself fully, without other people's support, managing oneself each day and not just when making major life decisions. Daily autonomy was stressed by those youngsters who lived with more job insecurity; indeed, lacking autonomy, they emphasized how it can be attained, albeit minimally, by helping their families to solve small day-to-day issues (see also Results – Part b2 Economic Autonomy). In short, knowing what you want and can get in life, and knowing how to get it with no help from outside, that is autonomy.

*"I think is linked to fully taking care of oneself."* (Dario, M, 27, E).

*"Being autonomous means knowing how and being able to think for yourself, both without being a burden to others and (without) having to ask for favours or at least anything at all. Knowing how to make ends meet by yourself."* (Costantino, M, 27, TE).

*"Being autonomous means having some certainty that you can say: I can do this, I cannot do this."* (Erika, F, 29, NEET).

*"Hmm... not needing others to be able to have... a life, say... that is... I don't know... being autonomous... yes, not needing outside help... to ensure yourself... of an adequate standard of living... yes... the word 'adequate' doesn't sound so good, but yes... that is the concept."* (Tommaso, M, 22, U).

Process-wise, becoming autonomous amounts to getting gradually detached from your parents, individuating your values and interests. As Marco puts it:

*"... but then to become adult means to succeed to detach from what our parents want for us and to understand ourselves what we want for us and... start realizing that."* (M, 26, TE).

Psychological autonomy, as defined by our young interviewees, is a drive to acquire an adult role, be future-oriented and grow up without any directions from others, yet aware – in some cases – when you need help from them. Therefore, its utmost distinctive component is life planning, and responsibility becomes the keyword:

*"... when you are responsible for things up to a point, but after that, when you build your own life afterward, after your studies".* (Dario, M, 27, PE).



*“Well, autonomy is being able to, in short,... to satisfy your needs, without having to ask anyone for help [...] It is not only economic independence, but also physical, and moral, in the sense that... you are taking care of yourself [...]. Because as long as there is someone else that reminds you what to do, how you must do something when in reality... (smiling) you’re actually able to do it, I think it’s a bit like that, that’s what”.* (Lorenza, F, 22, U).

Autonomy is, accordingly, being able to choose on the basis of what you think of yourself and your actual opportunities; it means to know yourself, identify your interests and assess their practicability:

*“... to be autonomous to me means to be able to choose... [...] it’s not to do whatever you want, there’s a big difference to me, but instead, to do what you want, to know, to know that you can do it, to know how to do it and... being at the same time unbound by ties such as family, money, and so on.[...] To want to do something, to know that you want to do something, and to understand how to be able to do it.”* (Alessandro, M, 27, U).

The real challenge for young people is to be autonomous and, at the same time, satisfied. For example, Carlo said he orientates his life along social dimensions, in a collaborative way, and deems very important to be satisfied with his own personal lifestyle. Once again, then, we see how a young person interlaces aspects of well-being with his definition of autonomy; specifically, life satisfaction.

### **Have a job, be autonomous**

As reported by the interviewees, having a job is an essential part of getting autonomous: you need an employment to lead life autonomously. However, in many cases, it is not “whatever job” that which might enable an individual to develop their psychological autonomy. As already noted in other sections of this report, doing any job may give you economic independence, but it could fail to mirror your own personal identity, thus representing a psychological strain. Instead, if a job-identity match presents itself, both dimensions are there (i.e., financial sustenance and identity integration) and a person’s sense of autonomy is whole.

*“I have to say that I can find a bit of difference between what I feel today and what I felt yesterday when I had that job, because that job was not for me (...) it didn’t (...) it did not correspond to my character, at all. Whereas here, it already corresponds with what I want / so that’s good.”* (Marco, M, 26, TE).





*“I need a certain type of job. Which would let me live, not survive.”* (Camilla, F, 23, TE – non contractual job).

*“At this time, I am still very lucky, I earn my living with my odd jobs, but I'm trying in some way to continue in what I like, because I don't want to find a job that I don't like, that's right, I do not want to find a job just for the sake of having a job.”* (Lara, F, 27, U).

A particularly emblematic case of the young Italian – i.e., its tendency to answer to insecurity difficulties by giving no more weight to important past values such as steady job and continuity of income – is represented by Lara and we consider it in several sections of the report. In some other cases, though, where unemployment is a serious situation and one runs the risk of experiencing daily life as useless and meaningless, having a job would first help you manage your days and then also get autonomous. These are Gaia's very words: *“Well, at least a job, BUT NOT SAY LINKED to my diploma study course, anything! Something to keep you busy, let's say”*. (F, 25, U).

Moreover, according to some interviewees, having a job enables to find balance; or better: it lets you live a balanced life. In other words, from a psychological point of view, having a job means being balanced, that is, employed, financially independent and yet able to have time for yourself (so as to live a whole life):

*“Now that I'm working, I have a kind of balance in my life. I have money to spend because I have a job. And I have free time to spend it because it is no good working all the time and putting money aside without having any chance to spend it (...) you should not live to work I also have my personal life: we have to work to live but there is more in life than just work.”* (Giulia, F, 27, E).

Here it appears that some sort of a virtuous cycle is brought about: having a job grants proper financial means and at the same time asks for responsibility and requires to meet your commitments. That increase in your willingness to be responsible is at the core of the process of the becoming autonomous. Additionally, it also appears there is an association between work and hope – a so very rare “commodity” in Italy, these days, according to the interviewees.

*“If there is no work, there is no autonomy in my opinion; work is the most important thing. [...] when there is work, there is hope. [...] I can go and start a family? No, I cannot do that. Without work, how I can I do that? It can't be done. That's the problem (...) Unfortunately, again, today our society does not give much hope to us young people. That is, there is no security today for us young people, both from the working point of view and... I mean we cannot even create a family [...] If we (in our society, she*



*means) continue this way, I sincerely do not know where we will end up". (Erika, F, 29, NEET).*

Regarding the link between psychological autonomy (i.e. being able to make decisions independently) and housing autonomy, some respondents declared that living on their own doesn't match thoroughly with being psychologically autonomous, despite representing an important target. Ionela, for example, said that economic autonomy let her be autonomous in her decision-making even if she was living with her family. Before getting to Italy, she was living with her parents in Latvia, but, since she was working, she felt autonomous and was able to save money. On the contrary, Lorenza said she didn't feel independent from her parents, and – more specifically – from her father, in spite of living alone; in effect, except for little everyday decisions, her decision-making autonomy was really limited. She separated from her family of origin but the process of psychological separation hasn't been completed yet: while there is housing autonomy, there isn't psychological independence.

*"Well, fortunately, thanks to this job, I consider myself pretty independent. Not totally, because I do not live by myself, but for all the rest, yes, I deal with all the rest."* (Costantino, M, 27, TE).

*"Namely, independence on the economic level is not total independence, that is, you have to be able to be independent not only economically but also precisely with the other aspects, in the sense that you are actually managing your life by yourself."* (Lorenza, F, 22, U).

*"A person can also be autonomous, not because they necessarily have to go live on their own in a small apartment, but while continuing to live with other people."* (Edoardo, M, 31, TE).

To sum up, psychological autonomy amounts to being independent in decision-making, capable of individual choice, self-aware, have knowledge of what you are, want, and would like to become. It's being responsible and able to seize opportunities and cherish hope.

### **Psychological autonomy and adulthood**

A complex link between housing autonomy, economic autonomy and adulthood has emerged. The interviewees used similar terms to identify psychological autonomy and adulthood and that clearly marks a connection between these two dimensions: actually, being adult and being autonomous both mean taking responsibility, find ways to express yourself, actively guide and direct your own personal growth:



*"...I understand that a mature person knows what she/he can or cannot do (...). "I know that becoming an adult means taking on new responsibilities and I want to succeed in this." (Giulia, F, 27, PE).*

*"Becoming an adult, in my opinion, means taking on responsibility, making choices, accepting that I have made those choices, not complaining with someone about having made them, but accepting the pros and cons. To try hard. So far, this." (Costantino, M, 27, TE).*

*"It means keeping your wits about you in the truest sense of the expression. That is, in short, it is our childhood itinerary that makes us grow, makes us become adult". (Giacomo, M, 20, TE).*

*"Becoming an adult means taking responsibility, having thoughts in mind, whether they are small or big, but they are your thoughts. Having so many responsibilities on all fronts: family, love, work, that is very important. Being responsible, [...] to not think like a child anymore but like an adult, but not because of the age one has //registry you say// but because one must be a concrete person in the things one does, in the things one says and does." (Erika, F, 29, NEET).*

There is one more link to be highlighted: some interviews, as noted, emphasized a connection between autonomy and personal identity as mirrored by one's job: to generalize, adulthood seems to fulfil the identity-building process and complete it. That might mean to come to grip with reality, which in turn brings to the fore awareness; so that being autonomous and responsible would be to control oneself and accept reality, actualize personal interests whenever it is possible and try not to put them aside.

*"Adults? [...] for many people it means losing all their dreams, but in my opinion it does not. [...] Growing up means having something extra to make their dreams come true, in the sense that if I have a dream, for example, of becoming an Air Force fighter pilot, if I want to do that, I can do it more easily if I am an adult / hmmm / because I have more possibilities and then being an adult also means, however, understanding when you can do things and when you cannot, it's having more awareness of life, your mom and dad will no longer be there looking over your shoulder to help you out..." (Matteo, M, 28, U).*

*"Having self-awareness, to ask for help if necessary, not to say: 'ah I'm big, I'm adult now, I don't need to ask anyone for anything!'" (Camilla, F, 23, TE- non contractual job).*

*"That you are able to auto-control yourself [...] that you don't need anyone that comes to tell you 'look, you have to do this'. You have your life that you manage. It's [...] that*



*you have to go to work, you wake up and you go to work. Not because someone tell you so o because you're forced to. But because you know that you have to, because you have responsibilities and if you won't think about your responsibilities, nobody will."* (Mohammed, M, 20, U).

If being autonomous is to take care of oneself, being adult is much the same, but it may imply a transition into parenthood and caring for others:

*"Having so many responsibilities... to be an independent person [...] make choices for themselves. That is, of course, there will be no my mom will give me a hand or at least I can ask advice, however, the choices, the actions I have to take by myself."* (Renata, F, 22, U).

*"... accepting responsibilities, starting a family, providing children with everything they need, having a stable job."* (Leonardo, M, 24, NEET).

*"... you've got to be an adult, it means becoming responsible. You see life from a different point of view, since there isn't, it's not a game anymore [...] cause you know when you get to be a mother you're not a little girl anymore, you're not a child that needs looking after, it's you who has got to look after another child. And so becoming an adult means getting a job, trying to hold onto a job [...] and also living for someone else."* (Francesca, F, 23, TE).

At what age does somebody become an adult? There seems to be no precise age. Adulthood is defined in terms of mental attitudes. And sometimes are parents themselves who play time and hold back their children, especially when they may support them:

*"... there is no identifying age to become adults: you can become adult at 14, 16, 50 years of age... it depends on the mentality. If a person has a wrong way of looking at things maybe she/he is not very adult, because I think it is not a factor related to their age. This is what I think".* (Gaia, F, 25, U).

*"... I'm not old. It's not that I'm 30 and I'm still at home. I'm 22 and I'm forming and I'm trying to create my future, right?"* (Renata, F, 22, U).

What are the dynamics of the process? And what relations does it call into play?

Well, having a job and being financially independent surely are indispensable requirements. Housing autonomy may contribute to growing up oneself into an adult, although not everybody considered it pivotal. Adulthood was perceived as the weighing



of childhood needs on the scale of reality. So the question is: What role did families play in all that? Not so many respondents answered to it. But we found that some parents fed delays in their children's growth process, while others tried to guide them towards adult life desperately as much as unproductively. Tommaso described a conversation with his parents making him a list of broad advices which were perceived not useful at all:

*"maybe I have, yes, with my father and it may have come up sometimes with my mother... but just the classic parental guidance... 'make a commitment', 'don't waste time', 'don't be foolish'. These are those great conversations that you never have with other people... it might make you look weak...."* (M, 22, U).

All in all, adulthood appears to be an opportunity located at the intersection of psychological autonomy (as composed of self-awareness, appreciation of your interests and the ability to manage life situations) and economic autonomy. Alessandro was good at phrasing such point:

*"There are two tracks that goes in parallel, on the one side the track of... personal awareness, personal conscience, interests... which [...] that then allows you to address different situation with a critical conscience, with spirit of awareness and... to be able to confront each other, to be able to move, to handle some situation. The other track is, of course, the economic track, therefore... I believe that you become adult when you are completely untied from your family, economically [...] To have an economic independency, to fulfil your needs through your salary, without needing to turn to... [...] And... I think that is the other fundamental track, they goes in parallel, and I think, I think that's it."* (M, 27, U).

Being adult means being independent, but what makes it possible for someone to grow adult is a progressive independence, which often starts from economic autonomy and then builds up step by step. In this respect, *trial and error* student experiences were considered serviceable and relevant by all interviewees:

*"I want to be independent. [...] having one's own work, one's own independence, makes you grow, in my opinion. At least, that I have already been to London... that experience made me grow. Not because I do not want to be with my parents, but because I need to mature more and more. [...] Become independent, independent but... growing. Because I think independence is also growing many times. At least to me the*



*experience of London, where I was more independent made me grow. Also because there, I was independent, but in the meantime, you had to live". (Gilda, F, 22, TE).*

Upon reflecting on adulthood, if in some cases there was the need of making dreams and reality meet to control dreams, some others denied that's necessarily true, and brought about unconventional adulthood and also the be-an-happy-adult theme – the idea of *having our zest for life*, preserving the child that's within us, our *puer*:

*"In my opinion, people are a bit accustomed to thinking that being adult means, in fact, having a mortgage, settling in one place, making plans, getting you head on straight, having children... no, it does not necessarily have to be that way. For me it would be nice, from my point of view, to become adults while somehow maintaining the child within ourselves, because if not, you lose all the poetry of life... yeah, I'm a bit afraid of becoming adult in the canonical sense of the term, because it's boring! /No? / (Both laugh) I want to keep doing what I like, I just want to be a happy adult!" (Lara, F, 27, U).*

### **Job insecurity and autonomy: coping strategies**

Concerning coping strategies, we present and discuss here those arising where job insecurity intersects with psychological autonomy. First, emerged an aspect in the interviews which is that feeling of not getting enough support to face the job market and its challenges. While such feeling asks you to have *fighter-like* personal resources, it also gives you future satisfaction and provide evidence that you have achieved a certain something by *your own efforts* (e.g., in case you are really successful). Anyway, the dominant metaphor is that of a challenge, a fight, a clash. Simply, our young adults' feeling is that they have to *fend for themselves*, find and make opportunities for themselves and by themselves:

*"I am convinced that in the end, it's you that has to make your own decisions [...] you have to be a bit of a warrior here in this world [...] Yes, not a Princess, but a warrior!!! (laughing) [...] I have the impression that (young people) we are a bit forced to make our own way all alone, so you have to look for things yourself, to (sighs) look for any kind of opportunity, by chance, by keeping your ears, arms, hands, and, eyes open, (doing) everything by yourself [...] finding your place in the world." (Lara, F, 27, U).*

*"... it's having more awareness of life, your mom and dad will no longer be there looking over your shoulder to help you out, but (you have to) be able to support yourself financially as well as fend for yourself in discussions or anything else that there might be." (Matteo, M, 28, U).*





*“In Italy I think growing up /is almost a test of courage!/ (laughing) because you feel right against adversity: difficulty in finding work, persons impeding you find work in every way because they are afraid of you, they are afraid that you also steal the work because maybe they have your same difficulties. That is, become an adult in Italy is ugly! That is, it is not like other countries. I remember I was in Ireland a month with the school and there it was different.” (Aurelio, M, 23, TE).*

With respect to autonomy, Lara insisted on how important it is to find your identity and become yourself even through working; however, when working doesn't allow identity completion, it's through voluntary work that a strategy to cope with dissatisfaction for a job which is not your job comes about. Among the interviewees, there were those who identified themselves with their life choices strongly, through personal resources such as being venturesome and active. They perceived a *force* – the power of managing and buffering job insecurity via an optimistic proactive attitude towards the future. Along with such aspect, the importance of acquiring know-how and learn emerged:

*“I can work, I have a trade, manual trades, I know how to do them, how to use the tools, do the work, get along... I have all the right cards to play (...) I am optimistic... I know I can deal with job insecurity.” (Carlo, M, 26, TE).*

*“I'd like to learn, to work... to learn as much as possible, not just in one place but in many places, and when I have enough money to come back here... after some years... with my mother's help because my mother really backs me up in these things, we'd like to open something together.” (Pedro, M, 21, PE).*

Optimism, that positive attitude towards the future, therefore, is grounded in craftsmanship, you have to truly know how, and shows itself up in a sound network of social relations which acts both as a protective belt and a catapult.

As to emotion focused coping strategies, subjects responded varyingly and their resulting attitudes were different. For example, Costantino, thought of irony as the best attitude to cope with problems and play down present insecurity. Some respondents seemed to process insecurity fatigue similarly to the title of Peter Cameron's novel: *Someday this pain will be useful to you*. Here's Giacomo:

*“To put it another way, when I have children in the future, everything that I have gone through should help me to find the right road to them” (M, 20, TE).*



Giacomo's thought is future-oriented and that makes it possible for him to manage his hard erratic present.

Some other cases showed an attempt to *stop overthinking possible insecurity*: respondents who were employed, if only temporary, used that strategy to enjoy present autonomy, even if incomplete. In addition, though, we also found that decision avoidance was used to cope with future insecurity. Camilla, for example, renounced her decisional autonomy and left it to her family (notably, her elder sisters) to choose her training and, consequently, her future job (in effect, training was selected to rapidly and easily find a job). She enrolled in a course at a beauty school on her sisters' suggestion quitting university, even though she was – after all – gifted for it. And yet that strategy wasn't risk-free and foreshadowed some emotional costs: on the one hand Camilla claimed she feels for arts and is inclined to the aesthetics of life, while on the other she appeared to really enjoy (and be strong for) jobs where a key role is played by social usefulness and other relational and educational dimensions (especially when children are involved).

### 3.2.5 Job insecurity, autonomy and social exclusion

#### Lack of housing autonomy and informal social support

As shown before, labour market exclusion and job insecurity affect young people and their chances of leaving the parental home and thus gaining residential autonomy. Their living arrangements appear to differ depending on their economic status: interviewees are unable to set up their own homes due to the financial constraints that low or intermittent pay and poor economic resources set.

However, lack of housing autonomy seems not to be a factor of social exclusion; as a matter of fact, most respondents felt neither socially isolated nor at risk of being excluded. In this section, we shall examine the issue in depth, providing an overview of social exclusion, starting with a focus on the interviewees' feelings, subjective experiences and perceived situations.

As we know, social exclusion is a relational concept: it is not just an attribute an individual has, but involves a relationship between individual and the rest of society (Atkinson, 1998; Silver and Miller, 2003). Acknowledging the relational character of social exclusion implies the necessity of considering the dimension of social relationships and, primarily, their supportive function. From this point of view, it is interesting to highlight the important role of the family: for most respondents, their family of origin has been both the major source of social support and a vehicle for social integration: it may balance their limited access to the labour market and the subsequent economic consequences.

Many interviewees reported they were rather satisfied by their cohabitation with their parents and many seemed to expect their family would provide aid – mainly economic aid - should they need it. Supportive interactions with parents granted them the



opportunity to save money, be protected against the spell of unemployment and, of course, against poverty and material deprivation. Family relationships were often described as quite fine:

*“I think I'm quite comfortable to the extent that I can be independent and I do not run the risk of having to face emergency situations, at least in the short term [...] Despite the fact I'm twenty-eight, I do not suffer too much from the fact that I still live with my parents. Since I live with my parents, my housing expenses are almost non-existent [...] except for my personal expenses, the small daily satisfactions, I can save money”* (Dario, M, 28, TE).

*“I'm fine at home with my mum because she cooks and washes and I don't have to do all those things ... I say that's fine [...] my mum has never asked me for money, but she has said ‘you do not give money but you put money aside, so I don't have to help you, you do not help me with the household expenses’”* (Giulia, F, 26, PE).

*“My parents have always been present, that's been really helpful, they've really supported me a lot, they listened, they go me to talk, let it all out, it's a type of support that's always been there at home”* (Margherita, F, 24, U).

Erika, by contrast, stressed that she very much wanted to leave her mother's home and live with her boyfriend, but without having a job that hasn't been possible so far:

*“I WISH I HAD MY OWN HOME! I GREATLY WISH THIS! To live with my boyfriend, to create a family, even only to cohabit without get married; just me and him, not like we are doing now, that from time to time he comes to my mother's house and stays with us for some days, but we are not alone. We are in good company with my mother, but that is another thing”* (F, 29, NEET)

For the great majority of our interviewees, indeed, finding steady employment was the most important prerequisite for leaving the parental home; indeed, living with their parents appeared to be a natural strategy for coping with job insecurity and economic uncertainty for many juveniles, and a necessity for some others. This result is consistent with the literature (Aasve et al. 2006; Iacovu 2010). However, as Erika's words have just reminded us, the family seems to lie at the centre of an apparent paradox: on the one hand, living in the parental home is a protective factor, as it allows young people to save money and reach housing autonomy and/or satisfy their own personal needs despite their limited economic resources. On the other hand, it seems to strengthen young people's dependency on their family and to postpone their real



autonomy (see also, Economic autonomy). In some interviewees, dependence on parents carried much weight:

*“I started working at 16 and now, obviously, I feel the burden of staying at home and not working, cause through these experiences I also met someone and got engaged, and so now we're starting to make some plans anyway, even just potentially moving in together, if I don't have a stable job, or even just an apprenticeship contract, they won't even give you a place to rent!”* (Margherita, F, 24, U)

*“I feel I'm a burden... I have no income, so I'm dependent on someone else... who has already been supporting for a long time... that is just the fact of having, for example, to say... ‘can you lend me 5 euros for me cigarettes because... I have nothing?’ that bothers me”* (Tommaso, M, 22, U)

When the family of origin is affected by deprivation and material hardship, and experiences low standards of living due to the father's unemployment, , the parents' divorce, or debts, not only are young people's living conditions strained by very limited economic resources, but also cohabitation with parents might have a detrimental effect, i.e. turn into dependency on them and become a risk factor for social exclusion:

*“You would like to invite somebody home but you can't, you'd like to have your friends to dinner but you can't, you want to ask your girlfriend to your house but you can't... Can you understand? It now seems that the girl is thinking ‘This prick! Still living with his mother’.”* I: *“Have you got your own room?”* R: *“Not even that! [I share] with my sister... the flat is small”* (Andrea, M, 24, TE)

Mara, 29 years old and currently unemployed, felt *“like a loser”*, depending on her parents for everything, with hardly no savings from her previous job. In the interview, she often talked about her lack of autonomy causing her very much suffering:

*“I am not independent, even if I have to go to eat a pizza I need to ask something to my parents, if I want to... do anything to use the car, it's my mum's car, so I need to ask... Not even to send the CV, because I use my parents' internet connection ... even the phone, the top-up, I mean, even the cell top-up... at a psychological level is really disruptive to me”* (Mara, F, 29, U).

Deprivation is so high as to compromise Andrea's and Mara's opportunities for sociability and also affects their self-image. Mara felt she couldn't have any social life:



*“I am forced not to do any Christmas present, because I cannot afford it. A silly thing, but... indeed, I’m saying to everyone not to give me any present. ... these are all things that force you to stay at home, to become asocial, because anyway if you go out, you want to drink a beer, you have to pay for a beer and can I go and ask money to my parents all the time? No, I cannot” (Mara, F, 29, U).*

Without a supportive family, unemployment – and the subsequent lack of income - can represent a serious barrier to full participation in the community and therefore be a factor of social exclusion. The most vulnerable families are unemployed or single-income, with a low pay. Of course, one’s poverty status also depends on household composition and family structure.

Both Mara and Andrea appears to be exposed to cumulative disadvantages. In effect, living in Southern Italy, where labour market conditions are particularly disastrous, is an additional risk factor. Let’s take another case, Tamara’s (F, 23). She is unemployed, like her father and her brother, and lives in Catania. Her mother cares for an elderly woman, but only at times, without a regular labour contract. The family atmosphere is terribly unpleasant due to the lack of jobs and the serious economic problems it causes: indeed, Tamara and her family don’t have enough money even for food. Tamara’s social life is extremely poor. She and her family usually get around on foot because they haven’t got a car and cannot even afford a bus ticket. She thinks that’s really embarrassing. Actually, she would like to live a “normal” life, just as other peers do, but she has neither a cultural and leisure life nor a circle of friends:

*“Maybe they do not say to you ‘pay me for the gasoline’ if they give me a lift, but then in the evening at dinner they have a sandwich and I can’t buy one. So, I avoid going out” (Mara, F, 29, U).*

### **Relationships and feelings of social integration**

Apart from a few cases, however, the respondents did not feel socially isolated or at risk of being marginalized. As anticipated, we didn’t find in the interviews a widespread perception of segregation or disengagement from society. We will come back to that. Up to now, two findings deserve to attention. First: when due to inadequate financial resources, lack of housing autonomy is not a factor of social exclusion for the great majority of the interviewees, because that condition, as we have already mentioned, is perceived as widely widespread among Italian young people. The interviewees who do not live with their parents neither live alone: quite simply, they are forced to cohabit with others to reduce housing expenses and a few live in a shared housing. Some of them



are university students who have had to move to Turin in order to attend their lectures (i.e. their family doesn't live in the city).

Secondly, it is important to examine the role of social bonds beyond the family, that is, focusing on friends. When asked about informal social support received or perceived as available during times of need, most interviewees mentioned family members (e.g., parents). So, at first glance, it doesn't seem they think their relationships with friends are supportive. But things are a bit more complex than that. In effect, when the family is perceived as the main source of economic and, in some cases, also emotional support, obviously friends are not mentioned as providers of tangible and financial assistance. Still, they often provide companionship (e.g., a sense of belonging) and sometimes even informational support (i.e., advice, suggestions and useful information about job opportunities).

In Carlo's interview, for example, friends recur often: they offered him hospitality and gave him information about job opportunities, representing conviviality, sharing and personal enrichment. The availability of social capital is often associated with high cultural capital, as Lara's case clearly showed: she is a young woman, with a high level of education, who makes a living doing discontinuous jobs, predominantly paid under the table. Formally unemployed, she perceived herself as a precarious worker in search of some fulfilling work experiences. She is now considering moving to France, where she is developing a project for a PhD, counting on a network of friends and acquaintances not just in Italy, but also abroad. The key role played by education in creating and mobilizing social networks emerged from several other interviews.

In general, although our respondents did not lack a social network nor informal social support, friends didn't always seem important sources of social support. On the contrary, sometimes they appeared as competitors. For example, Elena claimed that friends don't offer her support either in finding employment or in speaking about how to manage the precariousness: *"My friends, I'd say no, as far as work goes no, we've always been very much like, how can I say, 'you look for it yourself and I look for it myself', that's that"* (F, 28, U).

The decision to seek support from peers begins with the recognition that assistance may be both needed and provided. Some respondents seemed to see themselves as independent persons who rely on their own strength. Others said they do not seek support from friends because they don't get/assess the availability of the resources they need. Thus, for some interviewees, friends are not a source of information because they are either unemployed, i.e., *"they've already got to think of themselves"*, or work in other sectors. When looking for work, Margherita said, *"it's always best to do things by yourself, never rely on someone else (laughing)"* (F, 24, U)

Tommaso said: *"with my friends... we never talk about these things (autonomy, about growing up.) [...] Hmm sometimes it comes up but then... I mean... you say 'Ah, how*





*are you doing? 'Not bad and you?' 'okay'...'okay'...let's talk about something else'. I honestly don't even know why that is..." (M, 22, U)*

Many interviewees stressed that friends are, more or less, in their very same situation, that is, looking for a job or doing small, temporary jobs, so they don't see significant differences in terms of lifestyle between what they usually do and what their friends do, between how they live and how their friends live.

That awareness is likely to explain why they don't feel different or alone in what they are experiencing in the working field. Therefore, disadvantages such as unemployment or precariousness are not associated with shame and stigmatization for the great majority of the respondents. Generally speaking, we haven't found any feelings of being left out of society.

However, job insecurity and precarious working conditions can affect the possibility of having a romantic relationship. Sometimes they undermine young people's expectations and hope, and weaken their ability to make plans. In other cases, the discontinuity of work involves irregularities in working hours. The fact that Anna, for example, alternates periods of intense work, in which she is away and very busy, with periods of unemployment, when time hangs heavily on her hands, makes it almost impossible for her to have a partner.

As we know, the concept of social exclusion involves the inability to fully participate in one's own society, not only the lack of fundamental resources. Social participation means being able to enjoy a range of social activities which help people to preserve their integration into socially acknowledged roles (Silver and Miller, 2003). In the interviews, the most of our respondents didn't represent themselves as unable to participate in activities, living patterns and relationships that are the norm for most other young people. As a matter of fact, they felt cut out from socially-approved consumer patterns and life-styles only in relation to their parents' generation. Andrea confirmed that point underlining he had a feeling of a gradually worsening life situation, from both the social and personal-finance point of view:

*"At my age my parents were much better off. At that time... Dear God! ...If you lost your job you walked out, went to the shop next door and found another one – and they were very well paid" (Andrea, M, 24, TE).*

That's something to be addressed with focused attention: although the respondents feel neither disaffected nor disconnected from the mainstream, it can be argued, however, that they are left out from adult roles. As we have already seen, they are indeed excluded from the rights and responsibilities of full adulthood.



Another issue emerged in the interviews concerning the link between economic disadvantage and social disadvantage in terms of personal isolation or lack of social integration. Considering how respondents perceived their own financial situations, we have found that some are content to live “decorously” (as mentioned in the section devoted to economic autonomy). It is interesting to note that, even though most respondents are either unemployed or temporary workers and lack housing autonomy, some perceived their economic situation in terms of economic self-sufficiency. Notwithstanding the low wages, they represented themselves as economically independent and regardless being forced to live with their parents. They levelled down their economic self-sufficiency defining it solely in terms of their ability to acquire their own personal necessities.

Thus, although the interviewees didn’t represent themselves as deprived of economic autonomy, they did not see a direct link between being a temporary or unemployed worker and being excluded either, that is, they didn’t realize that low standard of living and the risk of experiencing social disqualification come together. Things differ slightly, though when we consider a peculiar juvenile sub-group, i.e. those who have a migratory background.

#### **Lack of future and vulnerability to social exclusion**

It is interesting to note that the interviewees further showed the difficulty of imagining, and planning for, the future. Indeed, we can consider their representations of the future as a lens to read youth vulnerability to social exclusion. While some interviewees could perceive their future only short-term, other envisaged the possibility of limited action only; that might explain the seeming devaluation of long-term references. We can say that most of our respondents did not demonstrate the «capacity to aspire» (Appadurai, 2004), that is, they did not show the ability to project themselves into the future, and express and cultivate aspirations. Obviously, it doesn’t deal with personal deficits affecting the individual: actually it’s the economic context on the one hand and social and political institutions on the other that do not provide young people with the tools they need to foresee and build their future:

*“Not many plans, more than anything else, you improvise... you adjust things”*  
(Tommaso, M, 22, U).

*“I wouldn’t know what other great future plans, that is... I’m trying to see if I can take a few trips, arrange things by myself, yes, I’d like this because... I think it’s... I mean, I’m curious to do it, That’s what... to travel a bit more...”* (Edoardo, M, 30, TE).

To Carlo, who was seemingly more focused on the present, the future was not a cause for concern, nor it seemed to be an important dimension for him.



*“My plan is to become enriched, improve my skills... a few more years. In my plans for the future, there is improving English at least, two or three professional courses, trips to visit friends...”*. (M, 26, TE)

For some other, hope for the future was limited to savings; for others still, it just concerned improving their skills. Yet others imagined a future with their own families, children, houses and cars; but they didn't seem to have worked out modalities and strategies for fulfilling those dreams, and lacked the opportunities and pathways needed to achieve their aspirations. Those who had fewer chances to develop their capacity to realize their projects were those who imagined their future in an unrealistic way.

Elena, for example, said:

*R: “A home, a husband, another child, my own shop. I hope. That's it”.*

*I: “And what plans do you have now to get those things?”*

*R: “Uhm no, there is no plan. For the time being, I've got to think of my daughter, then all the rest will come little by little. Then all the rest will come”* (Elena, F, 28, U).

### **Being children of immigration is (not) always the worst condition**

Trying to describe what it's like to find your first job in Italy, some make use of Roubini (2012)'s economic concept of *perfect storm* (Vernoni, 2014): given the current Italian juncture (which has never occurred in its economic, social and political republican history before), all Italians are prompted to endurance and positive reactions, young people in particular, searching for strategies that can take the path of emigration, at times. Now, one might ask: Do foreigners who have chosen Italy as the ending point of their journey, or juveniles born in Italy but of foreign origin, show differential characteristic with respect to their Italian peers? Also: Does not holding citizenship make it more difficult to compete for getting a job granting a good quality of life?

Pedro is a case at hand. He is a young waiter of Colombian origin and he is very proud of his training results: after moving from one school to another, he got a vocational degree in Catering (Table Service), immediately found a job in the catering sector and would like to further his education by enrolling in a bartending course. But he has difficulties with his being an immigrants' son, especially because that limits his ability to circulate across Europe: he would like to leave Italy for other countries in the Union but he cannot. He has to obtain his Italian (hence, European) citizenship first. Let him talk:



*“I still haven’t got Italian citizenship, and in order to go and work in another EU country I would have to change my residence... for example go to London to work for six months, without saying ‘I live here’, and then come back here... I can’t do that! Because it would mean changing all my documents, start from scratch in another European Union country” (Pedro, M, 21, U).*

Surprisingly enough, among those who have been living their life largely in Italy, legal status and its effect on the labour market don’t seem perceived as setting strong limitations on job search. And yet, the relationship between foreigner juveniles and work is nonetheless affected by stereotypes and biases directed against non-native people, no matter if second or third generation and with Italian schooling.

Of course, even among young foreigners there are those who lack proper instruments, have not been supported by their families in their education and training, haven’t got a social network or the opportunity to exchange opinion with (and get advice from) teachers and associations, and don’t know Italian so well as to be in the position of browsing the web for information or interact with public employment services and temporary agencies. Specifically, unaccompanied youths and/or asylum seekers represent the most vulnerable sub-group in the world of youth. Now, that clearly calls for a collaboration between the private social sector and public institutions and such call is not just necessary but utterly inevitable if one is to avoid transition into autonomy involving criminal networks (Giovannetti, 2016).

The opposite case is young foreigners arriving of age in Italy equipped with a qualification and/or a significant set of skills. Puzzlingly, even in such a latter case integration and inclusion can be hard to achieve. It could be cited the Ionela’s interview, a Lithuanian girl: she holds several degrees, has a considerable range of competencies and various life experiences. She thought she could use her international cv (especially her knowledge of languages) for finding a job in Italy easily. But her experience was completely different: since the very beginning, she has had some difficulties which she initially attributed to the fact that her curriculum vitae didn’t contain work experiences in Italy. But then she realized that *being a foreigner*, though highly-skilled, can be a disadvantage. And that’s not a dead issue, unfortunately, as it is currently characterizing the relationship between immigrants and the Italian labour market (Allasino e Ricucci, 2010; Ambrosini, 2013).

To explain why skilled foreigners entering the country with some experience and a degree find it difficult to integrate into the job market several topics could be listed, such as difficulties in the recognition of qualifications and diplomas, a very few positions for which mastering Italian is not required and no politics aimed at providing Italian courses while recognizing already acquired competencies.

For the children of immigrants we interviewed, being cynical and determined in entering the labour market represent, in effect, two sides of the same coin. One the one hand,



these youths show a scathing attitude, which is associated with considerable resilience when compared to their native peers' stance. Meaning that they often have an "alternative plane", they don't lose heart and show a practical attitude, i.e., they want to be back in the game and "don't like sitting in the waiting room", they enjoy actively looking for work and do not disdain to resort to parental networks and association connected with their Country and religion to do that.

On the other hand, they know how to read and interpret their own experiences and perceptions, they are "true to reality" and draw upon its various resources. Their stories reflect and shed light on the anti-immigration feelings within the Italian society, which, in the case under discussion, affects integration into work and transition to autonomy.

For most interviewees, there is a constant cloud on the horizon: the feeling of being without the proper tools – and hence "unstocked" – to work and enter a multi-level competition, i.e., with both adults and peers (and institutions).

### 3.2.6 Autonomy and policies perceptions in the youth voices

#### Knowledge of various policies and their use

The interviews show that many young people have come into contact with public policies, demonstrating that they are not passive and inactive. The most mentioned policy is the Youth Guarantee Initiative (see institutional context), an intervention whose performance quantitative data can easily confirm: over 1,224,136 had registered in the project by 1<sup>st</sup> December 2016.

Among the young respondents involved, however, only a minority was satisfied and found their job via the Youth Guarantee initiative (YGI). There are a few successful cases where the interviewees emphasized the importance of YGI in improving their working autonomy. For example, Giulia said:

*"Youth Guarantee had a positive impact on me. I can say that it saved me because it gave me a job, something to do, an occupation. It was positive. It was the only positive thing that happened to me."* (Giulia, F, 27, PE).

Even so, taking into account successful stories, most of the respondents still emphasized many weaknesses in the Initiative, which were regarded as side-effects of the YGI and - in their experience – undermined its effectiveness.

The first issue deals with its implementation. The interviewees reported that the YGI had been implemented too slowly: the process appeared incomprehensible and inefficient to them. For example, Giulia went on to say:



*“...then also there was the whole Young Guarantee process: I had to go several times to the public employment centre, I participated in various meetings, I signed various papers. After one of these meetings they called me for a job: ‘What are you doing this afternoon?’. I had a thousand things to do, including going to the course, and their said ‘Oh no, because you have to start now.’. They insisted because they needed me. They wanted me to start earlier before the contract ended.” (Giulia, F, 27, PE).*

If bureaucracy was stressful, the worst reported issues (and these are the second and third side-effects) had to do with job experiences and monthly payment delays.

*“Really bad. (laughs). Organization: a disaster. Signatures that had to be signed everywhere; the owners of the company themselves didn't know what they were supposed to do, what to do and who to turn to. ... waiting months and months for salaries, and then also having problems with INPS; sometimes they'd put in less, sometimes they's forget things ... at best, it (the money) arrived, at least on acceptable terms. Then there is also the beginning period, because I couldn't get started right away, because I had to wait two months, two months for what? For them to register me in the archive of Youth Guarantee, which we all know is something that can be done in five minutes. [...] Even on the business side, the company is what it is. Employees who are not properly trained come along, there are people who come there and don't know how to do anything, and there are also difficulties in keeping it (job) later, at the end of the internship.” (Costantino, M, 27, TE).*

Some young people also complained about the limited usefulness of training activities proposed by Public Employment Services (PES).

*“The only one that wrote me (email) was Young Guarantee to tell me that, if I wanted to ... 'on the 19<sup>th</sup>, to go to the employment centre in Via Bologna to sign up for the course blah blah blah', things like that ... the proposals are for training, the last one was this one here ... software design, but what if I already know, for better or worse, how to use a computer?” (Tommaso, M, 22, U).*

Also the contact with local PES - aside the YGI - resulted a negative experiences. A mayor complaint concerned communication difficulties with PES (e.g.: opening times, no reply to e-mails and so on).





Often, policies seemed not to assist young people in acquiring their work autonomy. We came across a very emblematic case on this respect: a girl involved in the Erasmus Plus Initiative. She had been employed part-time as an educator with a cooperative in London, but co-inhabited with young Italians only. The result was that she didn't learn English nor acquired useful skills to find a job once back in Italy. Concerning policy results, that is a good example of a policy failure.

I: *"How did it go? Can you talk about this experience?"*

R: *"So ... let's say it went very well. The only problem is that I didn't learn a lot of English, because there were 15 Italians in the house. And then ... then the work was intermittent, meaning they called us when they needed us, another reason why I could not find a work is because been always available was part of the internship. [...]It was an Erasmus Plus... and then basically I could not even look for work, and I left from here already with a contract of the company where I'll work"*

I: *"And that job was?"*

R: *"It was cooperative, and I work as an educator with disabled and disadvantaged children. We did activities, like dance, bongos, singing... it was an occasional job, it was 2/3 days at week, but I never knew when they would call me, so I could not make other plans."*

I: *"And housing? Did you find it or the Erasmus Plus?"*

R: *"No, no, no, they did always, all paid. So basically it was all paid. Plus they gave you pocket money of 400 euro per month. But even that it's non-regular so sometimes we need to add our money. But they gave you 400 euro which was just enough in London because transport and food are so expensive."* (Gilda, F, 22, TE).

Once again, that just illustrates a fact: many interviews show that while policies do indeed involve young people, they often yield unsatisfactory results. If it were possible to direct young people better, to assist them even after they have found a job, many of these stories could have happy endings. And that is a useful indication for future policies – young people feel lonely, abandoned by institutions, supported only by their families (or by other informal and formal private social networks).

While isolation and mistrust of politics were found to produce commitment to finding a job on one's own (especially by using internet tools) in some young interviewees, others seemed to react passively, waiting for a turning point in their lives, but doing little to make it happen.



### **The (crucial) importance of the third sector**

Along with moderately successful public policies, the interviews also individuated the third sector and families, as playing a substantial role in helping young people to be autonomous. Indeed, the majority of the interviewees did not hesitate for a moment about identifying who most importantly supported them: it was their parents.

*I: "Who helps you today?"*

*R: "My parents."*

(Leonardo, M, 22, U).

The strong role played by families is not a novelty in the Italian context and the collected interviews confirmed that families are relevantly involved in the Italian welfare system: the Italian family supports its young members, helping them to reduce the social costs of the current economic crisis. Family support, however, has strong and well-recognized side effects on young people: i.e., delays in the process of becoming independent and the perceived absence of public tools specifically targeted to the juvenile population.

*"I wanted to succeed alone, in truth ... but why not ... for example ... the father of my friend, the one who has the goldsmith's shop, told me 'Look ... you come to me, I'll send you to talk with those...with those that I know' and I have never gone to talk to him ... because I did not want to ask others to help me ... it must be something about the way I am personally."* (Tommaso, M, 22, U).

Analyzing the interviewees, a plethora of actors helping young people in their labour market insertion emerged: several interviewees were helped by their contacts within NGOs, and other associations and organizations working in the community with projects addressed to youth . What is interesting about some respondents is the lack of awareness of the key role played by these very actors in supporting them.

*"From time to time, once a month, the church brings to us some pasta, olive oil, canned tomatoes, however, /I do not know if you understand me/ (addressing the interviewer with embarrassment), do you eat pasta in the morning?"* (Tamara, F, 21, U).

The role of the third sector appears evident in the case of young foreigners, in particular among those arrived recently. In addition to their ethnic communities and



their parents, it appears that even associations play a significant part in helping these young people find a job and reach economical and social autonomy. The risk they run is that social their networks (founded on ethnic communities) might offer them little opportunities and end quickly.

*“When I came back in Italy, I went to job information point of \*\*\* [well-known association of Turin, which helps foreigners]. I talked with them, and they helped me to find useful contacts to find a job.”* (Flor, F, 24, TE).

### **Looking for orientation, information and support: the crucial relationship between youth and institutional services**

In recent years, the academic literature as well as political and lawmaking debates have stressed that subjective needs are central for young people in transition to the job market. Pivotal to that effect are labour-market-orientation programmes, a tool intended not only to smooth the transition from school to work but also to help unoccupied or unemployed people improve their ability to intercept unexpressed labour demands in the job market.

For example, in an interview, a young woman complained about websites being often confusing, emphasizing the need for places to find the right information, and considered the lack of targeted orientation services (i.e., aimed at teaching you how to look for work) a deficiency:

*“I downloaded 10,000 website looking for work, I also downloaded an employment app. I also uploaded my curricula but got no answers. The only one who got an answer was my boyfriend, but the company had got his curriculum from a different small ad from the one advertising the job he eventually took. The thing is that there are so many agencies and so many different ways. If there were one central agency where supply and demand met, where you could leave 150,000 CVs (smiling)! But everybody goes his own way when uploading a curriculum, there is no standard way, so you spend hours like a lunatic (smiling) in front of your computer trying to work out the format, because even something stupid like a photo can be too big or too small or too something else...”* (Claudia, F, 21, U).

As it happens, rules and regulations set directions bound to face financial and organizational difficulties in PES, and the indications stated in the recent labour market reform (e.g., offering individually tailored programmes for competence acquisition) is not an exception to the rule. Thus guidance is at risk for job agencies pursuing their chief aim, that is, finding their clients a job rather than guiding them.



Other interviews showed there are bureaucratic and management difficulties in implementing active work policies in offices which confront supply shortage problems:

*“Well, the Employment offices... I do not know how it works in the North, but here the Employment office is a joke, here, to manage to talk to someone, you have to go there at five in the morning (smiles slightly), because if you ever go at ten in the morning, besides, with everything else they should stay open until one o'clock or two, /I don't get it/ (with disappointment). Besides, of course, they are useless. The companies are not looking, the staff does not care...” (Costantino, M, 27, TE).*

In addition, it appeared that uncondusive interaction with young people is a peculiarly critical element for PES officials. Indeed, they talk to individuals who feel differently about themselves and have developed a negative attitude towards active work polices as well as their offices and their tools, even if they only know them partially, that is, via inaccurate information from the grapevine (i.e., their peers and their experiences).

Nor can educational institutions provide students with adequate information easily: school-to-work transitions are unstable and mostly left to students' self-organization. It must be noted, however, that some (few) services support curricular and extracurricular internships. Naturally competition is intense.

An interviewee stated that he had tried to go through the Job Placement Office of the University of Turin to create a fee-based internship, but he had been unsuccessful:

*“As soon as I graduated I tried to go on the website of the Job Placement [...] of the University of Turin... I sent requests to different cooperatives, institutions, associations... for an extracurricular paid internship, but... I've never received any answer.” (Alessandro, M, 27, U).*

With regard to young people, then, it is clear that a few crucial choices might well define their training programme and prompt them to enter – with more or less difficulty – the job market. In any case it is true that proper guidance is essential for those in transition, especially when they have joined an outplacement programme.

On this score, facing up to the hard reality of disappointment (e.g., *“to get a job you need a kick in the butt”* Giacomo, M,19, TE), the importance of NEET support – even via the YGI – became clear in some interviews. Indeed, the records show a common trait: young people experience and make use of different complementary tools yielding constant help over time. Antonio is an example: he communicated with offices and institutions many times during his training programme and evaluated his experience positively. After he had failed his exams for two years in a row, he chose a school on



the basis of information gleaned at the Municipality Office “Informa Giovani” [an office addressed to young people and offering information on several issues, ed], and he was successful. His school automatically enrolled him in YGI, which selected him and supported his first extracurricular internship. Antonio is positive about the entire programme because it truly made it possible for him to enter the job market and gain real work experience; previously he had felt uncompetitive without a diploma:

*I: “Opportunities? You refer to being involved in Youth Guarantee?”*

*R: “That too. The Youth Guarantee in itself is something that wasn’t there before, it has given*

*opportunities to many young people, I’ve heard it from many”.* (Antonio, M, 19, TE).

In short, the joint action of several policies triggered a virtuous cycle: Antonio, stimulated to reflect upon his vocational training and growth, started feeling increasingly motivated to invest in himself and his schooling.

That is self-entrepreneurship, a path which has been approached with human and financial resources (notably in Turin and its hinterland) to foster juvenile autonomy and personal accomplishment (Barella et al., 2012). Unfortunately, once again, the interviews testify to a lack of awareness of the implications, costs and competences required to change “an entrepreneurial ideal” into “an ideal enterprise”.

### **3.2.7 Conclusion and policies suggestions**

In analyzing the interviews of the Italian case, we have noted that the difficulties in entering the labour market complicate the situation of young people, who already sorely tested from the point of view of the transition into adult life: today young people in Italy are restricted by cultural and institutional boundaries that do not focus on their dimension of autonomy. In order to understand the Italian situation, it is necessary to recall the institutional dimension, following the part of the literature (Blossfeld et al., 2005) which stressed that job uncertainty is not the same for everyone, because it is filtered by the institutions (employment system, educational system, welfare state, and family system) that decide on whom to unload it. From the point of view of the employment system, the spread of flexibility in Italy took place without a substantial reform of the welfare state system and without the implementation of adequate active employment policies, thereby increasing the perception that if you lose your job you are exposed to high income uncertainty and a low probability of re-employment. Therefore job changes risk being not only those from atypical work to typical jobs, but also from the atypical towards situations of unemployment or even inactivity, because in the absence of a contract renewal, in times of economic crisis many people stop looking for work. The guidance provided by the educational system and proposals for vocational



training, with rare exceptions, do not yet seem to be able to help young people overcome work uncertainty by defining career paths that are consistent with their skills.

The welfare system radically changes the perspective within which individuals make decisions and helps reconcile the different transitions (Mayer, 1997; Heinz, 2001): from this point of view, in Italy policies inspired by the logic of de-commodification and de-familization are particularly lacking (Naldini, 2006): consequently, the economic capital of the family of origin, which protects them in the periods when they await work, but also the cultural capital that provides metacognitive resources (Villa, 2007; Franks, 2005) and social capital, affect the ways and the times when one finds work and the transition to a stable, good quality job. Our interviews clearly reveal the family's role in mediating the effect of flexibility on the acquisition of the young people's autonomy, however, as we have seen, not so much in the present as much as in the possibility to create it and imagine it concretely in the future.

These elements of the institutional context and the failure of their role as mediators of the effect of job insecurity on autonomy are strongly recurrent in the interviews with the young Italians. While on the one hand, a stable job and a secure income are deemed by the young people to be relevant elements in order to make transitions toward adulthood, leaving the family of origin and creating a new one, the institutional context in which they find themselves does not allow them to plan when and how to achieve these goals, thus they lack a clear vision of the intermediate steps and the means available to them. So in many cases leaving the family of origin is not only postponed, as emerged from previous research in Italy, but it has shifted much farther forward and is more "dreamed of" than planned out. With this in mind, everything is concentrated on the present and autonomy assumes a connotation limited in space and time, which does not lead to the decision to exit the family of origin.

Therefore autonomy is described by young people as, above all, a way to take care of themselves on their own, fully and without the support of others. It's about being able to think of themselves in everyday life and not only with regard to big life decisions. The issue of autonomy in everyday life is taken up mainly by young people who are in a condition of greater precarity and who, suffering from the lack of independence, show that it is possible, albeit minimally, in their everyday choices, in the help provided at home, and in small issues to solve. This causes a low satisfaction with their life project, since only those who perceive more autonomy consider themselves to be satisfied.

The widespread inability to project themselves into the future and plan for it is an important factor of social exclusion, a matter that has not yet been adequately addressed in the public debate and in the literature. The future seems visible on the horizon and plannable only in the short term, and this triggers a devaluation of time references of long duration and their limited opportunities for agency, or else their ritualistic adherence to the idea and the future model proposed by previous generations. However, the young people interviewed do not perceive themselves as socially





excluded, as the role of the family of origin is still strong, but - cornered between their limited opportunities for choice - in most cases they take refuge in the family, which offers them housing protection and economic support while they are facing a flexible labour market and weak institutional protections. This condition not only has a strong impact on the time and manner of the transition to adulthood, that in the trajectories of the respondents is characterized by incompleteness, despite being strongly desired, but it is also an important factor of inequality among young people. The families' capacity of solidarity redistribution, primarily through lengthening the permanence of young people in the family home and, if necessary, the return of those who had left it, has stemmed the rise of poverty and deprivation in Italy, especially in the early years of the crisis (Toniolo Institute, 2014; Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, ISTAT INPS, 2013; Saraceno C, 2014).

Furthermore, research on the role of the partially economically autonomous young people clearly reveals that the prevalence of this condition among Italian young people is an element that breaks with the past generation and is linked to changes in the labour market and the welfare system, as well as generally having been poorly studied in all its implications. Also, the *partially autonomous* group in the Italian sample is also defined by inconsistency between their desired lifestyle and their effectively actionable lifestyle: the *difficulty in maintaining the social status* of their parents is primarily perceived among young people of the middle classes, and is linked to a more general phenomenon of perceived impoverishment among these classes which in Italy has aroused the interest of studies and public opinion in the last decade (Bagnasco, 2008; Meo, 2009).

Finally, a generation that has no tomorrow is a generation that feels excluded from the possibility of taking on those responsibilities that are socially attributed to adult roles. At the same time, it is a generation that lacks an ability concerning the 'policy of representation' and which also feels excluded by the institutions and existent policies.

In Italy the individual responsibility to obtain and maintain autonomy is in fact delegated to the young people: the restrictions of the welfare system, failure to extend the social security rights of employees to atypical workers, and the lack of representation of atypical workers are contextual factors that make young Italians particularly hard hit by the global phenomenon of the transition of the management of risk from the collective to the individual (see Beck, 1986; Sennett, 1998; Castel, 2003).

Focusing on the topics of relevance to this research, the individual management of risk emerges from the interviews as a general *disorientation of young men and women with respect to an increasingly uncertain labour market*. Less-educated young people are at high risk of insecurity (Blossfeld et al., 2005): staying in atypical jobs can take on the traits of an *aimless wandering*, of a *chaotic collection of sometimes very short and poorly paid work experiences* that do not subsequently lead to any salable professionalism in the labour market. For those who do not have their family's



protection, sometimes it is also necessary to accept any job in order to earn some money, but the collection of such experiences can be, as we saw, a coping strategy for not remaining in the status of being unemployed, for getting out of the house, being involved in something, and accumulating experiences. However, for the young people with higher educational qualifications, atypical work seems to have gradually lost the function of being a bridge to a stable and good quality job that it had held in the past (Barbieri and Scherer, 2009; Reyneri, 2011). In Italy, a high level of education does not guarantee immediate access to a stable and good quality job, but rather, plays a role in the ability of the individual to hold together their different work experiences (Bertolini, 2012). The interviews reveal a worsening of this condition: the young working men and women with *higher educational qualifications* are willing to build to unstable work paths, but they are at a high risk of slipping into a state of *economic and social vulnerability*, not only in the face of unsettling events, as in the past, but also as a rewhat sult of non-virtuous intertwinings among their different work and family careers, and the economical conjuncture.

Among the measures for the introduction of sustainable flexibility, what should be done first of all is to invest in the development of *appropriate active employment policies*, which are fundamental in a flexible work system. Two directions should be established. First of all, there should be the development of *career guidance*; secondly, to ensure a *more effective and rapid matching of demand and supply of labour*. With respect to the first direction, this means supporting young people in maintaining, and where absent, maturing an acquisitive orientation, not so much to help them find single job opportunities, but providing them with the tools they need to build a work path that is consistent and possibly ascending over time from the point of view of contract stability. This would not only help to avoid the depletion of human capital, but it would be a positive mediating effect of job flexibility on the possibilities of young people to plan the acquisition of their autonomy.

The second direction in which the active employment policies should develop is that of acting on the system of the meeting between the labour supply and demand: for flexibility to be sustainable, it is necessary to change jobs frequently and, therefore, necessary that the information regarding available jobs circulate quickly and be accessible to all workers. The condition for this to happen is that the use of strong social bonds is no longer the main channel of selection and meeting of labour supply and demand, as we have seen in the analysis of the interviews. In this sense, the employment centres can play a privileged role and one of primary importance. In this direction, the centres' current support seems overly standardized and inflexible, it does not fit the needs and attitudes of the individual person but, in the eyes of respondents, provides undifferentiated support packages that in most cases are of little use. Part of the inefficiency of the employment centres, especially in Southern Italy, is due to the lack of qualifications of the personnel. Measures aimed not only at updating and upgrading the support that currently exists but consistently introducing more new and



qualified ones could trigger a virtuous circle, thereby not only improving the quality of services (guidance and other aspects) for the young people who turn to these services but also creating new employment opportunities for educated youth.

### Summary of policy suggestions

Given the results summarized in the preceding paragraphs, set out below is a summary of some important points for the definition and application of policies aimed at mediating the effect of insecurity on young people's autonomy, thus also acting on several frequently highlighted institutional shortcomings.

First of all, beyond the classic theme of the mis-match between skills formed in classrooms and skills required on the job, research has highlighted the need to import and/or implement the activities of counseling and budget skills within the job services. Although the young respondents appear to be without the tools to assess and, at the same time, enhance the work experience gained in various capacities (internships, apprenticeships, volunteering ...), on the other hand, the industry operators are also perceived as trapped in categories of analysis that regard an outdated production model. So it is possible to see that the figure of workers taken as a reference by the employment services concerns the lived contexts and the roles played by the young people less and less. There has been a **mismatch** between offers of initiatives (conceived for a generation of adults who have difficulty maintaining steady employment pending the economic crisis) and young users of the same, who do not recognize themselves in an anachronistic institutional framework compared to the dynamics with which they confront research and interaction with the world of work.

In order to render a flexible career path sustainable, it is also necessary to not always have to start from scratch at the expiration of each contract. In this sense, the *skills certification system* should establish rules to ensure that expertise gained in a *previous career path, even if with short-term contracts, be cognized* and that in the stipulation of a successive contract requires a higher job position and an increased income, as in other countries such as France and Germany. Otherwise every negotiation is left entirely to the individual's ability to bargain.

The lack of an environment in which to recognize oneself and find answers to their questions and information needs introduces another element that has emerged, namely the revision of the **guidance devices** and contact with the labour market, starting in the educational and training pathways. In the Italian scenario, this is a highly topical theme, where recent regulations have tried to intervene in a twofold manner: on the one hand, by implementing forms of combining school-work (see "The Good School"). On the other, by providing accompanying initiatives primarily aimed at the young people most in need of social and cultural capital (such as events where young people can encounter the employment services and operators with whom to discuss their concerns, projects, and CVs). It is matter of correctives that are not evenly distributed across the country: as in many areas, also in this case the guidelines are



defined at the national level, while the operational definition takes place at the local level. The result is an activism in some regions (such as Piedmont) which is matched by an absence of planning and dynamism in others (such as Sicily).

There is a very strongly felt need for the creation of places and ways for the encounter between atypical workers. These subjects no longer recognize themselves within the unions or other institutions, they feel isolated since they perceive their employment status to be unique. This is the problem of the atomization of the production process, especially in the service sector, which has individualized the subjective perception of work by eliminating the collective component, which was one of the forms of aggregation for integration into society.

The **territorial variable** continues to be crucial, leading to new migration patterns within the country and abroad, interweaving the stories of highly qualified young people and young people with low skills, both looking for a job that will allow them to stop being "eternally young and still in training", destined to go from one internship to another among various experiences of 'grace periods', without ever becoming an adult and to be treated as such. Apparently **stuck in the present**, the words of young people refer to a feeling of 'suspension of biographies', as if they felt to be on 'stand-by', waiting for an event that will allow them to become adults and achieve projects of autonomy and/or their own family, an event that for some is called "the end of the period of economic crisis", for others "moving abroad", and for others yet, "a stable employment contract".

Beyond the horizon of young people, instead there is the subject of **entrepreneurship**. While the media delineate the figure of the start-upper with the identikit of the self-made man/woman in the 2.0 era, the respondents - in a transversal way from North to South, men and women, college graduates or with only compulsory education - represent themselves in the future as employees. Self-employment is generally not a contemplated option. While flexibility and precariousness are elements that young people have learned to deal with, they often only experience the side-effects of policies that, in positions of prestige and high qualification, offer certain advantages. The experience of respondents shows the aporias of a country's system for socio-economic structure and policy definition that remains anchored in a dual labour market that is segmented and highly protected, in which room is made for new measures without a **proper accompaniment on the level of social and cultural policies**. And in spite of themselves, the young people, boys and girls, natives and migrants, are the litmus test of a change that is difficult to understand and assimilate, even more so against a background of fears and difficulties exacerbated by a persistent and severe economic recession.

Another active policy that could meet the needs of all atypical workers is that of supporting *access to credit* and/or the *creation of forms of microcredit*. Even the banking system should be open to the new situation of the labour market by not limiting



access to credit only to those with permanent work situations, and by designing a coherent micro-credit system in Italy which is not in the hands of third sector associations or becomes a business for consulting associations in the service sector.

In fact, having an income protection system of an insurance nature, in Italy there are no unemployment benefits for those seeking their first job. In addition, there is still the lack of both a measure of support for the cost of children and a universal measure of income support. The experiments underway on this front are still categorical and aimed at young people only if they are minors in families in absolute poverty.

Finally, there is the lack of a facilitated rent policy to support the housing autonomy of young people. The young people interviewed mostly leave a home that is owned. However, Italy is a country in which 90% of the population owns a home, but which in most cases has yet to be paid off through a mortgage, and it lacks not only policies for home purchase at the national level, but also rent support policies. As stated by Rabaiotti [2006], a housing policy that encourages youth autonomy must be a low-cost and temporary solution and amenable to verification, features that property ownership does not have. Rental is a necessary condition, there are no other titles of enjoyment allowing to say that housing is a general public service.

Regarding these policy proposals, unfortunately the latest reforms of the labour market are directed at removing the protections on those whose job and whose income is holding together the rest of the family system in Italy: the so-called *male bread-winner*. Therefore, things need to shift towards a new model which invests heavily in the insertion of the young and women into the job market. If fathers and mothers can no longer protect their children, then it will be necessary to invest on the young people, which first of all passes through support for their employment, rendering them independent and perhaps even able to support their parents.

Finally, from the point of view of policy it is necessary to underline that, as in many interviews of the Italian sample, there emerges a tendency to underpay young workers even many years after their first entry into the labour market, including through measures such as Youth Guarantee in order to save, by hiring young people who are not devoid of a wealth of experience. In a highly productive Italian industry put under tension by negative economic conditions and a productive restructuring that is slow in coming to pass, the majority of the young Italians interviewed represents the 'globalization losers' quite well (Blossfeld et al. 2011): the savings in labour costs as a survival strategy or limitation of the erosion of profits falls upon them and in many cases makes any strategies put in place by them to improve their economic condition, showing they are willing and available, pointless. Worsening the picture is the trend that began to emerge in the words of the respondents of not accepting jobs at extremely unfavorable conditions, which is interpreted by some of their employers as a sign of a lack passion and ability to adapt. Instead, what these young people give voice



to is that the loss of passion by young people is often connected to a system that has no confidence in them:

*“I don't think all young people should be underestimated, because I've often noticed that if a 20-year-old has a job, they immediately think that young people will stay out till the early hours on Saturdays and just want to make some money, 'cause they've got mum and dad anyway” (Margherita, F, 24, U).*

Such rhetoric fuels the legitimacy of the load of risks and responsibilities thrown onto Italian youth today, who not only manage to achieve autonomy with increasing difficulty and in a longer time, but who are also being blamed for this delay.

### 3.3 Well-being and health

#### 3.3.1 Introduction

The link between job insecurity and well-being/health has been amply treated in the literature at an international level, and, as a recent revision (De Witte, Pienaar, De Cuyper, 2016) has highlighted, the results of longitudinal quantitative studies have confirmed the hypotheses of direct causality between insecurity and reduced well-being, increased malaise and health problems, and have partially confirmed the relation between job insecurity and satisfaction, work engagement, and a number of psychosomatic disorders. The inverse or reciprocal relation has rarely been covered in the literature and there are few studies which tackle this issue from a qualitative standpoint and thus highlight the dynamics and subjective processes which operate in this relation (Blustein, Kozan, Connors-Kellgren, 2013).

In the interview analyses, we have concentrated on these very aspects in an effort to grasp from the words of the interviewees, perceptions and subjective descriptions of well-being with reference to: predominant emotional experiences; more specifically evaluative/cognitive aspects, linked to satisfaction with employment at a specific moment in the past (Diener, et al., 2006) and one envisaged, for the future; subjective aspects, personal characteristics, attitudes which are linked to the employment situation and to life more generally (optimism, hope, ...) and which, in turn, determine the ways in which individuals live their lives (Ryff, Singer, 1998); pathological elements, health problems, linked to employment situations both in terms of cause and of effect.

Well-being and health are interpreted in connection with precarious employment and/or joblessness but also in their link with work as it is experienced by the individual with its negative as well as positive elements. Previous Italian studies (Ciairano et al, 2010) of a quantitative nature have highlighted the link between precarious employment situations and satisfaction, for example, indicating the fundamental role played by meaningful work in fostering satisfying experiences. Other studies have also emphasized to what





extent the employment situation assumes meaning in the general life of the individual at the intersection of family and personal life (Ghislieri, Colombo, 2015; Savickas et al., 2009).

### 3.3.2 Self-perceptions of well-being and health

From the interviews emerge various interconnections between self-perceptions of well-being and health and work: a first interconnection is characterized by the prevalence, in many interviewees, of experiences of malaise linked to the lack/loss of a job; in other cases, the interviewees describe a basic alternation between moments of worry and of relative well-being, linked also to jobs which, for all their precarity or informality, do constitute forms of self-expression; in those instances of success, the interviewees describe their condition of being “employed” as positive, satisfactory, and ascribe this satisfaction to specific aspects of their jobs; in the other cases, the interviewees have described present or past situations of malaise in which “what work there is” has played a determining role, often due to excessive or absurd demands and excessive pressure from bosses stemming from an inadequate entrepreneurial and managerial background.

#### Malaise and job loss

Joblessness leaves a profound mark on the lives of the interviewees, with traces persisting even after the conclusion of the period of unemployment. In many interviews, the sense of malaise reported, often bordering on experiences of depression, has to do with being disheartened, with living with the deep disappointment engendered by the impossibility of finding a job, as in the case of Gaia (25, F, ME, U).

For Luigi (29, M, ME, NCJ) the most difficult moment was when he was laid off without an income: a period of six months which had an extremely negative impact on his well-being. It was such a traumatic experience that Luigi is unable to reconstruct it accurately, as if a process of denial has come into play, linked also to a period of continual waiting and being left up in the air regarding the issue of whether or not the job would recommence:

*“I mean, I think this... this condition has affected my mind so much that I'm tending to forget! (With a broken tone) (...) Initially, when we were in the first periods of redundancy... no, because you understand that that's a... quite a big company... you think 'Well, Okay, maybe it will be for a time, a week like this and that goes by.' //Mhm// But then you think that tomorrow they'll call Okay, tomorrow, they'll call me tomorrow and there always remain a moment with [... Suspended]” (Luigi, 29, M, ME, NCJ).*

In the case of Mara, there emerges from her state of joblessness, a profound sense of depression which, in the present, ties up with experiences of failure, disenchantment, malaise and an increasing state of neglect and surrender. Repeated failure in her



attempts to find a new job lead to negative thoughts about the future, including despair and pessimism.

*“My worry is to have no future. I mean, if this is the future I have, if I have to stay at my parents’ place... I don’t know. I mean, it’s fine... up to a certain point. At the moment I don’t see any future... it’s bad to say so, but it’s like that. Money, really, money decides the future, unfortunately, it decides the future, because if you don’t have it, you cannot do anything”. (Mara, 30, F, ME, U)*

Concita (23, F, ME, U) also shares this sense of hopelessness about the future, which in her case crystallizes in her “theoretical” desire to become a mother which is accompanied by the negative spectre of a future which can only become more and more difficult for her own children.

Elsewhere, it is isolation, the lack of activities to signal the passing hours of the day, which emerges from Tommaso’s narrative. Unemployed, he describes the shift from thinking that he has a great deal of free time to experiencing this “free” time as empty and frustrating: a prison from which to escape rather than freedom in any real sense.

*“I have lots of free time, too much free time, that’s what I would change... I mean... like I said before, the first few months you say ‘Yes, that’s fine, that’s great’, I can... I can get up at 11 and say, ‘Good, I don’t have to do anything!’... however, after a week of getting up at 11...you are already bored. After two weeks of getting up at 11, you feel that you no longer want that,... after three weeks of getting up at 11... you say ‘that’s enough!’... The days are all the same...you don’t... do anything... so... this is what I would change” (Tommaso, 22, M, ME, U).*

To the boredom to be faced over long periods of unemployment is added the frustration of the fruitless search for a job: such is the experience of Aurelio who refers to having lived badly during his longest period of unemployment (8 months in 2015). Recalling that period, Aurelio emphasizes the boredom and the sense of personal frustration in discovering he could not find a decent job.

*“What’ll I do today? Stay at home, clean... then go to the gym. Good thing I had paid for the gym, at least I had something to do. Go out: ‘no, they’re working; I can’t bother him/her. Total boredom. Looking for work: I delivered my curriculum everywhere. /’ No we have hired the owner’s cousin/ (ironically and simulating the employer’s answer). /’ That’s good news/ (simulating his answer). /’ We’ll let you know/ (simulating the*



*employer's answer). I'd turn and go out, and out of the corner of my eye, I'd see that my curriculum had been torn to shreds. The waiter... Companies also hinder you in looking for a job..."*

*"They hinder you. You go look for a job and maybe they throw your CV in the trash. Or rip it up or put it in a place where no one..." (Aurelio, 23, M, ME, TE).*

### **Alternation**

Edoardo, a thirty-year old with a fixed-term contract highlights some of the contradictions of contemporary life characterized, on the one hand, by a dominant culture of devotion to work which can lead some to lose sight of their lives in their entirety and to lose their sense of measure or balance, and, on the other, by the difficulty of finding stability and decent forms of contract-based work. For him, it is interpersonal relations and the possibility of discovery, of learning, which makes him feel good although, nonetheless, he does also highlight the psychological costs of being in insecure employment:

*"This is the dominant culture, your job, you must work hard, make a lot of money, but then there are people who only work in practice, who don't really have a way of... in any field. There must be a balance, for example, there are some countries where the hours of work have even been reduced, no?"*

*"(I'm) quite sociable... I love all forms of human relations... I have many friends, I like to move around somehow, traveling, learning, I think I am a curious person. And... let's say that my life path has led me to be... a 30 year-old person who remains optimistic... and, I think, quite free, under points of view that I think make me feel GOOD"*

*"Your CoCoCo contract suddenly ends... and you say 'now what the devil am I going to do?', and there, at that point, you do not know what to do, and then it is a bit difficult psychologically... Then you get accustomed to living with months of doing nothing and months of working, and then after a while, you get used to it. If you also have positive conditions around you... even from a psychological point of view, it is important... to be busy, because otherwise the risk is that you get depressed, and I see a lot of people who are depressed" (Edoardo, 31, M, HE, TE).*

Another story, more ambivalence: for Flor, her concerns regarding her informal job and all it entails, and which, moreover, does not allow her to adequately help her family of origin, which is in need, are associated with the pleasure experienced working as an assistant in a children's after-school service, a context which allows her to enjoy herself and to put her love of children to good use.



*“(Sigh) Now I worry about life (smiles nervously), because now I the main provider for my mother and family. I’m the person with most work, but I need more work to help them and send them more money”.*

*“I enjoy it because I like kids, so now I’m with them. I have fun... (smiles) I like this work... so I have met many people that I did not know before.” (Flor, 28, F, LE, NCJ).*

For Antonio, after an experience of school largely characterized by episodes of malaise, work, even if insecure, represents a source of satisfaction, also because he lives it with a focus on the present, without thinking too much about the future. The reason for this work-related well-being derives from the fact that he perceives that he is capable, that he can perform satisfactorily the tasks asked of him, that his abilities are acknowledged, and that he is goal-oriented.

*“Yes, this one I like. Cause anyway it’s not a job where you sweat and so on. But, apart from that, I enjoy it cause it seems, apart from the fact that I like it, it seems I have the right skills to do certain things, I feel good there”; “So, for me working I’m not saying it’s everything, but... I think it makes up most of our life” (Antonio, 19, M, LE, TE)*

Work is, then, still considered by some interviewees to be a possible source of well-being, a tool with which to construct identity, “it is the engine of life” (Paolo, 23, M, LE, TE), even if several interviewees stress the importance of having a job which is compatible with the rest of one's life, which also makes it possible to have adequate spaces for family and private life, spaces which, in turn, make it possible to experience work in the right way. In Paolo's case, it is the love and support of his girlfriend which have combined to maintain in him the motivation to search for work and to preserve it once found, within the framework of a complete idea of life.

In some cases, extremely varied emotional states and attitudes are present at the same time: Renata's current self-representation, for example, is characterized by ambivalence (optimistic but also worried) linked to her having drive and enthusiasm but, at the same time, fear of not knowing how to move, considering that all her peers are in the very same situation. The result is a rollercoaster of emotions and experiences which translate into deep confusion:

*“I dont’ have a lot of confidence in myself, but I have to... I mean I feel inside me like I have two personalities: on the one hand, I say to myself: ‘Oh my God there I’ll do it! I’m scared! Not... eee...’ But the other side: ‘But at this point I have to do it’. That is why I*



*fought I sometimes feel really exhausted... because I feel with these two personalities inside me, but I think... I think they are... that is, that I am in same boat as my peers, and I think it is a time of life that all people have been through. I think, then I don't know".*

*"... I feel very confused (...) I cannot, I cannot see what I have to do and how. That is, I am the same, I have to look for people right and left, and I... and they make me... and give me these jobs, odd jobs..."*

*"Positive because I feel very optimistic (...) Today is my first day of unemployment and... I am optimistic and I WANT to find something, I won't be sitting on my hands. I want to find something to do that engages me day by day, in fact, even with the English school I will search much harder than how I started earlier. I feel more motivated. More motivated to try something..." (Renata, 22, F, ME, U)*

Other interviewees highlight how their malaise is relative since they relativize their condition of precarity the very moment that they share their thoughts with peers who may even find themselves in more problematic employment situations:

*"I really see /many/ (stressing the word), really so many guys getting disheartened who do nothing, and they are good guys for sure. The age I can tell you? From twenty-twenty-five... and the only offers of work that really come up are, maybe, offers of ten euros a day and their employers tell them that they are lucky to get even that" (Costantino, 27, M, HE, TE)*

Work, in some cases, is a source of well-being even when the form of contract is not secure: this occurs when the work performed is considered meaningful, corresponding to individual interests, and permitting of self-expression:

*"... working, if you're doing a job you like, even makes you feel good about yourself, you occupy your time usefully. And this is what I was looking, basically; I was looking for a job which (...) gave me something, let's say, yes, something like, it also helped me grow" (Franco, 30, M, HE, NCJ).*

For Chiara, too, her cash-in-hand job is described as an element of well-being because it corresponds to her own interest in working in the environment of fashion, and follows on from a difficult period in her life plagued by personal problems and a negative situation at work, characterized by a sort of bossing. She really likes her current job,



the people with whom she is working seem serious and trustworthy, and she manages to find some freedom and flexibility in not being tied to working office hours:

*“But then I had some health issue, so I stopped for... for a year, because... (calculating the time, whispering), yes, more or less until the 2012... yes, until the beginning of 2012 I was, let’ s say, paralyzed, but not physically paralyzed, I had some psychiatric problems, so really... before recovering and starting to have a, let’ s say, my independency, back, it took me a while and... so...let’ s say after this parenthesis, I started to work again, I started to get my life back on track”.*

*“I lasted a month there maybe, because I was risking my health, physically, because it was a very stressful situation, because the boss... she was really aggressive at a verbal level, meaning that she scream, she insulted you [...] ‘ The devil wears Prada’, you know, the only thing one can refer to, because everyone knows it, I mean... it was a friendly environment in comparison [...] so, basically I was loosing my health, because she gave me tasks... a part from stressful, that depends on the kind of person you are, but... maybe I had to be there at 8.30am, I couldn’ t have the lunch break and then I get out at, I don’ t know, 9pm, and maybe I had to go back home and keep working [...] she had a really rude attitude... she might say you to do A, you do A, and she would get mad because you should have done B [...] I was losing weight, and at night, when I could get some sleep because /I didn’ t have to work/(smiling)... I was very anxious, I had nightmares and... so, it’ s been really tough and I thought, I don’ t know, I’ d rather... I don’ t know, I’ d go to work in a call center, I will be more calm, I’ d go to work as a cashier, I’ d go to do something for which I didn’ t study, but at least I go home and I can sleep peacefully... and so... so this was really the last drop, so that I say ‘ that’ s enough, I don’ t want to deal with this fashion system any longer”.*

*“To do everything by yourself... referring to... referring to the fashion field, it’ s very difficult, because you have to think to the creative project, advertise the product, selling, the prices, the most administrative part [...] so at the end it became, also kind of frustrating to work alone, because... you’ re always alone, maybe sometime you are not lucid, you cannot see the whole picture, so it seems that... so maybe you do a mistake, or... things like that, and... then... there’ s none to cheer you up ((she laughs))”*

*“I lived a quite bad period, I was really frustrated. I mean, now I feel almost like I’m getting out of a tunnel, so... [...] I mean, I had my fashion project, I had my... fashion line... my small jobs, it’ s not that I was completely... without a thing”. (Chiara, F, 28, ME, NCJ).*

### **Well-being and work**

Emma is one of the interviewees who declares that she feels fine. She says she is very pleased with herself thanks to the autonomy that she has gained at her young age, in





particular, in working and living alone, which she links to her upbringing and the example set by her mother, as well as to her willpower and initiative:

*“Honestly, when I think about my life, about all the things I've done for my age, I'm very happy with myself, cause after all my mum brought me up by herself cause my dad was always away for work, and you know, as a family we don't get on, so I grew up with my mum and I must say she did a wonderful job, she really broke her back. And now my mum tells me that, yes, she did a lot but all the rest I did it myself, cause she tells me ‘ I could've told you to do it like that but if you didn't want to anyway, you know’ so, honestly, both the way my mum brought me up and the way I turned out, I'm happy cause at my age, for now I'm still 19, I'll turn 20 in October, at almost 20 living alone, having a job, owning a car, two dogs... /it's a lot, so!/ (laughing)”. (Emma, 20, F, ME, TE)*

There are, nonetheless, no few moments in which Emma examines herself about the future: she is worried and feels that her current situation could change, but she tries not to think about it and to remain grounded in the present:

*“I mean, I try to keep calm and not think about it, cause if you always live with a knot in your stomach, about everything. Sometimes it's better to think about it but not too much, cause otherwise you get really paranoid, worry about everything and you never get to live. So sometimes it's better to let things go as they will and when you come up against a problem you deal with it. Otherwise I don't get to enjoy what I have, cause every time I take the dogs out I would have to think ‘this might be the last time, maybe tomorrow they'll fire me, I'll lose my home, it'll all go up in smoke’, if I think like that, I don't get to enjoy anything!” (Emma, 20, F, ME, TE)*

Ionela also reports predominantly positive experiences: originally from Latvia, Ionela is 25 years old and has a job, just started, with a fixed-term contract, with an event management company. She is dynamic, motivated and draws satisfaction from her current job, which seems to her to be an excellent opportunity also with an eye to the future. She appreciates all aspects of her job, above all the relational side, the fact that she moves in an international environment, and also the challenge to grow professionally:

*“I like everything. I like the people, because we are very international, from all parts of the world... there's really very nice people, and also interesting because the new level in my career, with goals, you see the goals to follow, which you do not do just a job to*



*do 'okay I get home at the end of the month I've got the money,' no, you work with an idea in, that's why I really like. This is the motivation.” (Ionela, F, 25, HE, TE).*

Giampiero, 28 years old, employed with an open-ended contract and possessing a high level of qualifications, describes his working circumstances as satisfactory, while realizing that his job is not entirely secure, since he is a consultant in a company which is in the midst of a reorganization. He describes himself, nevertheless, as being in a situation of well-being, due largely to his positive evaluation of the working environment, which is described as “young and relaxed”. He particularly appreciates the organization of work, based on the importance of teamwork and cooperation, and he also likes the kind of job in which he is involved:

*“It's not that the boss dictates in our team, it is possible to discuss the topic. I like it for this as well. I mean if I have an idea I say it and most of the times it is appreciated. It's a sort of working together. This is how I imagined it. As many colleagues tell me this isn't always like that and it is something I was lucky to find.”*

*“I can start – as I was saying – from nothing, from a blank sheet and writing the code, and then you see it is working good when it is the final product, you see users using it. I mean, something that has your signature on it and it's used! It's something that makes thing going better, in my case it is in the public sector. Thus, this is something I like, I like it very much.” (Giampiero, M, 28, HE, PE)*

Gianpiero expresses satisfaction about his overall life situation; currently his needs and desires in housing, emotional and psychological life appear satisfied, although he is aware that soon his needs will change and that he will need to gain greater autonomy.

### **Malaise and work**

In some cases, extremely negative experiences of work emerge which have the power to completely undermine well-being: Concita describes, for example, an experience of work in a call center as both very tough and disappointing:

*“Work in the call center wears you out psychologically... really when I was home I did not want to talk to anyone. 'The world is revolting', I thought. After two and a half years my head said: 'Stop! I cannot handle it anymore!'” (Concita, F, 23, ME, U).*



In her description, work is a source of psychological exhaustion which translates into a feeling of profound malaise in the other spheres of life, so much so that, while fully aware of the difficulty of finding a new job, Concita leaves her employment at the call center. Her employment history is marked by great difficulties. A further negative experience which she reports relates to a job with a photographer:

*“The worst experience was that of the photographer because... yes... he has given me great knowledge because I learned a lot of things, but he has traumatized me. (laughs) The owner of the shop has traumatized me” (Concita, F, 23, ME, U).*

The experience of work related by Katia (28 years old, currently unemployed) has also been a source of malaise, even if also an opportunity for professional growth. A recent graduate with a few brief experiences behind her, Katia has had the opportunity to work in an area close to her interests, human resources management. However, the environment in which she had to work, what she was required to do, the pressure from above, the negative atmosphere caused her to leave the job since her well-being was seriously jeopardized.

*“I made a contract for 3 months, but then 10 days ago, I decided that... I had to choose between work and feeling all right, and I chose to feel all right.”*

*“Because it was absolutely not on, humanly speaking, from any point of view. Leaving aside the hours, because I can also feel good working 12 hours a day, however, being treated badly and insulted every day, no. (...) Moreover, being insulted gratuitously, without any reason. That is, by being told ‘ You have no balls, by being told to do anything... because she was so and so, and it worked out.”*

*“The last (work experience), after all, is definitely the worst, however, it is also the one, through which, let's say, I was able to learn something more than that... it was my field, and what I wanted to do. So, regardless of what happened, how... with the positive and the negative, certainly... a very intense experience, here. Because the others were not what I wanted to do, so for that... this was what I wanted to do anyway...” (Katia, F, 28, HE, U).*

In some cases, it is health problems which have effects on work, on the search for work and on its preservation. Two cases, in particular, among the Italian interviewees, present this situation. The first case is that of Matteo, a 28-year-old from Catania, who, as a result of an accident, has been taking medication and appears isolated from the network of friends which he previously had. His interview is a continual switching



between his stating that he is “fit for the world of work” and recourse to the accident as a biographical faultline and to a present marked by rejections and failures.

The second case is that of Lorenza: victim of an accident as a child, Lorenza grew up in a continual struggle to free herself from an over-protective father, but without really managing to find her own way. In her case, lack of clarity regarding her own interests is coupled with intermittent motivation to study, an educational path which ended at the start of university and a search for a job with little real determination, with a series of fears of not being up to the task, specifically when it is a question of interviews, but also the need to making her mark without recourse to the special treatment to which she is entitled in consideration of her accident. Lorenza's brief work record includes an experience of work in a call center which is described as absurd:

*"And the working environment was really absurd for me, because you had to work standing up, you could not sit, always standing, there was loud music blasting away all the time, while you were on the phone with the customer with this loud music, you had to DANCE because it was the ambience, no... a little... where they were trying to pass off this work as if it were a fun job, wonderful, satisfying, things really... I... I remained there for a month and then I ESCAPED!!!! (Laughing)." (Lorenza, 22, F, ME, U)*

Currently, her jobsearch seems fruitless and she is frustrated because even the hope which she placed in the employment office, where she imagined that she might learn to cope better with job interviews, left her disappointed. Overall, today Lorenza seems to be living through a situation of malaise linked mainly to the difficulties which she encountered in her studies, in her search for work and in her difficult social integration with her peers in the city of Turin, where she has lived for three years:

*"Hmmm, I did not expect that I wouldn't be able to integrate with the other kids, I was not expecting to feel a little alone or in any case just a little demoralized because... ignorance and everything that is hidden behind... in short, I wasn't expecting that, I was expecting to have a lot of success both in my studies and basically in my personal life, because the thing of going away from home is what I saw a bit as my redemption, but it has not arrived yet, so I'm still waiting for what is to come." (Lorenza, 22, F, ME, U)*

Moreover, her work situation, as mentioned, is a source of worry also because she is expected to have work experience which she does not possess and, above all, which she cannot gain.



*“Bad!!!! (Laughs) I feel BAD actually, because it seems like something taken for granted... that is, banal, I mean, if someone is 20 years old they can't have had experience, just how are they supposed to do that, how can you study, work, do stuff and then... It really seems absurd that the people who should be professional expect certain things, in the sense that it makes no sense to me! It's just sad, I get angry because, what the hell! I'm just 22, how am I supposed to have three years of experience in a job as a secretary?! Honestly, what the hell, I have to... (laughing) what do I have to do, I can't do anything!!! It's not my fault.” (Lorenza, 22, F, ME, U)*

Lastly, Giulia, in a secure job, 27 years old, experiences moments of anxiety and anger relating to injustice at work, but also to the choices which she will have to make for the future: well-being at work, in her case, is linked to the human, relational dimension.

### **3.3.3 Risk factors**

As emerges from the previous section, the principal risk linked to the health and well-being of interviewees is their employment situation itself and, specifically, joblessness or “toxic” work, characterized by high demands and low levels of acknowledgement and resources. Cases like these must cause us to reflect on what really are the effects of the process of deregulation of the labour market on the quality of work for individuals, beyond the mere issue of its stability. In describing well-being and perceived health, the interviewees refer to certain risk factors, predominantly at a micro and meso level. The macro dimension is little mentioned by the interviewees spontaneously, and emerges, above all, from direct questions relating to policies, to the overall socio-economic situation (the role of policies is treated in a dedicated section in the report).

As regards risk factors at an individual level, there do not emerge considerations relating to gender or to other socio-demographic variables which may influence well-being. Belonging to the current generation is considered an employment risk factor which brings with it critical considerations which also regard possible happiness “today” but do not affect well-being directly.

One element which does though emerge, at an individual level, is linked to personality and to a number of subjective elements: in the experience of Isa, a young girl (22 years old) who describes her character as shy, this variable contributes to making unemployment a source of extreme malaise. Unemployment means staying at home, not meeting people, exacerbating, due to the lack of participation in a community of work, those traits of introversion which prevent compensation through other forms of sociality:



*“You know, the fact of staying at home doing nothing, not even studying, cause obviously, and fortunately for me, /the world of school is over/ (laughing). But staying at home is too much, the whole day too...” (Isa, 22, F, ME, U).*

Again at a micro level, simply having been victim of an accident is an element which directly generates malaise and which seems to contribute to a worsening of the condition of precarity since it limits capacities to cope therewith, as described in the previous section with regard to the cases of Matteo and Lorenza.

At a meso level, family may represent a risk factor when it harbours conflicts, abuses, requests which young people are not equipped to deal with. In the case of Tamara, in addition to requests from the family, her peer group is also perceived as a disruption factor, as a competitor in the search for work, one which uses “non-conventional weapons” such as influence.

Indeed Tamara (23, F, ME, NEET) reported a very strong sense of depression, discouragement, and malaise, linked to joblessness and to problematic family relations. Thus she feels envy and anger towards her peers who have had the possibility fulfill themselves thanks to having a job (perhaps obtained through informal personal channels) and sufficient economic resources.

*“Sadness. So many times I want to cry because I do not feel fulfilled and independent. I also feel pressure from my parents because they are in the same situation as me too, and rightly so, they try to spur me on but I’m in a pit just as they are, because they cannot find one (a job) either. And rightly so, they get angry because they think: ‘how is it possible? you are young and you cannot find a job!’ Even they cannot explain this.” (Tamara, 23, F, ME, NEET)*

Ester (26, F, ME, NCJ) had a period of severe discomfort, related to many factors: job insecurity, the relationship with her parents and their pressure on her to abandon the idea of devoting herself to tattoos, and consequently the time wasted:

*“At a certain point, I almost fell into depression, I didn’t even want to leave the house, stuff like that. Panic attacks. [...] Cause I didn’t know if it was me not being good at it or I had just found the wrong people. And so I didn’t know if I should continue looking, every time you go for an interview you become a little vulnerable, you know, cause you have to show yourself to different people, take the challenge, deal with new colleagues, new faces, I mean it’s quite a tough situation. And so it was kinda mostly physical stress. And then, you know, my relationship with my parents, it’s never been, I would have gone more for the artistic thing, for tattoos from way before that. If I would’ve*





*chosen the tattoos from the start now I would have more money aside, but I am quite sure [...] not that working as a hairdresser was useless, I am convinced that the more things you can do the more they'll prove useful in life, especially manual jobs" (Ester, F, 26, ME, NCJ).*

The malaise is described, in some cases, not only as an individual problem but as a "family illness". Michelangelo, for example, describes his family's situation of emotional malaise as a condition in which being tense over joblessness, over financial problems, becomes contagion within the family, causing a worsening of the emotional state of each and all: *"It's a little bit of a nasty situation, that is... I see my father tense and nervous and, then, at the same time I'm nervous as well, so... I feel... weighed down."* (Michelangelo, 22, M, ME, U)

As has been shown in the previous section, one important meso risk factor is represented by abusive leadership of employers and by thorny relations, as well as, more generally, by alienating working environments.

As far as protection factors are concerned, at a micro level, just as for the risk factors, the interviewees cite personal aspects, subjective characteristics such as optimism and positive thinking. Optimism and well-being seem to be linked in a virtuous circle: the interviewees presenting situations of greater well-being are also those who describe themselves as more positive and optimistic about the future. This, for example, is true of Carlo: in his personal "theory of the self", optimism is the resource which allows him to cope with job insecurity maintaining satisfactory levels of well-being: *"I'm an optimist... I'll be able to deal with job insecurity."* (Carlo, 26, M, LE, TE)

Alongside optimism, being proactive and self-determination are considered to be personal resources which sustain well-being since, underlying these, there is a desire to build a satisfactory condition of life, as in the case of Lara, already cited amply in the section on autonomy.

At a meso level, Carlo, again, highlights the fundamental, positive role of the relational dimension: in his conception of well-being, the social dimension and solidarity in participation and volunteering seem important. It is the human relationships with friends and co-workers, as set out in associations and cooperatives, that seem to give meaning to his existence.

Among those interviewees who do not seem to experience their situations of job insecurity with anxiety and malaise, Franco, for example, 30 years old, contractless working situation, states that this is the case because he receives considerable support from his family, both financially and emotionally, and he is also supported by an informal social network of friends. In other cases, work, even if informal, not subject to contracts, provides an opportunity for personal expression, and despite the frustration experienced, represents an instrument of well-being: *"I feel lucky because I have an*



*enormous group of friends, I have my family, I have so many things"* (Franco, 30, M, HE, TE).

### 3.3.4 Coping strategies for well-being and health

In this section we show the main micro, meso and macro coping strategies adopted by Italian interviewees in order to manage, deal with, overcome or improve situations and difficulties arising with regard to their health and well-being. In line with the indications published in the EXCEPT project, here, by coping strategies we mean strategies the interviewees use/activate, in order to face the symptoms of their condition (for example, health problems) or to change their employment prospects and conditions. We also report, where we deem opportune, the repercussions which, in turn, the adoption of a certain strategy has on the well-being and health of the individual interviewee.

#### **Coping strategies for well-being and health: Micro**

Micro coping strategies for well-being and health refer to personal characteristics, habits, behaviours, future plans, cognitive mechanisms and emotional strategies used by the individual to overcome stress and anxiety or other health problems.

There are those like Giulia (27, F, HE, PE) who, to cope with the diminished well-being and dissatisfaction associated with their specific work status, attempt to find some harmony between the income and leisure time available to them.

For some this can simply mean affording, once in a while, to treat themselves to a pizza or a bowl of pasta in a restaurant. For example, Erika who is a little stressed since her mother is – she says – lazy and thus she has to do most of the everyday tasks (this is also why she would very much like to leave her parental home):

*R: "if I want to give myself a treat, I do it, because after working, for chrissakes, for six months..."*

*I: "What form does this treat take?"*

*R: "Nothing much at all! I'm not the type of person who has to buy that signed bag (she means "designer label"), or signed shoes. I am a very simple person. But, you know, now and again: "let's go and eat out!" I really like eating, I like my food, so if there's an opportunity to eat I am happy. It's just the way I am. When I eat I'm happy. I always say this because you take away food and what's left? Problems, and this and that... there's nothing left, so take away the food and there's nothing left at all. Fortunately, I can also afford to because I am //thin// yes /because If I had a bit of a fuller figure I'd think twice/ (laughing) but i don't have this problem." (Erika, 29, F, LE, U).*

In many cases, the being crushed and subsequent falling back on the present, which seems to be a shared trait of the majority of young Italian interviewees, seems to be



offset by the preservation of a gaze towards future horizons in which one “dreams” of achieving a (stable) relationship in a couple, the formation of a family of one's own, having children, and a house. Thinking, in short, that sooner or later, one will manage to reach that horizon, nursing that hope, is a coping strategy against the anxiety and disquiet associated, at times explicitly declared, at other times only hinted at, with the individual's own job insecurity. A strategy to “avoid thinking about the present”.

Among the strategies to avoid thinking about the present (or the future if this does not seem so rosy) there is also Aurelio's. He is confused about his future and says:

*“I do not know /what I want to do with my life/ (smiling)”. When the interviewer asks him what kind of worries he has for his future, Aurelio answers: “Sometimes I think about that, but I try not to think about it because, I repeat, I try not to be anxious. The more I hear the television news, the more I hear certain things, the more I want to cry and to say: ‘What the hell should I do? What am I supposed to do?’” (Aurelio, 23, M, ME, TE)*

Others, like Franco (30, M, HE, TE), to protect themselves from the negative effects on their well-being of a precarious employment situation, endeavour to give value to and to appreciate the expressive and relational aspects of the job; they claim to find satisfaction in the content of a certain type of job, and therefore seek to find one in line with their own interests, downplaying the instrumental aspects (contractual stability and income) by activating, it would seem, a strategy of cognitive dissonance or of „compensation“, or even of „adaptation“. Franco describes himself, moreover, as being quite “relaxed” because he enjoys some self-esteem and considers himself confident about the possibility of obtaining, in the future, a fully-fledged contract of work at the start-up in which he works.

Similarly, Giacomo (19, M, LE, TE) uses as a coping strategy of his own, an appreciation of the content of the job and a link between work, personal satisfaction and well-being. Giacomo feels a strong relationship between work and life, between work and well-being. He is happy about his current situation and aspires to a permanent contract to permit him to develop his plans for autonomy, on the one hand, and for having a family of his own. He has a temporary job in a big company in Catania. Despite the temporary nature of the contract, it is a somewhat rare job opportunity, of high quality, and having obtained it is considered a stroke of luck by the interviewee, also considering the possibilities of a stable contract ensuing.

In other cases, the effort to find a personal gratification which the work setting is unable, at present, to provide, is made not “within” one's own job and current employment situation but “outside“, thus shifting the axis of one's own fulfillment to the outside, outside the workplace and also maintaining, as far as possible, a certain detachment



from the source of one's own malaise, when this coincides with work, its precarity or the difficulty of finding it.

For example, Concita (23, F, ME, U), Pedro (21, M, ME, PE) and Andrea (24, M, ME, TE), Margherita (24, F, ME, U) find their coping strategies to enhance their own well-being and to reduce the stress associated with precarious employment situations or joblessness, in a commitment to develop their own interests and to pursue hobbies which gratify; for example, Concita says that she pushes herself to experience the artistic dimension of life, including photography, Pedro, for his part, music, Andrea sport, and sessions with a psychologist, Margherita dedicates time to her favourite hobby, dancing. To overcome her anxiety she would also try to “never be still” at work and to always keep busy.

Then there are those who like Costantino (26, M, HE, TE), activate all the positive personal resources which they can muster to avoid succumbing to the pessimism which an objective situation of difficulty could easily induce; this type of strategy includes the “get busy” and the “don't expect anything from anyone” approaches.

Others seek to “escape” the psychic malaise associated with the impossibility of finding fulfillment in work in one's own country by planning to emigrate. This is, for example, the case of Gaia, who is planning to follow her current American boyfriend to the USA, but for whom it is a strategy which, if, on the one hand, described as necessary for her realization as a person and to live happily, on the other is not devoid of emotional costs. This would be a hard and emotionally costly choice for her to make since - she states - she would not like to leave her country, her city, for reasons linked to the lack of work and to the impossibility of achieving her dream and to achieve her life project in her own land; she loves Sicily:

*“I would not like to leave Sicily because it is my home, my place but /what can I do/? (Bitterly) It's spirit of survival! [...] /However you cannot bring a person to the point of marrying another person just because here, in Sicily, there is no life and a future/ (said quietly)”. (Gaia, 24, F, ME, U).*

Renata, too, is thinking of emigrating in order to have the chance to fulfill herself and to escape lifelong unemployment, but like Gaia she does not conceal the malaise and the emotional costs which she would experience in a “forced” emigration:

*“what makes me sad is the fact that here, yes, here, there are perhaps universities which are great but there is no work. So, naturally, yes, the brain drain, /but if you don't give us work, what are we supposed to do?/ (with regret) Are we to stay here? Catania, my city, I love it, is BEAUTIFUL, it has the sea... and then some... but Catania, in terms of tourism, could have so many things, it's just that it's not harnessed! Because it has*



*so many... /THAT IS, WHERE CAN YOU FIND A PLACE WHICH HAS THE MOUNTAINS AND THE SEA? IT'S GOT THE LOT!// (WITH PRIDE) IN TERMS OF NIGHT LIFE, IT HAS SO MUCH TO OFFER, SO MANY BARS AND CLUBS, there is just so much which, though, when all is said and done (...) isn't exploited //mhm//. Now, I... that is, everyone must think... that's to say. I think for myself and for my future and my future I'd like to build it here in Catania, but I can't." (Renata, 22, F, ME, U)*

Living in Southern Italy is defined in ambivalent terms by some interviewees from there: on the one hand, it is considered a factor which exposes the young people who live there to worse employment and economic risks (and therefore also in terms of malaise) than their peers living in Northern Italy and abroad. On the other, as the words spoken by Renata relate, being able to live there constitutes or, at least, would constitute, under different economic and employment conditions, a protective factor for well-being and health.

In other cases still, it is the thought of sharing a common employment situation and common risks (even for health) with the young generation to which one belongs which serves as a micro coping strategy to control emotionally and mentally the malaise and to avoid the risks of developing serious forms of malaise due to insecurity and lack of work. For example, Ester (26, F, ME, NCJ) thinks that she shares this discomfort with many of her peers and feels that she does not want to end up like many young people who develop full-blown psychological conditions, and who tried to shake herself up so as not to fall victim to panic attacks and medication. She has never sought psychological help:

*R: "There's my cousin who's been suffering from panic attacks since she left school [...] she's never had a job yet [...] panic attacks are not a recognised condition, they just stuff you with medications, and you hear about a lot of young people suffering from it".*

*I: "Among your friends or you just heard it (somewhere)?"*

*R: "Yes, one of my friends, she graduated, she can't find a job. But I don't know if it's really just about the job or cause you can't succeed in life. Now she's having problems, she's started to have problems similar to panic attacks and then rashes on her body caused by stress, that's something else you can't control cause it's your body reacting to physical stress, spitting out all the toxins". (Ester, 26, F, ME, NCJ)*

### **Coping strategies for well-being and health: Meso**

Meso coping strategies for well-being and health are related to actively seeking support from family and social networks. Family (of origin, and in certain cases also uncles and



aunts, grandparents or peers such as cousins) appears to be the most significant source of emotional and psychological support for our interviewees.

For example, Mara is looking for a job and is depressed. Her parents do their best to support her psychologically and emotionally at a time when she feels badly about her lack of a job. Her family's emotional support is so important to her that it stops her from taking into consideration the idea of emigrating to find work:

*“To be honest, I have no desire to go abroad, because my family is here //mhm//... so many people go, maybe I don't have the guts... let's put it that way [...] why should I have to go? Leave my home, in inverted commas... and go somewhere else... the situation could be resolved here, in some way or another, I don't know how eh, or at least try, //yes, yes// because in my opinion nobody is trying here.” (Mara, 29, F, ME, U)*

Likewise, Renata (22, F, ME, U), who describes herself as an energetic and optimistic girl, turns to her family of origin for considerable support and finds therein the motivation and encouragement to carry on without becoming depressed by the difficulties encountered in the labour market. She is still well-integrated within the environment in which she lives, thanks to strong and significant protection given by her family of origin which appears solid both economically and emotionally.

If many Italian interviewees state that they have recourse to, and greatly appreciate, the emotional support of their families of origin, more than a few consider this basically insufficient to contain the malaise associated with their employment situation albeit they acknowledge that this support impacts positively on their well-being and mental stability.

For example, Camilla (23, F, ME, NCJ), who for the moment is satisfied with her present living conditions (she lives with both parents and one sister in a detached house built by her parents in the countryside), she strongly desires to leave her parents' house and to move in with her current boyfriend. She would have liked to have left her parents' home already at around the age of 20, but her working conditions did not allow her to live with her boyfriend.

Or Franco who says:

*My mum... I mean, she tries to help me, to support me... but for the way I am, these are words that don't work with me. You feel like a loser, useless... bho. It's bad. She tries to make this thing easier for me, but... but the thing that would make the situation less, more easy, I mean, the thing that would make the situation less complicated, it's a job.” (Franco, 29, M, HE, NCJ).*





In other cases, “forced” cohabitation with the family of origin deriving from the impossibility, given the the unstable employment situation, of having one's own independence in terms of abode, creates real tensions and malaise in the young interviewee. This, for example, is the case with Erika, who in the previous section we have seen is stressed because she has to do most of the everyday tasks (this is also why she would very much like to leave her parental home):

*“I do everything. My mother can't do it. She's the kind of person who gets confused and then she, like, /is my responsibility/ (sorry) so if I don't do anything, she doesn't ever do it either. She's lazy. She says: 'go to the grocery store and do this and do that' and I say: 'but you don't do anything! Do something! Get moving! I say this to you because at least you wouldn't be sitting around doing nothing'. No! [...] I understand that she has all her physical ailments, BUT SHE MUST MOVE BECAUSE SHE IS LAZY! And she says so too! And I say 'oh well!' /And I try to be patient/ (venting).” (Erika, 29, F, LE, U).*

Other interviewees utilize different channels and relations to cope with the malaise and the sense of dissatisfaction with their own employment circumstances. For example, Tamara attends church together with her family and is able to derive a some comfort and peace of mind from it, as well as some basic economic and material support:

*“We began attending during a dark time in our lives; we try to relax a bit in church.” (Tamara, 23, F, ME, U)*

In certain cases, even, or, above all, friends (or boy/girl-friends) are a source of emotional and psychological support. For example, one of Antonio's important points of reference is a friend who is two years older, and the only one who is already in employment, because the others are all still in school. With the latter he cannot discuss work, but still receives their support which he considers crucial at a psychological level in his transition from the student life to that of a worker, requiring greater commitment.

### **Coping strategies for well-being and health: Macro**

Macro-contextual strategies are related to actively seeking support from public institutions and the State. In this section we report not only the cases of those who make use of policies and institutions to improve or to deal with health and well-being problems linked to their own employment situation, but also those cases in which the use of policies and seeking assistance from some type of institution, in order to improve their employment prospects, have had some form of positive or negative impact on the own well-being.



For example, Gaia turned to the Garanzia Giovani (Youth Guarantee) programme and considers the experience positively. She states:

*I: "What impact did Garanzia Giovani have on your life? If it had one.*

*R: Sure it had one! I was depressed. Let's say that, in inverted commas, it saved me because I found myself with a job, a role, employment. It was positive. It's been the only positive thing that has happened to me./ (laughing)". (Gaia, 24, F, ME, U)*

Erika's point of view is similar. She found her last job thanks to the Youth Guarantee Programme. This is the job which she has held for longest in her fragmented ten-year working life, and also the best paid (500 euros a month). She is very enthusiastic about this last job and she considers it the best working experience in her life:

*"It was the most wonderful job experience that I have ever had in my life. [...] /I was so pleased to work in this factory because I had found a job that I had never done, in a factory where I had never worked. It is a creative job because it is a kind of work that goes from production to finished product, all made by hand, with your hands not by means of machines... none of that/ (enthusiastically)... made just by us human beings". (Erika, 29, F, LE, U).*

She would have liked to continue that experience; unfortunately - she said - the factory was not able to employ her after the six-month period of paid training and it dismissed her in the following way:

*"We can't offer you something that in the future we can't give you. You have finished the project. It was our pleasure that you have worked for us'. That was how it finished there." (Erika, 29, F, LE, U).*

Margherita also evaluates positively the outcome of her macro coping strategy, the work experience with Garanzia Giovani with the assistance of Piazza dei mestieri (a labour-exchange operator working in a Turin training center specialized in the restaurant sector). At first, unable to find work, she began to feel discouraged and helpless in the face of a distorted system:



*“Before finding Garanzia Giovani I was starting to lose hope, ‘how is it possible that all the places I go to, as much as they said ‘yes yes you’re good, one can see that you know how to do things, that you’ve studied, and so on and so forth’ then they’d still leave me at home! I started asking myself questions [...] I started thinking it was their trick (to have unpaid workers)”. (Margherita, 24, F, ME, U)*

Margherita entered the Youth Guarantee programme thanks to her contact with Piazza dei Mestieri during her job search on the Internet. Through an advertisement, she discovered and enrolled at the Job Center of Piazza dei Mestieri, which gave her a bit more security, because she saw the list of jobs available, more extensive and detailed than what she could find on the Internet, and because she could count on personalized support. As regards her experience in the restaurant in the centre of Turin for a six-month Youth Guarantee internship, she loved this first job: it was a young environment, a Grill House.

Max, too, is satisfied that he made use of the institutional channel to cope with his situation (Piazza dei mestieri). He is very satisfied with the courses because he thinks that they had a significant impact on his life (and well-being), when the factory work started to become a passion and he tried to change jobs, leaving the company and going into a confectionery shop:

*R: “As I kept working there and moved to baked products, there was also a small branch of confectionery like biscuits and things, and as I got to know it I realised I loved it. Before that, I picked items up, I produced and if it had been metal bolts it would’ve been the same, then I learnt to see the difference, it was more the real retail confectionery instead of simply a big factory with machinery that makes a lot of noise. So I started getting into it, trying to improve, I wanted to grow and I enrolled in those courses.”*

*I: “Did they meet your expectations?”*

*R: “They certainly did. I must say that a great part of the reason why they recruited me here is also thanks to that”. (Max, 27, M, ME, PE)*

While there is no shortage of cases, like the previous one, of appreciation of the possibilities afforded by macro strategies to cope with their own malaise and focused on improving their employment situations and employability, which involve the use of policies and institutional channels, many interviewees declare that they do not trust in the ability of politicians and institutions to improve their situation. At times, lines of argument such as these seem to be an „excuse“ to avoid being proactive and developing so-called macro coping strategies. Several of these young people state that



they are not completely convinced (on occasion drawing on the direct experience of peers for want of any of their own) that the institutions are interested in doing anything practical to help young people.

Veronica (F, 26, HE, U), for example, expresses dissatisfaction with the policies implemented with regard to her macro coping strategies, defining them as an experience which generated malaise in her since she felt neither helped nor followed at a time when she was in great need of both.

Or Michelangelo:

*“we can put in all the effort possible, however, if we have no help from the state or anyone else, there's not much we can do.” (Michelangelo, 22, M, ME, U)*

These words seem to reveal a sense of isolation and abandonment felt by Michelangelo towards the institutions.

On other occasions, the negative evaluation of macro coping strategies is justified by the interviewees' own direct experience of such strategies and their negative outcomes.

Alessandro, for example, tried to enroll on the Garanzia Giovani (Youth Guarantee) programme, but, after completing the online application form he has never been contacted by the Employment Office for interview:

*“I've tried to enroll on the Garanzia Giovani (Youth Guarantee), not having any kind of answer [...] I did the procedure online... nothing, a void, really”. (Alessandro, 27, M, HE, U)*

Graziano tried to attend a course organized by a Sicilian regional government public training institute, but the disorganization he found left a bad impression and he decided to quit the course after only a couple of days. This experience generated in him a sense of discouragement and not so positive emotions. He described that experience in the following way:

*R: “If I do not know a person, I rely on their image; image is very important; if, at the outset, that person does not make a good impression, it is difficult for me to become curious enough to go on because it is already... anyway, I'm a guy that even if the image is not really so positive I see that there is a 0.000.1% glimmer of light, I'll say /‘Okay maybe then... it's only the first impression’/ (laughing). However, in that case, the situation was disastrous! No comment.” (he laughs)*



I: "In what way?"

R: "For example, it took us two hours to find the classroom, because we did not know where it was, then we had to move in another place... [...] it was definitely something serious that someone was trying to do for the unemployed, but maybe people who had been put there to organize the course were not actually that capable [...] if I have to make a comparison with the internship that I did during high school, that one was organized in a completely different way: starting from the fact that there was a bus that took and accompanied all the guys, then the tutor had a well-detailed program and clear ideas about what we were supposed to do." (Graziano, 23, M, ME, U)

Margherita, too, describes negatively her attendance of a course at a vocational institute which was to serve as a macro coping strategy to improve her working prospects. She tells the story of how the discomfort experienced during the first three years spent in a vocational school in the Santa Rita district had a very heavy impact on her life. In those three years she had a very bad relationship with her teachers who "came in just to get paid and nothing more".

"we were the rejects, cause we weren't the teacher's pets, we kept sitting there at school, you could study all you wanted you'd never get a pass in the oral tests or various other things, various tests". (Margherita, 24, F, ME, U)

As a "reject" in the teachers' estimations, Margherita experienced a series of quite grotesque episodes which generated in her a high level of frustration regarding learning and did not help the building up of self-confidence, and against which she tried to react by working during her studies:

"I did it mostly for myself because on the floor I didn't really shine, I was very unsure of myself from that point of view, I was afraid to carry two plates and things like that, so I had the chance to make a little extra over the weekend, I told myself 'at least I'll learn something while I'm doing it'". (Margherita, 24, F, ME, U)

The judgement of Costantino (26, M, HE, TE) on his particular experience with Youth Guarantee is very negative, not because of questions regarding the company or the type of work, which he liked, but rather due to the lengthy bureaucratic process necessary to start the internship and to complete it.



When Anna (27, F, HE, TE) tried to use them, she found they did not respond to her needs. They were not addressed to her specific work profile, and, moreover, they did not provide enough information.

Nor did Mara (29, F, ME, U) have any good experiences with the Employment Office: she cannot really understand what it is they do and, in general, she thinks that there is inadequate information about policies implemented or benefits which might be available. When she was considering starting her own business, opening a cake shop with her sister and a friend, she went to an office of the Municipality offering support to new entrepreneurs to prepare and launch their business. She had approached this office known as MIP – Mettersi in Proprio (Start Your Own Business) to ask for information, but she figured that she would need, in any case, to have her own capital, since they would not give her financial assistance, and, as such, she found it useless.

Renata (22, F, ME, U), for her part, had a 6-month internship through the Youth Guarantee programme, discovered through a friend, says that, for her, the usefulness of the placement office is strictly limited to her being able to do the internship. She, too, highlights the disorganization encountered in the service.

### 3.3.5 Conclusion

The results presented in these pages highlight the complexity of the situation regarding young Italians and the question of perceived well-being in connection with work and joblessness. The differences which emerge among the participants on this subject certainly reflect the composition of a sample which includes both individuals from among the long-term unemployed, this despite their young ages, but also individuals working with fixed-term contracts or under more solid contractual conditions. In line with international studies (De Witte, Pienaar & De Cuyper, 2015), long periods of unemployment seem to be an important determiner of the malaise perceived by young people, inducing intrusive thoughts, depressive states, profound worries about the future. It appears, however, that, for young Italians, the idea of work and stability is undergoing a transformation: some respondents point to the fact that the absence of contractual safeguards is a “problem shared”, some declare themselves to be worried about the future, though not desperate, since they can draw upon resources, both of a personal nature (optimism, determination) and of a social one (family of origin, above all). Work in the informal economy, where satisfying individual aspirations, seems at times not to be coupled with malaise. The significance of work from the point of view of identity emerges in many interviews both as the element sought and as the aspect which makes it possible even to live with situations of insecure employment in a sufficiently acceptable manner. This aspect might also be the result of a cognitive process of acceptance of the state of affairs, a kind of strategy to cope with precarity focusing on meaning.





Some young people observe, moreover, that at times it is work which has negative consequences on well-being: this happens when job demands are excessive (Bakker, Demerouti, 2007), managers are too exacting, and rewards are inadequate.

With regard to coping strategies, relations and support represent an important element for well-being alongside individual protection factors. Young Italians, ultimately, as highlighted in other sections of this report, seem to have little confidence in the possibility of finding support in the institutions which often appear on the periphery in discourses of work and well-being.

### 3.4 Socio-economic consequences

#### 3.4.1 Introduction

In this section, we focused on the socio-economic consequences of unemployment and job insecurity, as well as how they were subjectively perceived and defined by our interviewees.

As the literature reveals, in Italy young people exhibit a greater economic and social vulnerability in comparison with other age groups. They are exposed to a wide range of risks, coming from the institutional changes - welfare and labour market reforms - that occurred in the 1990s: specifically, they are at greater risk of being trapped in a secondary and sub-protected labour market and not being able to enter the insurance-based welfare system (Barbieri, 2011). In addition, more recently, they have been hit hard by the economic crisis.

The deterioration in labour market conditions has contributed decisively to the growing inequality, affecting young people in particular. In fact, their greater vulnerability has to do with the fact that they are more likely to hold short-term and atypical labour contracts and to be less paid; moreover, they tend to face higher unemployment risks and lower upward mobility opportunities, even when they held permanent contracts (Eurostat, 2016a). Therefore, since unemployment and low pay are the most relevant risk factors for poverty, in Italy, young people are the most likely to be at risk of poverty and social exclusion. In 2015, the percentage of young Italian people aged 16-24 at risk of poverty and social exclusion was 36.5% (+ 5.4% compared to 2007 and + 5.6% compared to EU28). Among young people aged 25-29, this reached 36.8%, 10% higher than the EU28 average (Eurostat, 2016b).

Poverty and social exclusion, as we know, do not affect only those who are economically inactive or unemployed (Barbieri and Cutuli, 2016). Considering the Italian in-work at-risk-of-poverty rate by age in 2015, those aged 25-29 were in the most serious condition with 12.6%, more than 4% higher than in 2007, and 3.4% above that of EU28 (Eurostat, 2016b).

In the absence of a minimum income scheme, young Italian people often needed to rely on their families, creating a phenomenon of hidden youth poverty, as well as



increased deprivation for their families. This enforced dependency on parents disguised the lack of opportunities and the poverty faced by young people (Saraceno, 2015). Family solidarity was able to shoulder the loss of income and employment among family members in the first period of the crisis, by making use of savings. However, as the crisis persisted, family strategies showed their weaknesses. The increase in economic deprivation reflects the worsening of family material living conditions. In fact, in Italy the proportion of people materially deprived in 2015 was very high (22.6%) compared to EU28 (17%) and more than half of those defined as materially deprived experienced severe material deprivation (four items of the nine difficulties considered in the indicator). According to Eurostat data, in 2015 the rate of severe material deprivation across the overall population in Italy (11.5 %) was higher than the average of the EU-27 (8.7 %) and *had* increased compared to 2007 (7%) (Eurostat 2016c).

In more general terms, as the literature argues, Italian young people are particularly exposed to the risk not only of not achieving economic stability over the course of their lives, but also of not maintaining or reaching a socioeconomic status in order to make and implement their life projects (Schizzerotto, 2002; Bertolini 2011; Busetta and Milito, 2010; Ranci, 2011; Forni 2015).

However, while much of the relevant research focuses on their objective economic conditions, little is known about how labour market exclusion and job insecurity impacts youths' individual feelings of economic and social insecurity, their perceptions of disadvantages related to their weak labour market attachment and their coping strategies.

In the report devoted to youth autonomy, we explored how economic conditions affect perceived autonomy and how autonomy is subjectively defined on the *basis* of available money and economic resources. We referred economic autonomy to the interviewees' perception to having one's own economic resources that are sufficient to face the expenses that they consider necessary for their own needs, in order to maintain their economic autonomy or to reach it in the future.

On the one hand, in the above-mentioned report, we investigated young people's experiences, their difficulties and coping strategies, which have been explicitly linked by the interviewees to the maintaining of their autonomy; on the other, this report deals with the social and economic consequences of their weak labour market participation. Among the issues covered in the following pages, we can mention e.g. what kind of social disadvantages they perceive in their daily lives and in planning their future (long-term financial planning), how they evaluate both their parents' and institutional support, what are their strategies to cope with irregularity or lack of income and about money management.



### 3.4.2 Economic consequences of unemployment, precarious and temporary employment or labour market exclusion

#### Material deprivation

One of the most serious economic consequences of unemployment and job insecurity is material deprivation. As we know, material deprivation refers to a state of serious economic strain, defined as the enforced inability to afford indicative material standards, considered by most people to be desirable or even necessary to lead an adequate life (Atkinson, 2003; Whelan, Nolan, Maitre, 2008; Guio, Gordon, Marlier, 2012).

It's interesting to note that many respondents did not represent themselves as economically deprived. As we said in the report focused on autonomy, even though most were either unemployed or temporary workers and lacked housing autonomy, many perceived their economic situation in terms of self-sufficiency. They levelled down their economic self-sufficiency, defining it solely in terms of their ability to acquire their own personal necessities, by cutting expenses deemed unnecessary, such as holidays or leisure activities. Rather, as we will see later, though they didn't feel materially deprived, some considered themselves as deprived regarding their needs of social life.

*"Basically, what do I need it for, apart from the rent? It's not that I'm a big spender, other than eating a sandwich when I'm out, or another beer... eating dinner out, going to discos - zero, I also don't travel much, that is, I'll take a train, stay with friends that can host me" (Carlo, M, 26, LE, TE)*

*If you want to go to cinema, you need money, or if you want to go bowling, but I do not like these activities, I do not care... I like more have a walk and I can do when I want to; this is a kind of thing that also people without money can do" (Concita, F, 23, LE, U)*

*"However, with €500 per month, I could to maintain my car and scooter, always considering that I did not have to help anybody else and I only had myself to think of, right? But I already had to think about car insurance, motorcycle insurance, car gasoline, motorcycle gasoline, my own stuff, gifts, some gifts to my girlfriend based on my salary because then my salary increased (going from €500 to €700), and I could do more, but there was always something (meaning 'with renunciations')... that's why I say work is hard work (Matteo, M, 28, ME,U)*

Moreover, many respondents did not represent themselves as economically deprived, regardless of being forced to live with their parents. Considering our interviewees' experiences, particular attention needs to be paid to their housing arrangements, as this variable seems to make the difference. As already mentioned in the report on autonomy, most of the interviewees lived in the parental house and for most of them, giving up their housing autonomy is the outcome of the lack of economic self-



sufficiency, due to their very limited financial resources. Talking about their earnings, as most have a precarious or non-contractual job, if they have any, they mentioned very low pay (often 400 – 500 euros).

*“It was a contract for occasional employment. I earned by the hour, and the pay was (thinking) two euros and thirty cents an hour, so let's say €25 on normal days, 30/40 on very long days, such as those from five in the morning until ten at night [...] Jobs, in fact, it's not that there aren't any jobs - there are, it's only that they are all underpaid, we are always talking about jobs paying € 300-400 a month, which are fine when you're twenty, but when you're already older than twenty-five, you get tired of only earning €300 a month”* (Costantino, M, 27, HE, TE).

Low pay and/or work and income discontinuity represent important risk factors of deprivation and explain why the interviewees can be exposed to economic strain. As in many cases, their wages are not enough for them to live on, as mentioned, so living with their parents represents a widespread strategy to make ends meet, and allows them to cover their basic daily needs, such as gasoline, cigarettes, a few beers with friends, while freeing them from the demands to pay for house expenses.

In this scenario, family economic background is a very important factor: those who have a supportive family don't feel under economic strain and, if the parental financial resources are good, can not only cover their personal expenses but also put aside savings. Those who have a less supportive family, have a lower level of subjectively assessed economic sufficiency and are forced to make sacrifices and self-imposed limitations.

Camilla (F, 23, ME, NCJ), for example, reported that she supported her parents by helping them to pay for their medical expenses. Andrea (M, 24, ME, TE) said:

*“I regularly give 200-300 euro a month – when I'm working, naturally; when I'm not working, I can't do that... but now that I have money in the bank and my mother needs it, I can (help her) (...) she runs the house and keeps the books”.*

Margherita has always been aware of her parents' limited resources. She pays for her own cigarettes, goes out only on Saturday evenings with a 10 Euro budget, for instance, choosing clubs with free entry and putting her mother's teachings into practice:

*“I know how to make sacrifices, and this has been useful to me, you know. I am the first to say, ‘I can't go out because I have no money’, but I've never been ashamed to say it, not like many others who come up with excuses instead, cause they're ashamed to say it. There's nothing to be ashamed of, because this is the situation and you shouldn't*



*feel ashamed, it's not something you've wanted, it wasn't your parents who wanted to stay at home without work. It's the way it is, you've got to make sacrifices [...] learn to manage"* (F, 24, ME, U).

Without a supportive family, unemployment – and the subsequent lack of income – or very low pay represent a serious risk factor: in fact, coming from a disadvantaged family background negatively affects the respondents' economic situation. Some interviewees stressed that their living conditions were greatly constrained by lack of resources and perceived themselves as severely materially deprived people. They lived in households unable to afford necessities considered primary. For them, deprivation also affects the parental family, as in the case of Mara (29, F, ME, U), and its impact involves not only the material standard of living.

Mara's family lived on a tight budget. They owned the house where they live (they finished paying off the mortgage a few years ago), but they needed to face unexpected expenses (the death of Mara's grandfather, some fees for miscalculating the taxes were needed). Mara says that "*we've always... tightened our belts*". Mara's father lost his job in 2000 while she was in high school (the company where he had worked for 32 years failed and the owners absconded), and since then he has done some small temporary jobs before paying off the contributions to retire earlier. In relation to this episode, Mara mentioned not only the financial straits, but also the depression her father went through and the fact that, as a teenager she couldn't really understand or accept that they had to cut expenses and were not able to afford some things. With regard to the family budget management, each Friday Mara's mother withdrew €200 from her bank account, which had to be enough for all the expenses of that week. In the past, when the family's economic situation was better, her mother started to put away €100/month for each of the two daughters to create a fund to build their future or as a retirement fund. However, they needed to take money out of this fund to pay for Mara's grandfather's funeral. When living conditions are so compromised, any unforeseen expense can reveal the household's strong vulnerability to poverty.

Living in the South of Italy is an additional risk factor, as data related to the labour market shows: in 2015, the unemployment rate of young people aged 15-24 was 40.3% nationally, while in the South it reached 54.1% (Istat 2016a). Moreover, the South is traditionally characterized by very high levels of risk of poverty and material deprivation (in 2015 among the whole population living in the South 46.4% was at risk of poverty and social exclusion, compared to 28.3% at the national level) (Istat 2016b).

Gaia's family situation was difficult: she lived in Catania, was unemployed, and she was not able to rely on any source of money at the time of the interview. Her father was an autonomous worker (electrician) but he was suffering from the negative effects of the economic crisis (for 7 years now). Gaia said:



*“When he (the father) comes back home, he brings shopping bags full of fruit because old people sometimes pay him this way. [...] He can't say no and given that the work he does is not so very costly, he accepts them. Sometimes people also pay him with bad checks. We have found our bank account empty many times” (Gaia, F, 24, ME, U).*

Tamara (F, 23, ME, NEET) was unemployed too, as were her father and her brother. Her mother was a housewife, but she sometimes worked irregularly, taking care of an old woman without a regular labour contract. Tamara and her family didn't even have enough money for food and had no telephone at home. They got around on foot since they had no car and could not even afford a bus ticket:

*My mom is now doing a small job, in the sense that she takes care of an elderly lady, aged 88... but then, how long will this old woman stay alive? So, my mom is saving something, in order to buy a car. My father would like her to use her money only for the bills, taxes, grocery shopping, and he does not agree with her about buying a car. However, rightly, a car would be very useful. We go everywhere on foot, even when we have to go to the doctor!”*

Of course, young people living by themselves are more exposed to the risk of being economically deprived. An unforeseen event can disrupt a precarious balance, such as in the case of Carlo: he is a male breadwinner in Southern Italian. When his car broke down, he was forced to put off his wedding because he had to buy a new car with the money he had saved for his wedding ceremony, despite the fact that he had really longed for it.

### **Budget management and short term financial planning**

The majority of interviewees who are unemployed or precarious are still living with their family and they are using their salaries, in the period in which they work, for every day expenses. In fact, they can count on the economic resources of their family for housing and eating, a situation that some feel comfortable about, and some feel less comfortable. In general, they feel better if they can at least pay by themselves for their small expenses and free time. They try to economize, but they are not able to save money if they are precarious or unemployed or NEETS. In general, young people living with their parents do not have any particular budget plan.

Young people, who had been precarious at the beginning of their career, try to save money when they have a permanent job, while they are still living in the family home. They can plan a little bit more about their life. For example, Giulia, who is 28 years old, does not contribute to the household expenses, and she is saving money to buy a car and a house and then move in with her boyfriend. She does not want to rent a house





because it is a “waste of money”, but she plans to take out a bank loan using her mother as a guarantor for the house mortgage.

Some people with a temporary job manage to be economically autonomous and leave the parental home, if they earn enough. The question of the level of wage it is important, because at the moment, salaries in Italy are very low. Economists theorize that the salaries of precarious people are supposed to be higher to compensate (Berton, Ricchiardi, Sacchi, 2009) the irregularity of payment, but they are usually not. After having worked under the table, Paolo now has a temporary job, his average wage is € 1,050 - 1,100 a month, while taking into account other occasional jobs, he reaches €1,400 - 1,500 a month, and he is economically autonomous. He is living with his partner and they have a baby, which is the reason why he left the parental home. However, he is not sure about the renewal of his current fixed-term labour contract, and he reflects the male breadwinner, since his partner, after having achieved a high school diploma, is unemployed and only takes care of their family. They manage with effort to cover every day expenses, housing, food, but they are not prepared for unexpected expenses:

So, such unanticipated levels of expenditure could cause cumulative disadvantages to a certain extent. His objectives for the future are, respectively, marrying his partner and then completely furnishing his house, thanks to his father-in-law. However, some unpleasant happenings occurred, thus delaying his projects.

*“The last month (before the marriage) it happened to me a misfortune, my car broke. Thus, what happened to me? I had to buy a new car, a new one, always used. Buying a car meant saying that all the money I and my wife collected for the marriage, we had to spend for a thing that we never imagined. (Paolo, M, 23, LE, PE).*

In other cases, the affordability of housing and daily expenses affect life choices in a less direct way: for example, Chiara decided to move to Turin also because the rent was cheaper than in Milan.

*“As I couldn’t have any salary or anything... and to afford a rent in Milan was very difficult, I was of gipsy, roaming around between friends in Milan, and also other people, friends, relatives that I have in the North, [...] (they) told me ‘why don’t you... come on, come to live in Turin, for what you have to do, Turin or Milan is the same’ and I checked the rent prices in Turin and I said ‘ok, fine’. So, I came to Turin” (Chiara, F, 28, ME, PE).*



A few people manage to be partially autonomous while working with precarious jobs and leave the parental home, but they are still receiving some economical support from their family. For example, Emma left the parental home when she found a job through a four-year apprenticeship contract within one year after obtaining her diploma. She decided to go and live alone only after signing the contract, sought a low rent (€ 380) and took on the partial restructuring expenses of the apartment, in which her parents helped her.

In this case, they are more careful about managing their daily budget. Emma, for example, keeps her expenses under control with a forecast over time, using an Excel program, provided by her father, which calculates a simulation of future spending commitments, both regular (rent) and one-off (car insurance), thus not spending in the present if the program reports that she will not have enough money to support the one-off expenses in the future. This leads her to renounce free-time activities, which her friends still living at home do not do. But she thinks that compared to them, she is living better, because she uses money for her all-important autonomy:

*R: "I don't, cause I think about it, if I have to spend 50 Euro to go out for dinner, I prefer to spend 20 and use the rest for the shopping, for the electricity bill, right? "Something I haven't asked, about your condition now, do you think you're better or worse off than the people your age in relation to the things you can do?"*

*R: "I think better, cause it's a question of priorities, a subjective question. My friends, they spend to go out and party, here and there, honestly I prefer spending to live alone, to pay my rent" (Emma, F, 21, ME, TE).*

Living together with a partner helps the possibility of becoming economically autonomous, if both of them are working. Today, Francesca and her partner are both working, so she gives herself treats, such as going to a restaurant or enrolling her daughter in a swimming course. Therefore, she is still able to save money, although she would like to do it more in order to achieve her future plans regarding family and work. But in recent times, precariousness and in particular the resulting lack of protection such as 'maternity leave' creates vicious circles in which, in addition to the emotional impact, the expenses are increasing, such as those for looking after the child:

*"I was unlucky cause I didn't manage, I breastfed her for three months, then I went back to work, what was I supposed to do? The powdered milk, not the normal one because it wasn't right for her, I had to give here powdered milk for colic, it was 30 Euro a box and a box would last me a week. 30 Euro is a lot, really is" (Francesca, F, 24, LE, TE).*



Always due to economic reasons, the child could not go to kindergarten:

*R: "Now she's two and a half and she speaks, but really just a little". I: "And you want to give her some experience (sending her to school)".*

*R: "Exactly. And anyway, it's good for children to stay with other children. Thing is, obviously, I didn't have the chance, what could I do? With my salary, I'd have to give them half of my salary, I couldn't make it".*

Francesca shares the feeling of uncertainty with her partner and her friends:

*"I never feel 100 per cent safe, because we live, me and my boyfriend, in some kind of uncertainty, cause neither of us has a fixed-term contract, I mean a permanent contract, and it's hard to make plans, in the sense that maybe I just say: 'I wanna travel somewhere' and I'm never sure I can do it". "My classmates from secondary or lower secondary school, so many of them are at home, unemployed, really so many of them"*

Therefore, her most immediate projects are to be able to save money in order to marry her partner and then achieve her business plan.

Alessandro's parents pay for his rent (which is € 250/month) and they put € 100 a month into a retirement fund for him. Alessandro covers all the other expenses himself and tries to save some money, between € 50 and € 100, each month. Few years ago, Alessandro received a sum of money as a reimbursement for a car accident his grandmother had been involved in (the sons and grandsons of his grandmother received a sum). That created a basis for him that would assure him some certainty and tranquillity, and a bank account.

The majority of the interviewees have a low degree of indebtedness, in terms of both short and long-term debts. With regard to short-term debts, the well-known parental support for young Italian people has an important impact also in terms of protection from the long-term consequences of indebtedness. In fact, given their labour market vulnerability, young people can cope with their budget problems by *choosing not to pay*: they pay only what can create short-term sanctions (Perrin-Heredia, 2013a). This choice generates strong long-term sanctions that dramatically increase the risk of social exclusion: tax collection notices by the national institution responsible for collecting unpaid amounts, complete with interest and fines, that can generate compulsory seizure of personal property (dispossessions); the label of 'bad payer' will prevent access to credit also for professional purposes (short-term financial exclusion). The interviewees, as mentioned also in the report on autonomy, do not manage their housing expenses, so they not only have no problems with unpaid bills, but they also have the possibility to use their money, if they have a job, to pay for other goods without asking for any debt.



In other words, the lack of autonomy is the most important protection for the young Italian interviewees from the difficulties of debt management. In some cases, this can be viewed as a coping strategy to face the economic consequences of precariousness: living with parents is what the young Italians do when they have the perception of not being able to face expenses such as rents, mortgage rates, but also bills, insurance policies, and taxes.

*“For expenses, with regard to gasoline and that stuff, my parents help me out, like the insurance for my scooter, I don't have to deal with that” (Franco, M, 30, HE, NCJ).*

*“I feel like my hands are tied [...] because I'd like to find a more stable job where I'd feel less stressed, where I'm earning for my future. With my present job, unfortunately, I can't have a future... for a rental of a house you need 500, 600 euros a month... How can I pay all the bills, expenses, and things? Then the State always raises taxes, how can one do? It can't be done!” (Aurelio, M, 24, ME, TE).*

With regard to long-term debts, the interviewees have no mortgages. Firstly, the majority of them live with their parents, the few who have left parental home live in a home that is a property belonging to their parents or in a rented home. In Italy this situation is confirmed in the economic literature (Jappelli et al. 2013) and is due, also and overall, to a structural factors: the bank sector denounces a high uncertainty in the recovery of debts by banks and the young people without a long-term contract have no access to credit, in many cases, even if they can count on a parental guarantee. Moreover, in most cases, banks require that the clients are able to cover the housing costs with their savings for a measure of 20%. For example, as previously mentioned, Giulia plans to take out a bank loan using her mother as a guarantor for the house mortgage: despite the fact that she has a long-term employment, for her it is not a possibility in the present but a project for the future, when she hopes to have some savings: “my idea is that I want to buy a house, I want to buy a car, so I save money, and so then I can buy this thing” Giulia (F, 27, HE, PE). Now she does not receive any economic aid from her parents and manages to save around € 500 a month in the bank.

### **Long term financial planning (retirement plans, pension schemes and savings)**

The majority of interviewees do not worry about their future and they are concentrated on short-term economic consequences, so they are not worried or care little about long-term economic consequences. Some of them are not aware of the regulation of the pension system and the risk of not having an adequate pension in the future if they don't pay regular contributions during their working period. In fact, the Italian pension system is built around the idea of permanent contracts and a discontinuous work path of unemployment periods or precarious jobs can lead to a very low pension. Moreover, in recent years the Italian pension system has undergone a series of reforms that have



extended working life by raising the retirement age and giving priority to the criterion of old age rather than contributions made over the years (Bertolini and al., 2016).

Some of them have started to think about the future, but for the time being, they are not able to do anything about their economic future. In fact, they earn too little for saving or investing anything.

*"I am thinking about retirement, especially now I've begun to think, "so for all the work I'm doing, are they paying my contributions...because I've know that in any case, my job allows me to eat today... Before it was more "It's enough to eat with today... I'm paying the rent, I'm paying at home...". I'm beginning to understand what type of contract it is, I'm beginning to look at my CUD (pension) module if... I'm starting to... retirement is a long way off but I've start to get interested in these things" (Anna, F, 28, ME, TE).*

The young Italian interviewees do not think about retirement plans because they have to face other problems in the short-term period: they are able to save, but they use their savings to face unemployment periods or to face the expenses of leaving the parental home. This strategy is well linked with the lack of autonomy:

*"Now I live with my parents. So, I'm living with my parents, and this has also allowed me... to save. Because whoever lives with their parents and can't manage to put anything aside... is a fool. Because this money will be necessary. Now that I'm going to a rental, you have to have those €500 a month to pay... (if you're) working you can manage to pay them, but if you hadn't put something aside, how were you supposed to get started?" (Giovanni, M, 26, LE, PE).*

Nowadays, their savings can also be useful in order to improve their own skills so as to improve their working situation. This is the example of Costantino (M, 28, HE, TE): his choice has been to remain with his parents to set aside savings, which he now plans to invest in his education.

For some, their feelings regarding saving for the future are mainly devoted to concerns about the lack of a pension... then for some youths, it is better to work under the table, since they feel that they will never have a pension anyway, so paying contributions just means losing money:

*"Even without a contract, really. I would work, I would work again, paid under the table. Anyway, me, I won't have the pension myself. Then why should I leave them the*



*money? To pay someone else retirement benefits? /No, really / (laughing sarcastically), who will pay for my pension then?" (Mara, F, 31, PE, U).*

This could be an unexpected effect of the regulation of the pension system. Seeing as it is commonly thought that young people will not have access to pensions, their reaction is that it is better to work under the table. This is contrary to economic rationality: precarious people would have to save more for their future or to invest in private pensions, because their pensions will be lower. According to a study on labour market uncertainty and private pension planning in Europe (Paskov, 2011): those who rationally should save more, such as precarious people, are those who do not invest in private pensions. Rational decision-making with regards to long-term binding decisions is increasingly difficult.

Some of them have the idea that if you have no money, you cannot plan your future.

*"My worry is to have no future. I mean, if this is the future I have, if I have to stay at my parents' place... I don't know. I mean, it's find... until a certain point. In this moment, I don't see any future... it's bad to say so, but it's like that. The money, really, the money makes the future I feel like I'll become, I don't know. A tramp of the future, anyway...?" (Mara, 31, PE, U).*

In some cases, the father or the mother had created a pension plan for them.

### **3.4.3 Social consequences of unemployment, precarious and temporary employment or labour market exclusion**

Material deprivation, due to unemployment and job insecurity, can affect social life and make it difficult to take part in relationships. If economic deprivation leads to a lack of goods, services, and comforts normally enjoyed or at least widely accepted as primary goods, on the other hand social deprivation implies a non-participation in the roles, relationships, duties, rights, and responsibilities implied by being a member of a given society or its subgroup, as first highlighted by Townsend (1987).

People who have to deal with precarity can face additional challenges in starting or maintaining a family, in forming or maintaining friendships, in getting involved in community life, and in enjoying recreational activities during their leisure time. We explored these issue in our interviews, identifying some recurring issues.

#### **Personal and family life**

First, as we already stressed in the report focused on autonomy, job insecurity and limited economic resources have led many interviewees to delay leaving the parental home and starting a new family. This is the main and the most serious social





consequence of their labour market exclusion or weak attachment, as diffusely highlighted in the interviews.

Giulia reported that the lack of economic autonomy affected her ability to achieve housing autonomy. She would like to live with her boyfriend, but he is the owner of a cafe, and he does not have enough stable economic resources. She did not receive money from her parents, but did not contribute to household expenses, which are paid by her mother.

R: *“Yes... I mean ... now I know it's I'll be here for a few years. My intention is to go and live with my boyfriend but now he has a café but not yet economic stability.”*

I: *“Why ‘not yet’ ... is it a new business?”*

R: *“ He has had it for three years. The first year there were no problems but the second year he had to pay a lot of expenses and taxes. The result is that your real salary is less than a factory worker's. Maybe things will be improved in the next few years. Since we are going to live together, we must have enough money to pay the rent”* (Giulia, F, 27, HE, PE).

After almost 3 years of working as a shop assistant in a franchise selling socks and underwear, and about a year working at a call-center, one week before the interview Giulia signed a contract for a stable job at a medical clinic (with both administrative and nursing duties), seeing as she has got a degree in nursing. She manages to save around €500 a month in the bank. Having a job, she declared that: *“I know that in two years I will leave home, and then I'll start a family. I have a lot projects”*.

Unemployment and his family's difficult financial situation limited Andrea's prospects, starting with his inability to make plans to solve his problems.

*However you cannot bring a person to the point of marrying another person just because here, in Sicily, there is no life and a future/ (said quietly)”* (Andrea, M, 24, ME, TE).

Margherita is suffering from not being able to move in with her boyfriend, who works as an apprentice and earns around € 800 a month:

*“I feel stuck, cause if you work you can do everything, as long as you know how to manage things. Like, I mean, I managed to get my driving licence, I carried out my plan”* (Margherita, F, 24, ME, U).



The lack of a job prevents Margherita from thinking about her future life: “I feel powerless, I can't think about anything because I know fine right that I can't do it”.

As we mentioned, among the social consequences of young people's weak labour market attachment, one that is worrisome concerns the inability to project them into the future, and express and cultivate aspirations. Young people lack the tools they need to foresee and build their future. We mentioned that many respondents showed the difficulty of planning their future. While some interviewees could perceive their future only in the short term, others envisaged the possibility of limited action only.

The lack of adequate financial resources, and therefore of autonomy, not only raises the risk of severe economic deprivation, but also affects social relationships, including the most important of all.

As Andrea admitted, relations with his partner are more strained and conditioned by the lack of economic resources.

*“I really like to have a family, but I have to work out – not just for me but for everybody – how you can support a family on 800 euro a month from precarious work. Where can you find a girl who will say ‘I'd like to have a child?’ I hope we don't go back to the Middle Ages when they chose for you as a partner who had money. Can you imagine it? It won't be like that but it seems like that, that's the way things seem to be going. I have a lot of friends of both sexes who think the way I do. I'm still seeing a girl; frankly, I'm not very committed... but she's full of money, her family is very well-off, her father is a lawyer and her mother is a teacher, so let's say they both have steady jobs... They have a villa... honestly, I swear that in this period of life anybody would think not twice but three times, if only for this reason” (Andrea, M, 24, ME, TE).*

Some reported that the relational climate in the family is also affected by economic hardship.

For example, Tamara's family atmosphere was terribly unpleasant: due to the lack of work and the resulting serious economic difficulties, she has a very difficult relationship with her father:

*“I can't talk with my father. We don't get on well. With my mother, yes: since we have the same opinion about many things” (Tamara, F, 23, ME, U).*

In Tamara's opinion, her father makes the familiar atmosphere heavy: he has a hard time dealing with the family relationships, not showing any constructive attitudes and



behaviour towards the very difficult economic situation of the family. She also reports quarrels between her mother and father about how to use the little money they have earned.

### 3.4.4 Social life and friendships

Economic strain can also affect forming and maintaining friendships and social relationships. Exploring young people's social capital with regard to their job search channels, the interviews revealed that the majority of our respondents have small social networks, inadequate for mobilizing resources of social support.

This is mainly the case of some interviewees who lived in very deprived families. For example, Mara thought that, since she didn't have any money of her own, she could not have any social life. In fact, in her view, social life always implied costs that she could not afford. She seems to be increasingly detaching herself from social interactions: in a kind of vicious circle, she seems to have become more and more stuck, with decreasing agency and strength to look for any new occasions or try to find different ways to deal with the current situation.

*These are small things, but I am forced, anyway, not to do any Christmas present, because I cannot afford it. A silly thing, but... indeed, I'm saying to everyone not to give me any present. To go to the theatre, it's some I'd like to do, but with which money? So, these are all things that, anyway... force you to stay at home, at the end, to become asocial, because anyway if you go out, you want to drink a beer, you have to pay for a beer and can I go and ask money to my parents all the time? No I cannot"* (Mara, F,30, ME, U).

Tamara thought that the fact she could not go out with her friends because she could not even afford to buy a sandwich was embarrassing. She would like to live a normal life like other girls her age, but she did not have a real social life and friend relationships.

*Maybe they do not say to you 'pay me for the gasoline' if they give me a lift, but then in the evening at dinner they have a sandwich and I can't buy one. So, I avoid going out"* (Tamara, F, 23, ME, NEET).

The interviewees with a more disadvantaged – economic and cultural - family background revealed to be inserted very little into support social networks outside the family.



For example, Margherita has never relied on her peers, at school the teachers put her in the “*group of the rejects*” and she never had close friends. Yet, she has always been able to rely on her parents.

*“I’ve never been the type to go around and socialise very much and so, you know, also my relationship at school with my classmates and stuff, it was all very very minimal. But, at the same time, the figure of my parents, who have always been present, that’s been really helpful, they’ve really supported me a lot, they listened, they go me to talk, let it all out, it’s a type of support that’s always been there at home”* (Margherita, F, 24, ME, U).

On the contrary, other interviewees declared to have friends and they did not touch upon their social deprivation.

Carlo said he had many friends and represented them as important sources of hospitality, information about job opportunities, conviviality, sharing, and personal enrichment. However, among the respondents, his is a relatively lone voice.

*“I have a lot of friends, last year I had my birthday party here where I work... we offered the buffet, I just bought the fruit, the people from the shop in front of us gave me six liters of sangria... there were 38 people including long-time friends and friends I’ve met maybe just in the last five months, it’s so cool”* (Carlo, M, 26, LE, TE).

In general, it’s interesting to note that, in the interviews, respondents ended up talking a lot about their families of origin, but little about their relational fabric. Friends occurred briefly, as did partners. They talked about them almost solely when they had to talk about their future plans.

Our respondents seemed to represent themselves as ‘children’ rather than young people, even when they talked about themselves and their social life. They seemed to lack large social networks as well as activities and opportunities to create social capital and to be involved and engaged in relationships outside their own families.

Nevertheless, as we said, apart from the few cases mentioned, for the great majority of the respondents, disadvantages such as unemployment or precariousness are not perceived as reasons of shame and stigmatization. Therefore, we haven’t found any feelings of being left out of society.

### **Rights and entitlements**

Within the sample, there are both Italian and foreign interviewees, both sub-groups illustrate the difficulty of finding useful information for adapting first to an educational



path and then a work path. As we've already mentioned in the institutional report, the dynamics of the Italian labour market are influenced by the high level of informality in personnel-recruitment research procedures (Schneider and Buehn 2012; Vindigni, Scotti and Tealdi 2015). Most hiring is the result of informal contacts, based on social networks available to companies: with regard to the high number of small (often very small) companies in Italy as well as the structural difficulties of both the public and private sectors in matching supply and demand. This increases the problems of those who feel largely left outside this fabric of acquaintanceship, information, and ability to form relationships, which can become social capital to use when looking for a work position. This also applies, although not exclusively, to the children of immigrants.

According to the literature, youths with a migratory background arrive at adulthood more quickly than their Italian peers do. As many research findings show, young foreigners work and set up families earlier than their Italian peers, who – as has already been said - increasingly delay the passage from what is considered 'young' to what is considered adult (Conti, 2012). In this sense they are a novelty within the Mediterranean pattern toward adulthood which characterizes Italy.

The life stories gathered in the context characterized by becoming adult in times of crisis show similarities which both migrant youth and Italian youth share, as one interviewee stressed.

*“We do, we do everything that everybody else normally do [...]such as going dancing on Saturday night, or things like that, I don't know, like going the swimming pool now, it's almost the right time now... I mean, normal, normal things, normal life, it's not that, no, the fact I'm not working it's not that...[...] there isn't a big difference. Because, in the end, you work a little bit, and your friend works a little bit, maybe there's some little difference with the other guy who has a steady job. And so he... he has economic security. But between me and the other guy, I mean, between us there's not such a big difference” (Marius, M, 23, ME, TE)*

Concerns about the lack of job opportunities, budget constraints in daily life as well as in thinking about the future are similar, stressing how the relationship with the labour market has some transversal traits (e.g. lack of experience and sometimes possession of generic or devalued qualifications; lack of trust in public services) according to all the juvenile subgroups living in Italy (Aassve et al. 2013). However, some specificities emerge in what they recall and refer to when speaking about the link between the lack of job/ autonomy and the socio-economic consequences. The main issue deals with a kind of anxiety about finding their own place in society and the feeling of being “something different because of citizenship”.

In this framework, we have to distinguish between those who have clear integration paths in Italy and those who belong to the subgroups of young migrants who are



suffering from their recent arrival and their lack of social capital. The former are boys and girls strongly committed to their goals: obtaining a job, developing their skills as much as possible and maximizing their educational capital either in Italy or in other European countries.

*“I can keep all the money I earn for myself because I don’t have to pay rent or a mortgage, I haven’t got a car or any other major expenses. Naturally I will try harder, maybe go abroad... I don’t know, I’d like to go to Australia, I’ve spoken to some people who are there already, school friends who left, who had enough courage to get up and go (smiling). The idea is to work here for a while and then leave, gain some experience, in English, because you need it in any case in my work, catering... that is, I already speak it fairly well but I want to... you know... learn it”. (Pedro, M, 21, ME, PE)*

The words of the young interviewees outline an awareness of the difficulty of living in these troubled times. They call forth the image of young people “who can’t stand still”, “who can’t afford to miss any chance or opportunity”. Often, their social capital is supplied by the associations they attend and by projects aimed at the children of immigrants and/or the intercultural activities in which they take part. None of them mentions ethnic capital, the possibility of benefitting from the support of their community of origin. This is an indication that the settlement of foreign communities in Italy is still relatively recent and has not yet reached a widespread level of maturity and insertion in the country’s social fabric. On the other hand, they seem to be more assiduous and frequent visitors to employment services and training agencies than their Italian peers: in other words, more actively involved in constructing their life-stories – this applies equally to the youngest who live with their parents (or in families reconstituted after migration) and those – like Ionela – who live with a partner. There is no lack of those who adopt a fatalistic approach, choosing to live from one day to the next.

*“At the end, me and my mum share a thought: to live today, tomorrow you might find yourself... may your soul rest in peace... so, I mean, you live today and tomorrow... what needs to be done, it will be done” (Mohammed, M, 20, LE, U).*

In the second sub-group – i.e. composed of those who have the weakest social ties and a low level of integration (measured by language knowledge, skills in understanding how the context works) – attention is mainly devoted to gaining a stable societal position to help relatives in the home countries. This latter group shows how both public policies and third sector initiatives have to continue to think about a heterogeneous foreign youth population, where on the one hand the second





generations are growing up asking to be treated as Italians and on the other, youths belonging to the most vulnerable groups need strong social support.

A peculiar issue emerges from the interviews with the young immigrants. The feelings of being discriminated against in the labour market and in society come out in a couple of cases. Being a foreigner seems to be an additional disadvantage in both societal and economic life. The issue of the lack of Italian citizenship remains in the background: it comes to the fore when the spectre of competition between nationals and foreigners in the labour market and for social welfare makes its appearance.

Foreigners and Italians share the same problems: they are young, they live in impoverished families and they have to improve their skills if they want to succeed in the post-crisis knowledge-based society (Rosian and Ambrosi 2009). The foreigners seem to be more motivated to do just this. For some time studies have highlighted the many facets and the complexity of today's youth, connoted as a list of 'lacks' which makes this generation of "grown-up children" choosy and passive compared with the previous one, seen as "more active, more enterprising and more inclined to work" (Filandri, Negri, Parisi 2013). The anxieties gripping adult generations in the face of the younger one, which is growing and making new demands, living new styles of life (anxieties which increase when the young people are foreign) are not today a symptom of epochal change in the world of work and its rules, in affective relations and ways of building families, or inter-ethnic relations. The youth and adults, parents and their children, natives and foreigners no longer share broad frames of reference and interpretation of reality: it is not only a matter of interpreting reality differently but of profoundly different realities. Flexibilization of the work market, public devaluation of the national educational system, profound changes in local economies and in the social fabric of urban contexts, and increased multiculturalism are some of the transformations in young people's life-context. Definitions of Millennials or the Ipod generation (Taylor and Pew Research Center 2014), used by scholars and the media, do not distinguish according to citizenship: grandchildren of natives and children of immigrants are lumped together from the fact that they live in a local context characterized by the digitalization of an increasing number of life experiences. Even these definitions are subject to territorial, family social class, educational opportunities, and political distinctions—characteristics which continue to delineate differentiated urban situations, educational and training streams (Gjergji, 2015; Ricucci 2017).

### **3.4.5 Coping strategies and policy perception**

#### **Micro/individual coping strategies**

##### ***Living with parents: giving up one's housing autonomy***

As mentioned, the most widespread coping strategy among our respondents is giving up their housing autonomy. The acceptance of a relationship of dependence toward one's family is the other side of the strong support received. However, being dependent



on one's parents at a young age is not a source of shame or stigmatization, because in Italy social norms and cultural values determine solidarity within the family and the parents' willingness to help their children. Therefore, only some interviewees living with their parents have shown a feeling of social failure.

*"They are always available for me and I'm too. It is a reciprocal help: if there is no help within the family, to whom one could ask for being supported? To those who are unknown people? I don't think so"* (Giacomo, M, 20, LE, TE).

*"I DO NOT WANT TO LIVE WITH MY parents but not because of them, but for myself because I want to be autonomous. I am forced to stay with them; this is the problem... if I had the opportunity, I would go away, but not so much for them, for me, but I cannot do this because /nobody/ allows me this (she means no employer gives her work)"* (Gaia, F, 25, ME; U).

### **Saving money (Precautionary Savings)**

Most interviewees are used to saving money: they save when they are working, putting aside money for periods of unemployment; they save money living at their parental home, in order to pursue and reach housing autonomy and/or satisfy their own personal needs despite their limited economic resources.

*"Money matters... it matters a lot... I spend, but not stupidly, in the sense that fortunately I'm the kind of person who puts money aside to use later, I'm responsible about things like that and still have some money in the bank left over from McDonald's although I haven't worked there for months"* (Andrea, M, 24, ME, U).

*"Considering that I still live with my parents, I have tried to set aside at least a good 60% of my monthly salary (about €1,000 a month net)"* (Costantino, M, 27, LE, TE).

### **Living with less**

Many interviewees declared that they keep their expenses under control by paying attention to what they buy, reducing budget items considered not necessary, such as the expenses related to leisure, culture, and social life. For example, renouncing free-time activities is the main strategy for our interviewees, in particular those living outside the parental house and having a temporary, poorly paid contract, if they are oriented toward housing autonomy.

*"For me the important thing is being able to pay rent, eat, and buy cigarettes without having to ask anybody for anything. If I achieve that amount, I'm relieved, for the bills and the rent. Then the rest, everything else is... extra..."* (Carlo, M, 26, LE, TE).



Unemployed young people, especially if coming from or living with a deprived family, appeared to struggle to get by and cope with their low standard of living. Some interviewees can make ends meet with sacrifices and their efforts have led to psychological stress.

### ***Going abroad***

Among the coping strategies against the socio-economic consequences of the absence of (regular and stable) work, one that should be mentioned is going abroad. Especially young people from the South of Italy see other countries as having more possibilities to create a future. For example, Gaia is seriously considering the opportunity of moving to the USA with her current boyfriend, an American marine, looking for a dignified life that here, in Italy, she thinks she would not be able to build and live. This would be a hard and emotionally costly choice for her to do, since - she states - she would not leave her country and her city, for reasons linked to the lack of work and to the impossibility of achieving her dream and to achieve her life project in her own land:

*“I would not leave Sicily because it is my home, my place but /what can I do/? (Bitterly) It’s spirit of survival! (Gaia, F, 24, ME, U).*

### ***Developing a time perspective “focused on the present”***

Another micro/individual coping strategy involves focusing on the present, on immediate needs and short-term goals and avoiding thinking about the future or lowering one’s expectations. As we mentioned in the report devoted to autonomy, most of our respondents did not show the ability to project themselves into the future and to make plans. The future doesn’t seem to be an important dimension.

*“Not many plans, more than anything else, you improvise... you adjust things” (Tommaso, M, 22, ME, U).*

*“I wouldn’t know what other great future plans, that is... I’m trying to see if I can take a few trips, arrange things by myself, yes...” (Edoardo, M, 30, HE, TE).*

### ***Living with a working partner***

Living together with a partner, if he/she is working, helps to be economically autonomous, as in the above-mentioned case of Francesca. Even if both the partners are precarious and poorly paid they can count on two salaries, while the fixed costs are shared by two working people. This means a different model of family compared to the traditional and more diffuse 'male breadwinner' model in Italy.



Working two jobs to earn more money or volunteering to work more hours than necessary in the hope of being hired or renewed are two other common coping strategies among the interviewees.

### **Meso-coping strategies**

#### ***Turning to parents' support***

Literature investigated whether being materially disadvantaged increases the likelihood of social disintegration (the accumulation thesis) or whether poor people can count on more support (compensation thesis), showing country-specific variations, with regard to the role played by the welfare state regime, cultures and degrees of social support, and household composition. The link between material and social disadvantage is weaker in the Mediterranean than in Northern European countries (Bohnke 2015).

In Italy, family solidarity is traditionally very strong and also institutionalised in subsidiarity regulations under the social welfare system (Saraceno 2004). Therefore, the fact that young people in precarious material circumstances turn to their parents first is not surprising. This is the most widespread coping strategy adopted by our interviewees to 'navigate' precarious labour market opportunities.

We already highlighted the strong and crucial role of the family of origin as the major source of social support and a vehicle for social integration: we underlined that it may balance young people's limited access to the labour market and the subsequent economic consequences. A vast amount of research supports our findings, stressing the family support during youth transitions to the labour market.

Using family socio-economic resources, including the home, is necessary in order to deal with the lack of economic autonomy for those who are unemployed or temporary and low-paid workers.

Families enable young people to continue looking for a stable work or, as in the case of Lara, for the job they like, providing them enough stability to navigate unstable work options. Of course, the cultural and economic family background matters.

For example, Lara was a young woman with a high level of education who makes a living doing discontinuous jobs, predominantly paid under the table. Formally unemployed, she perceived herself as a precarious worker in search of fulfilling work experience. She was considering moving to France, which she imagined offers greater opportunities for growth. She was keen to create a personal working and existential path, in which she feels realized. Living with her mother is described broadly in positive terms, her desire for autonomous housing remains in the background.

*“As support, well, of course the family, that is, my family is very present, especially my mom //hmm// so she is my number one support. [...] The subject of money has never*



*been a taboo in the family, so when you need (it) you say so [...] I am still very lucky, I earn my living with my odd jobs, but I'm trying in some way to continue in what I like, because I don't want to find a job that I don't like, that's right, I do not want to find a job just for the sake of having a job" (Lara, F, 27, HE, NCJ).*

Turning to family support is a coping strategy also for the interviewees who are still studying. Some of them continue to live at home, after finished studies, while they are looking for a stable and good job. This so-called "waiting strategy" (Fullin 2004, Bertolini 2011) is very used in Italy, due to the lack of economic and social support from the labour policies for people looking for the first job. Among middle social classes living in the parental house and being supported by parents is vital to young people's ability to find a good social position (Negri, Filandri, 2010).

Supportive interactions with parents granted many interviewees the opportunity to save money, be protected against any spell of unemployment. Moreover, as mentioned, family relationships were often described as quite fine:

*"They are always available for me and I'm too. It is a reciprocal help: if there is no help within the family, to whom one could ask for being supported? To those who are unknown people? I don't think so" (Giacomo, M, 20, LE, TE).*

However, in some cases, the family seems to inhibit youth transition to adulthood and autonomy. Concita represents the most emblematic cases: she thinks that her parents would consider it a betrayal if she made a decision to leave the parental home without getting married first. Her brother had done the same in the past and her parents considered this decision as an abandonment of the home and also of them.

*The fact that I still live with my [parents] I do not know, maybe in Sicily is a normal thing because only when I get married I can go out from my parental home. /This is something of normal in Sicilian [tradition]/ (laughing) For us it /is NORMAL/ (marking). [...] For now, I consider a normal thing living with my parents because all of my friends are living with their parents but also when someone is employed, he/she cannot go away from home because we are in Sicily and /one can not escape from parental home/ (laughing). Only for what. So I live in a very normal way this thing to live with my family" (Concita, F, 23, LE, U).*

If living in the parental home is a protective factor, as it allows young people to save money and reach housing autonomy, and/or satisfy their own personal needs despite



their limited economic resources, on the other hand, it seems to strengthen young people's dependency on their family and to postpone their real autonomy.

Some interviewees represented their dependence on parents as very heavy.

*“I WISH I HAD MY OWN HOME! I GREATLY WISH THIS! To live with my boyfriend, to create a family, even only to cohabit without get married; just me and him, not like we are doing now, that from time to time he comes to my mother's house and stays with us for some days, but we are not alone. We are in good company with my mother, but that is another thing”* (Erika, F, 29, LE, NEET).

On the contrary, as we said, support from friends is valued relatively modestly, probably because – as some interviewees noted – friends are also in the same situation, facing the challenges of instability in the labour market without adequate support from public policies.

### **Macro-coping strategies**

Thinking about how to deal with the consequences of being unemployed or precarious also means observing if and when interviewees make use of available public policies and services (Eichhorst et al. 2013; Barslund, and Busse 2014).

Against the background of the persistent economic crisis and structural shortfalls in the Italian productive system, one asks oneself about relations with public services set up by the state or local bodies, or the incidence of extraordinary measures – such as Youth Guarantee – in favour of employment.

In general, when talking about policies, social benefits, and social welfare, the interviewees showed a certain vagueness, often covered by strong statements that, however, were often inaccurate or based on word-of-mouth.

*“There's an unbelievable queue [to access the Employment Office], you have to be there at 7am to do a registration that takes 2 minutes... if it was online that would be easier, but...”* (Mara, F, 30, ME, U)

*“I've tried to enrol in the Youth Guarantee, not having any kind of answer [...] I did the procedure online... nothing, the emptiness, really”* (Alessandro, M, 27, HE, U).

This element also indicates a serious lack of communication on the part of public institutions: not only because of the difficulty of letting potential beneficiaries know about the existence of initiatives and opportunities on behalf of young people but also – and principally – to the extent that the message communicated by the main





stakeholders and mass media is often unclear or insufficient to furnish correct information about the services that are actually available.

*“...to be helped in finding a job... my friends have tried but they found it to be no good because they didn't do anything of what they had written... or a subsidy that does not mean that you necessarily abuse the subsidy and you are staying at home all day being lazy. [...] No, I was never interested in all these things. Apart from that I do not know... I didn't know... I never knew where to go, then, I do not know, I was never much interested” (Paolo, M, 23, LE, TE).*

In some cases, the support of public policies – often practised in collaboration with third-sector subjects – turns out to be essential.

*“Yes, I mean... It was positive cause I am one who plays football so it was a passion, something I really like, but (we also had the opportunity) to find a job, we had some meetings to prepare ourselves for job interviews, to write our CVs... and then we participated, when we got into L'Oréal, we went to (\*\*\*) [town in the Province of Cuneo] to tell them about this project, cause they also wanted to do it over there... so it was positive” (Paolo, M, 23, LE, TE).*

For example, Erika found her latest job thanks to Youth Guarantee, and she likes it very much. For many years she had worked without any contract, social-security contributions, and sickness or maternity leave. All her life, she has adopted measures to stretch her income, such as reducing her electricity consumption to keep the bill low.

*“Youth Guarantee had a positive impact on me. I can say that it saved me because it gave me a job, something to do, an occupation. It was positive. It was the only positive thing that happened to me” (Erika, F, 29, LE, NEET).*

But efficient functioning of public services is not enough: companies too need to be attentive and collaborative.

*“There must be a positive response from the employers also. [...] they do not trust the young and the Programme [...] They are afraid that maybe allowing this training then, maybe in the end, they will have to pay the young people, in my opinion” (Tamara, F, 23, ME, NEET).*



A proactive attitude (often counter-intuitively absent) on the part of young people themselves, frequently discouraged by disappointments and nostalgia for a – partly incorrect – vision of past where relations with the labour market were less complicated.

The case of Giacomo could be explanatory. His perceptions of institutional employment services and their policies are negative. Even though he has never used any kind of public service, he has a strongly pessimistic feeling about them. He stresses that institutions don't work well and that they are especially inefficient in the labour market: *"If you want to get a job, you need a kick in the ass"*. He refers to some friends' negative experiences with the employment services. These stories have increased his disappointment concerning public institutions and - as generally happens with elderly people [he stresses several times that he feels more aware and mature than his peers] – he harks back to a kind of golden age where students found jobs after earning their diploma.

*"Once upon a time, things were good: if you were enrolled in training course you were sure of getting a job after finishing the educational path. There were people who guided you towards the available job. Today, everything has changed"* (Giacomo, M, 20, LE, TJ).

If one way of reacting to the social and economic effects of work precariousness is to enrich one's skill set, further problems and negotiating assessment of the service appear. In this connection, young interviewees often complain about the low quality of training courses and work experience supported by public funds – as well as the employment services.

In such cases, a complete, careful reading of the interviews with those who really have availed themselves of these services and then judge them negatively, reveals that they attribute their failure to two main causes: lack of resources, for example financial resources for unemployment, and the low number and professional capacity of operators; and the fact that policies do not correspond to young people's needs, being incapable of supplying adequate tools for intercepting a labour supply which is extremely dynamic and undergoing profound transformation.

*"Well, the employment centers ... I enrolled after I finished high school, it was useless / (smiling), it did not do practically anything, also because they were disorganized, to say the least. [...]. I do not know how it works in the North, but here the employment center is a joke [...]. Besides, of course, they are useless. The companies are not looking, the staff does not care ..."* (Costantino, M, 27, HE, TE).



*“Yes, they would good enough but it didn’t help me much, I’d leave my CV with them, but it wasn’t much use. I’ve tried some, no, actually they had me do some courses, stupid things, pretty useless stuff. For the courses for the unemployed, I only had to pay the duty stamp, while others, for example, the bartender course, was not free, and I paid a fifth, because it was for the already employed” (Carlo, M, 26, LE, TE).*

*“The only thing which has worked up to now is word-off-mouth. I got the cleaning job because a friend told me about it, and the discotheque job through a family friend (Claudia, F, 21, ME, U).*

The interweaving among labour-market weaknesses, the normality of irregular, off-the-books work, the inability of public services to intervene effectively and their poor reputation all create a hurdle which young people have to face and overcome to build a working future. It is often a barrier that is too high to leap over, in the face of which one starts to consider a flight strategy such as emigration:

*“I think the state should give young people and families a subsidy if they do not find a job, as is being done in Germany, or in Switzerland where you can get unemployment benefits for nearly € 1000... I know this from hearsay... € 800-1000 a month to provide you with a decent existence. (Aurelio, M, 23, ME, TE).*

### **3.4.6 Conclusions**

The collected stories outline how socio-economic consequences range from personal life-styles to planning one’s own family, from (convenient, free) co-habitation with parents to the smallness of social networks, inadequate for mobilizing resources of social support, from the feeling of living in the present to the lack of planning for the future.

In addition to this, the stories confirm just how interiorized some stereotypes affecting young people’s perception of the Italian labour market and their consequent behaviour are. The North-South divide still matters: interviewees living in the South of Italy demonstrate a lack of confidence in their skills and institutional opportunities. Images of a labour market permeated by social ties and personal recommendations are culturally rooted and cause a juvenile way of acting.

In this framework, some good news emerges: if we take educational level and household characteristics into account, the picture is not so dark. In line with previous research, those who have social and/or cultural capital perform better in coping with the socio-economic consequences of job insecurity. Not surprisingly, among the Italian



sample, those who belong to ethnic minorities and live in a family inserted into Italian society with a steady job conforming with legal requirements are – according to the literature – active in coping with difficulties, including the use of institutional labour service centers and initiatives set up by NGOs.

## 3.5 Social exclusion

### 3.5.1 Introduction

This report constitutes an attempt to carry out a meta-analysis of the previous Italian qualitative reports, focusing on the interviewees' risks of social exclusion and highlighting interrelations among labour market exclusion and other dimensions of social exclusion. The aim is to identify the key mechanisms leading from labour market exclusion (defined as unemployment and job insecurity) to other dimensions of social exclusion.

As Silver and Miller (2003), Atkinson (1998), Nolan and Whelan (2010) stressed, despite the continuing vagueness of the term, there is a general agreement on the following issues concerning “social exclusion”: it is a multidimensional concept as it implies deprivation in several spheres, not just economic. It is a relational concept as it is not just an attribute of individuals, but also encompasses relationships between the individual and society. Therefore, it involves not only the lack of fundamental resources, but – most importantly – the inability to fully participate in one's own society. It is relative: individuals may be socially excluded only with respect to the context and society in which they live. Furthermore, social exclusion is a process, not just a condition that is the outcome of a process. It is intrinsically dynamic in that it impacts people in various ways and to differing degrees over time. In fact, people are not excluded simply by their current circumstances, but also because of their past background and future prospects.

As literature highlights, social exclusion is a situated and socially embedded concept. Given the importance of context in understanding it, first we will briefly summarise some information concerning the Italian context's specificities.

Italy is characterised by structural youth unemployment. As literature showed, young people exhibited a greater economic and social vulnerability in comparison with other age groups. They were exposed to a wide range of risks, coming from institutional changes – welfare and labour market reforms – which occurred during the 1990s. Even before the onset of the recent economic crisis, the Italian partial and targeted model of labour market deregulation, introduced in the 1990s (with the insider-outsider divide that followed and the re-regulating of the welfare and labour market), greatly deteriorated the plight of young people (Barbieri, 2011; Barbieri and Scherer, 2009; Blossfeld et al., 2005, 2012). In particular, they were at greater risk of being trapped in a secondary and sub-protected labour market, and not able to enter the insurance-



based welfare. Young people were, in fact, considered the main losers of the Italian labour market flexibilisation process, “*at the margins*” (Barbieri and Cutuli, 2016; Blossfeld et al., 2011).

In addition, more recently, they were hit hard by the economic crisis. The deterioration in labour market conditions contributed decisively to the growing inequality, affecting young people especially. In fact, their greater vulnerability was to do with the fact that they were more likely to hold short-term and atypical labour contracts and be less paid. Moreover, they tended to face higher unemployment risks and lower upward mobility chances, even when they held permanent contracts (Eurostat, 2016b). Therefore, since unemployment and low pay were the most relevant risk factors for poverty, young people were the most likely to be at risk of poverty and social exclusion in Italy. In 2015, the percentage of young Italian people aged 16-24 at risk of poverty and social exclusion was 36.5% (+ 5.4% compared to 2007 and + 5.6% compared to EU28). Among young people aged 25-29, this reached 36.8%, 10% higher than the EU28 average (Eurostat, 2016a).

As we know, poverty and social exclusion do not affect only those who are economically inactive or unemployed (Barbieri and Cutuli, forthcoming).

Considering the Italian in-work at-risk-of-poverty rate by age in 2015, those aged 25-29 were in the most serious condition with 12.6%, more than 4% higher than in 2007, and 3.4% above that of EU28 (Eurostat, 2016a).

In the absence of a minimum income scheme, young Italian people often needed to rely on their families, creating a phenomenon of hidden youth poverty, as well as increased deprivation for their families. This enforced dependency on parents, disguised the lack of opportunities and the poverty faced by young people (Saraceno, 2015). Family solidarity was able to shoulder the loss of income and employment among family members in the first period of the crisis, making use of savings. However, as the crisis persisted, family strategies showed their weaknesses. The increase of economic deprivation reflects the worsening of family material living conditions. In fact, in Italy the proportion of people materially deprived in 2015 was very high (22.6%) compared to EU28 (17%) and more than half of those defined as materially deprived experienced severe material deprivation (four items of the nine difficulties considered in the indicator). According to Eurostat data, in 2015 the rate of severe material deprivation across the overall population in Italy (11.5 %) was higher than the average of the EU-27 (8.7 %) and increased compared to 2007 (7%) (Eurostat, 2016a).

In more general terms, as literature argued, Italian young people are particularly exposed to the risk not only of not achieving economic stability over the course of their lives, but also of not maintaining or reaching a socioeconomic status in order to make and implement their life projects (Bertolini, 2011; Busetta and Milito, 2010; Ranci, 2011). This kind of risk can be a relevant factor of disadvantage for young people and can bring them to a condition of social exclusion.



In this context, the report presents a typology of Italian young people at risk of social exclusion, that is largely based on Kieselbach's et al.(2001) study and considers three types of interviewees: at high risk, at increased risk and at low risk of social exclusion. The typology is based on economic deprivation and social connectedness - operationalized as availability of both informal social support and institutional support - as central criteria for estimating the risk of social exclusion. Moreover, the crucial issues of the Except project, concerning (postponing) the transition to autonomy and the deterioration of health and well-being, are also considered.

### 3.5.2 Methodology/procedure

Because of the above scenario, the Italian sample consisted of youth potentially at risk of social exclusion. The logic of the Italian sampling plan was coherent with the logic of the EXCEPT project and with sampling criteria common to all the countries<sup>6</sup>, but taking into account some national peculiarities<sup>7</sup> for each country by including specific national risk groups in the National sampling plans. The EXCEPT working paper Nos. 1 and 6<sup>8</sup> also identified young people with high level of education as a risk group in Italy. Furthermore, Italian literature showed that young people aged over 25 with a high education level, experienced job insecurity and unemployment and were exposed to economic vulnerability and risk of social exclusion. Therefore, we did not oversample low level of education (ISCED 0-2)<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, following the logic to construct a selective sample, we focused on two different risk groups in the two geographical contexts identified in the sampling plan, Turin and Catania: migrants in Turin, who raised the question of their socio-economic integration, and NEET in Catania, highlighting the problem of strong difficulties in searching for a job for young the Italian in the south of Italy (SVIMEZ 2017) and the widespread feeling of helplessness among them. Data related to the labour market in the south of Italy explained why living there was an additional risk factor: in 2015, the unemployment rate of young people aged 15-

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<sup>6</sup> The UNITO sample was constructed following a "National Sampling Plan" drawn up according to the general outline provided in the EXCEPT project. The elements that had to be respected in order to follow the EXCEPT project logic were specified in the Deliverable D3.1 – "Overall survey and sampling strategy" and concerned sample size, people involved in targeted policies, gender, age, occupational status, level of education and legal status in the host country. The criteria were to i) interview young people aged 18-30 but oversample the 18-24 age group, in one of the following occupational conditions: temporary workers, unemployed, NEET and non-contractual workers but including some successful stories (youth with permanent jobs); ii) include all the educational levels but oversampling low educated people; iii) include at least 20 young people involved in policies; iv) balance the sample from a gender point of view; v) include ethnic minorities or migrant groups. At the same time, specificities of each country were taken into account identifying risk groups and oversampling specific categories, as identified in D1.5 "Guidelines for construction of risk groups" (NEET, immigrants, disabled individuals) in each National Sampling Plan.

<sup>7</sup> See Deliverable D3.3 "A Methodological report on the qualitative interviews in each country" for further information.

<sup>8</sup> EXCEPT Working Paper No. 1 "Composition and cumulative disadvantage of youth across Europe" (M. Rokicka, M. Kłobuszewska, M. Palczyńska, N. Shapoval & J. Stasiowski) and EXCEPT Working Paper No. 6 "Another approach to risk groups identification" (J. Stasiowski & K. Täht).

<sup>9</sup> The Deliverable D1.5 "Guideline for construction of risk groups" also indicated a group as one of the most exposed to risk of social exclusion.





24 was 40.3% nationally, while in the South it reached 54.1% (Istat 2016a). Moreover, the South was traditionally characterised by very high levels of risk of poverty and material deprivation (in 2015, 46.4% was at risk of poverty and social exclusion, compared to 28.3% at national level) (Istat 2016b), lack of public (and private) services, and inadequate policies. In fact, Catania presented a high unemployment rate among youth and a high presence of NEET compared to the national average, with a lower percentage of migrant people.

Catania is a southern city and represents a disadvantaged context with regard to the labour market and the implementation of policies

In the process of analysis of the interviews we took into account these criteria: we paid attention to the level of education, the geographical context and the status of migrants searching for some common features relevant for the definition of groups with different levels of risk of social exclusion. Finally, as mentioned, the dimensions of autonomy, future orientation and the ability to project themselves into the future, and well-being were also taken into account in an effort to examine any possible interlinks among these dimensions and social exclusion's dimensions.

Based on these criteria and after having carefully examined all the Italian interviews, we divided the participants into three categories. The procedure that was followed is described as follow.

First, we identified the interviewees who we could classify at both high and low risk of social exclusion. Each case was assessed in terms of cumulative disadvantage that originated as a consequence of weak labour market attainment, considering the three issues relevant in the project: financial deprivation, leaving the parental home and health and well-being. We searched the intertwining among these aspects, and considered the possibility for each young person to turn to parents or friends to receive informal social support. Then, as the WP3 guidelines suggested, the continuum among these two external groups was empty by constantly comparing (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), between them, these dimensions. Three researchers were involved in this operation that followed the project since the shared construction of the analysis tools.

In doing this analysis, the focus was on the most important mechanisms that came out of the data, without being necessarily recognised by the interviewees or explicitly expressed.

In order to exemplify better the most relevant mechanisms of each group, we decided to follow the criteria of identifying and describing some individual/typical cases from our sample.

In each type in the typology, we chose three or four cases particularly meaningful of the following dimensions identified in the Guidelines: the education and working paths of people belonging to each group; the availability of informal social support (family and broader social networks) to cope with economic vulnerability and exclusion from the



labour market; the autonomy pathways and the links with the “*emerging adulthood*” pathway; health and well-being of people belonging to each group; the involvement in policy initiatives and the influence of this on their trajectories. Of course, attention was also devoted to the Italian institutional settings and labour market, as well as cultural expectations and norms.

### 3.5.3 Results/typology

#### Participants at high risk of Social Exclusion

The interviewees we considered at high risk of social exclusion were those who faced severe economic deprivation, lacked adequate family support and experienced both strong difficulties to participate in social life and feelings of social isolation.

All of them were unemployed: they had no income and lived in the parental house. Lacking income, resulting from unemployment, they were forced to live with their parents, giving up housing autonomy. From this point of view, these interviewees showed that the experience of unemployment could strongly affect the transition toward adulthood and the process to gain independence, thus undermining it. It must be underlined that Italian young people did not have access to unemployment benefit when they were looking for their first job, or they had not accumulated enough payments in order to avail themselves of the benefit. Moreover, active labour policies were still scarce and not effective. Often young people lacked orientation in the labour market.

Young people at high risk of social exclusion had low labour market attachment: both their educational and working paths were non-linear and downward.

As we know, in Italy family support and solidarity had a crucial role: turning to family financial support or transfers in-kind was one of the main coping strategies Italian young people were used to adopting in their effort to cope with their lack of money, given the low level of institutional social protection (Bohnke, 2008; Majamaa, 2011). If Italian families and parents, in particular, were traditionally committed in compensating for the deficiencies of the welfare state, in the case of this category of interviewees, the family of origin was itself affected by deprivation and material hardship, therefore could not financially support their children.

When living conditions became strained due to the very limited economic resources, also youth's cohabitation with their parents might have had a detrimental effect. In fact, for many respondents, dependence on the family could represent a further disadvantage factor as not only could it lead to a general feeling of dissatisfaction or of guilt but also to severe familial tensions.

An emblematic case was represented by **Mara**, who showed with particular evidence that social exclusion could be considered as a process in which many types of disadvantage accumulated, as a downward spiral of cumulative disadvantages. Mara



was 29 years old and, at the time of the interview, had been unemployed for 4 months and was struggling to find a new job. Her last job had been without a contract, which had started in January 2015. Her last formal contract ended one year before the interview. She had changed a lot of jobs, mainly because she was not hired after a trial period, or the temporary contract (the way she was usually hired) was not renewed or she was fired. The dimension of work in her life was crucial: its absence, the consequent lack of money and the inactivity that in her case came with it, was at the centre of the interview. The precariousness and, even more, the absence of a job showed her as feeling disenchanted, lost and strongly pessimistic. She felt she was unlucky on some occasions and a victim of circumstances, mistakes or the inability to evaluate correctly the situation of those who hired her.

Both her educational and working paths were non-linear and downward. Mara finished high school as a tourist operator. At the end of her second year of high school, she considered changing and enrolled in a socio-psycho-pedagogic high school, but realised she would not be able to study all the different subjects in one summer. Right after finishing high school, she enrolled in university (in 2005). She tried the access test for the course of Professional Educator and that of Educational Science, but could not pass them; therefore, she enrolled in a BA for Social Service. After two years of University (2007), she started to work with a temporary, but full-time job at the Post Office and left university before finishing without a degree.

She did a few professional courses while she was unemployed. She almost always worked as a shop assistant – the kind of job she liked most. She enjoyed creating a connection with customers and having a relationship with them. She always worked for very short periods, the longest being a 5-month-job, which was the only time she was able to claim unemployment benefit. She worked twice informally, one in 2015 (her last job) and one for a toyshop at Christmas (3 years in a row).

She was forced to live with her parents who lived on a tight budget. They owned the house where they lived (they had finished paying a mortgage a few years before), but they needed to face unexpected expenses (the death of Mara's grandfather, some fees for miscalculating taxes). Mara said that "*we've always... tighten our belts*". Mara's father had lost his job in 2000, while she was in high school (the company where he worked for 32 years failed and the owners ran away) and, since then, he had done some small temporary jobs to pay off the contributions for early retirement. In relation to this episode, Mara mentioned not only the economic tightness but also the depression her father went through and the fact that, as a teenager, she could not really understand or accept that they had to cut their expenses and were not able to afford some things.

With regard to the family budget management, each Friday Mara's mother withdrew €200 from her bank account that was needed for all the expenses of that week. In the past, when the family economic situation was better, her mother started to put away



€100/month for each of the two daughters to create a fund to help build their future or as a retirement fund. However, they needed to take away money from this fund to pay for Mara's grandfather's funeral. When living conditions became so compromised, any unforeseen expense revealed the household's strong vulnerability to poverty.

Mara thought that, as she did not have any money herself, she could not have any social life. Indeed, in her view, social life always implied costs that she could not sustain. In the interview, she said that she felt forced *"to stay home and become asocial"* because going out meant, drinking a beer, and she could not ask for money from her parents.

She seemed increasingly detached from social interactions: she seemed to be in a kind of vicious circle, becoming more and more stuck, with decreasing agency and strength to look for new occasions or try to find different ways to deal with the current situation.

As we know, the concept of social exclusion involves the inability to fully participate in one's own society, not only the lack of fundamental resources. Social participation means being able to enjoy a range of social activities, which help people to preserve their integration into socially acknowledged roles (Silver and Miller, 2003).

In the interviews, Mara and the other respondents at high risk of social exclusion represented themselves as being unable to participate in activities, living patterns and relationships that were the norm for most other young people.

In fact, Mara's idea was that if you had no money, you could not plan your future, *"I don't see any future... it's bad to say so, but it's like that. The money, really, makes the future, I feel like I'll become, I don't know, a tramp of the future"*.

She reported a sense of depression connected to the fact of not having a job and, more than that, of *"not having a future"* because of that. She seemed quite disenchanted. She felt that, at almost 30 years old, she was old for the market and was afraid she would not find anything.

Another exemplary case was that of **Andrea**, who also showed that without a supportive family, unemployment – and the subsequent lack of income – represented a serious risk factor. In fact, coming from a disadvantaged family background, negatively affected the respondents' economic situation. Both Mara and Andrea lived in households unable to afford necessities considered primary: they stressed that their living conditions were greatly constrained by lack of resources and perceived themselves as severely materially deprived people. For them, deprivation also affected the parental family and its impact involved not only the material standard of living.

Andrea was 24 years old and born in Turin, the first-born of a very young couple, which had migrated from Southern Italy. His father ran a bar and his mother was a secretary in a solicitor's office. He underlined great tension and quarrelling between his parents. After the birth of his younger sister, his parents separated and the children were entrusted to their mother. The father's business collapsed, his father had problems of



alcoholism and sometimes he beat Andrea during his childhood. Later, his father left the city.

Andrea lived with his mother, sister and grandmother. They had financial difficulties for some years because the mother lost her job due to the office's cutting down, and the children could only find temporary work. Furthermore, the family had various debts such as unpaid utility bills in the mother's name, taxes the grandmother owed and traffic fines Andrea had incurred after getting his driving licence. The family's divorce lawyer was helping them by giving useful advice, allowing them to pay in instalments in so far as it was possible and, in some cases, using statutes of limitation to try and have debts cancelled.

At the time of the interview, Andrea was unemployed, but sometimes he had worked as an assistant trainer for a sports association. Andrea had a lot of various work experiences in the restaurant trade, all without a regular contract or fixed-term contract, including a two-year contract as an apprentice in a cafeteria/sandwich bar in the city centre. All these job experiences ended by his resigning or being fired because of conflicts with colleagues and/or the boss, and in each case, he underlined his reasons and the difficult working conditions, including low pay. In one case, the problem was severe psychological stress partly caused by family problems, which were *"the straw that broke the camel's back"*.

In the interview, health problems emerged as a result of Andrea's stress. He experienced panic attacks, which influenced his lack of employment success and, more generally, his quality of life, which forced him to interrupt his sporting activities for a time. Moreover, his plans for the future were not very clear.

In his interview, various contradictions appeared and a general perception of the weight of a precarious employment situation came out, which did not seem resolvable in the short term. Unemployment and the family's difficult financial situation limited Andrea's prospects, starting with the inability to make plans for the solution of his problems.

Living in Southern Italy, where – as mentioned – labour market conditions were particularly degraded, was an additional risk factor to be underlined. For example, among the young people interviewed in Catania, **Tamara** (23, F, ME, NEET) was a NEET at the time of the interview. She had a high school diploma, but she was unemployed just like her father and brother, but she sometimes worked irregularly, taking care of an old woman without a regular labour contract like her mother sometimes did. The familiar atmosphere was unpleasant due to the absence of jobs and their economic problems: they did not have enough money for food. Her mother was doing a small job, in the sense that she took care of an elderly lady, aged 88, but as she did not think the old woman would not live much longer she was saving something, in order to buy a car. Tamara's father wanted her mother to use the money only for bills, taxes and groceries, and did not agree with her about buying a car.



However, Tamara and her mother thought that a car would be very useful. They went everywhere on foot, even when they had to go to the doctor.

Tamara's working path was characterised by very low qualified jobs, often without regular employment contracts; her jobs until then had been different from each other. These jobs were not only inconsistent among them but also her level of education and type of study course (upper secondary education in the tourism sector). She appeared to be at risk of being trapped in precariousness because the disorder that characterised her educational and working path would not allow her to accumulate (on the contrary, this results in a waste of) competences and knowledge that could improve her employability over time.

She and her family got around on foot since they had no car and could not even afford a bus ticket: she thought it was embarrassing. They had no telephone at home. She would have liked to live a normal life like other girls of her age, but she did not have a real social life and friendly relationships. Tamara's social life was poor and she avoided going out with other young people because she could not even afford the cost of a sandwich.

She was very critical about one of the few experiences she had had regarding the policies, a one-year regional (public) course for child educators she had attended after high school but, since she had not obtained a certain amount of money (*'participation compensation'*, about €600) that by regulation was to be granted to the participants. She declared that she had not even received the certificate of attendance. She and other participants had asked the training organisation for explanations but with no results. Regarding this course, she said she expected something completely different – to study and be involved, instead, the teachers were bored and so consequently the students also got bored.

To conclude, the high risk of social exclusion is the result of a process of cumulative accumulation of disadvantages in many domains of the youth's life. Unemployment and job insecurity represent important risk factors which, if not offset by adequate labour market policies and in the absence of strong family support, can lead to social isolation and poverty, triggering a vicious circle where also lack of both housing and economic autonomy and plans for the future accumulate.

Most of the participants in this category were unemployed, had a low level of education and had not participated in policies (active or passive) to improve their employment status and living conditions.

Nine interviewees (five women and four men) out of the 50 young people interviewed could be considered at high risk of social exclusion.





### Participants at Increased risk of social exclusion

The increased risk-of-social-exclusion category included individuals who experienced, at the same time, job insecurity (therefore, risk of labour market exclusion) and some risk of economic exclusion or social exclusion. This category consisted of 25 individuals from our sample (16 men and 9 women).

It was more difficult to define who was at increased risk compared to the other categories, as Keiselbach et al. (2001) underlined. First, they did not experience severe material deprivation as they were able to cover their basic needs. It was interesting to note that, even though most were temporary workers or workers without a contract and lacked housing autonomy many interviewees did not represent themselves as economically deprived, regardless of being forced to live with their parents or make hard sacrifices. If they did not consider themselves as poor it was because they levelled down their economic self-sufficiency, defining it solely in terms of their ability to acquire their own personal necessities, by cutting expenses deemed unnecessary such as holidays or leisure activities. These activities were indeed crucial for sharing lifestyles and relationships, which used to be quite widespread among young people (<http://www.rapportogiovani.it/>). Therefore, these respondents were at risk of social exclusion because their financial situation could imply a limited participation in social life.

Talking about their earnings, most youth had a precarious or non-contractual job, and if they had any, they mentioned very low pay (also €400 – €500). Low pay and/or discontinuity of work and income represented important deprivation risk factors and explained why the interviewees could be exposed to economic strain, difficulties to project themselves in a long- term temporal horizon and plan their future, and few opportunities to improve their social life.

As in many cases, wages were not enough for them to live on, as already mentioned, living with their parents represented a widespread strategy to make ends meet, allowed them to cover their basic daily needs, such as petrol, cigarettes, a few beers with friends, thus freeing them from the demands to pay their own house expenses.

Living conditions of these interviewees could be defined as vulnerable, since they seemed to be in a very precarious balance, focused only on a short-term perspective.

As a case in point, **Carlo** perceived his economic situation in terms of self-sufficiency, despite his financial resources being limited and insecure. He was 25 years old and, at the time of the interview, he worked as a salesman and part-time bartender at a trade fair cafe, run by a cooperative of which he was a member-worker. He had moved away from his parents' home at an early age (living at a friends' home for some time while still underage), and went to school until the ninth grade (the first year of high school in Italy, ISCED 2). Subsequently, he changed his home and school when he moved to another city, attending a vocational school. He failed at the beginning of his second year of high school, at 16, and went back to Genoa and started a period of work



courses and internships (until he was 18). Afterwards, he did many jobs in a discontinuous and fragmented way, often having more than one job at the same time and combining them with training periods: he held various jobs in sales (door to door), but also as a bricklayer, dishwasher, and attendant in call centres, a salesman, and waiter. There was an apparent inconsistency between his training and his work experience, but this was not thematised by Carlo. He moved to Turin in 2011 and took part in projects of shared housing connected to different association projects.

Carlo presented himself in the interview as an independent person from an economic point of view, however, he let us know that he did not need many things; he was therefore content to live with what he earned with his part-time job. Carlo appeared to be a person who was satisfied with himself and, on the whole, with his lifestyle. He showed no problematic elements; rather, he highlighted his capacity of activation as positive. The only indispensable expense was rent and Carlo managed to cover it with his part-time job salary, given that the rent was shared with a roommate. For the rest, Carlo was satisfied. However, his work was precarious, his family was not supportive, and he managed to pay bills and rent but little more.

An unforeseen event could disrupt his precarious balance: when his car broke down, he was forced to put off his wedding because he had to buy a new car with the money he had saved for his wedding, notwithstanding the fact he really had longed for it.

To give another example, **Antonio** was 18 years old, had a diploma and was working in a business services company with an apprenticeship contract at the time of the interview. He was failed twice at the beginning of high school and, after the second time, he decided to take a two-year qualification in order to start working as soon as possible. Antonio decided to ask for help at the Youth Information Centre to understand what schools he could attend to gain access to the labour market. After obtaining the qualification, his teacher called him for a job with Youth Guarantee, which then turned into an apprenticeship (see box d. Work). He was very satisfied because his Vocational school allowed him access to the labour market. In fact, he was automatically enrolled in Youth Guarantee.

Antonio was afraid to start work before gaining a diploma, and leaving less-demanding student life, which all his old friends had continued. However, the fact of succeeding in his work reassured him and made him feel good. He is now thinking of resuming night school to get his diploma. He lived with his parents and a brother, and his family faced a few years of economic hardship due to his mother's unemployment, accumulated debts and health reasons. He helped at home with his salary, covered his personal expenses and saved. He did not think that housing autonomy was one of his priorities considering his age, but believed that making important decisions in the workplace was an indication of independence and adulthood. Antonio said he was relaxed living the present and planning for the future and, despite the economic difficulties experienced by his family, he felt he was playing his part to help. The important informal support in



Antonio's words were related to receiving advice from people who combined the fact of belonging to “agencies of socialisation”, first his family and then school, despite the fact that he had decided autonomously.

Given this situation, Antonio seemed to have precise and informed strategies to turn his work and career for the better. On the one hand, he was able to count on emotional support from his family and, on the other, he turned to institutional channels to prepare him for the world of work. The Youth Information Centre and Youth Guarantee were important factors for him, which allowed him to obtain the virtuous sequence of “obtaining the qualification-internship-apprenticeship”. At the time of the interview, Antonio thought that with his commitment he had the possibility to exploit the opportunities available in order to have as many experiences as possible, even abroad, so he would be able to achieve his long-term objectives, especially a permanent position and consequent stability in order to create his own family. The idea that the commitment was a discriminating factor in the transition to adulthood was strong in him, as well as the will to differentiate himself from his friends who spent their days sitting in the town square.

Moreover, despite economic distress in his family, Antonio said he knew how to live cheaply and manage his salary, contributing to the family budget and saving monthly.

**Francesca** represented another emblematic case: she was 23 years old, had a daughter of almost 3 and lived with her partner who had a job. She had a fixed-term job in an ice-cream shop that she liked a lot. This situation of relative autonomy and stability was a recent achievement for her.

After upper secondary school, Francesca (23, F, LE, TE) enrolled in a vocational Catering school, she failed the first year and so decided to go to “Piazza dei Mestieri” where she obtained a qualification in Baking and Confectionery. After a few months, through the Job Centre of a private association, she had a job offer for a four-year apprenticeship, which unfortunately finished unexpectedly, and she then went through a series of irregular jobs for four years, broken promises of regular contracts, episodes of exploitation intertwined with health problems, sometimes debilitating, and the birth of her daughter in 2013. Francesca also planned to move to London. A turning point in her life was the opportunity to do two seasons in a well-known chain of ice cream shops in Turin. Although it did not offer her a permanent position, it opened the door to find her next, and current, stable job in an ice-cream shop.

In the interview she denounced the distortions of work in grey and the distorted use of flexibility by employers, although in fact she was never able to protect herself.

The impact of insecurity was strong both on her autonomy, since she never had access to a subsidy (except a one-time state bonus for her first child) and was able to move in with her partner only at the end of 2015, and on her motherhood, which she could not live fully as she began to work when the child was 3 months old, without telling her employer that she was a mother.



Informal social support was essential for her, in very strong forms: living with the parents at the beginning with her partner and daughter, the availability of the mother to work part-time to look after the granddaughter, allowing Francesca to take the job in the well-known ice-cream chain, in order not to make her lose the opportunity. The lack of kindergarten at an affordable price was a major need for Francesca, from a political point of view. In 2015, she and her partner and daughter left the parental home and went to live alone in an apartment of her parents', where they could pay a nominal rent.

In planning her move to London, Francesca was able to count on some friends who lived there and offered advice and support. Francesca had experienced a series of negative twists in her career and health, but now she seemed to have overcome the consequences and had a curriculum experience at one of Turin's most famous ice-cream shops and relative job security at an ice-cream parlour that has been running for 30 years. She had a daughter of almost 3, unplanned but welcomed immediately by both her and her partner, who – she said – took his responsibilities seriously.

Today, both are enjoying the support of their parents, especially hers, either through direct cash transfers and indirect (care for her daughter and flat).

The main risk factor was the instability of both her and her partner, which did not allow them to make long-term plans and save. In particular, Francesca would like to open an ice-cream shop in Germany, although this project might lead to further uncertainties.

An additional risk factor was Francesca's health, who suffered from ulcers and asthma, although she said that she had been well since she found stability and left the parental home.

She shared the feeling of uncertainty with her partner and her friends; she stated explicitly that it was caused by the fact that neither she nor her partner had a fixed-term contract.

Her most immediate projects were therefore to be able to save in order to marry her partner and then realise her business plan.

**Gaia** (24, F, ME, U) was another very emblematic case. She was a proactive girl and planned to emigrate to another continent. Gaia's family situation was difficult: she lived in Catania, was unemployed and was not able to rely on any source of money at the time of the interview. Her father was a self-employed worker (electrician) but was suffering from the negative effects of the economic crisis (more than 7 years). Gaia (24, F, ME, U) said in the past that her economic situation had been fine, but after the economic crisis hit, the situation worsened. When her father came home after work, he brought shopping bags full of fruit with him because old people sometimes paid him this way. He could not say no and, given that the work he did was not very expansive, he accepted them. Sometimes, people also paid him with checks that bounced; our bank account was empty many times.



Gaia's working career looked stable having always done jobs consistent with her own interests in the sector of dressmaking and clothes (her ideal job would have been in the fashion sector as a stylist, a dream that she had had since she was a child). The weak point of her working career was that these jobs had always been low paid and often without a regular employment contract. At the time of the interview she was unemployed.

She seemed a proactive girl. She was looking actively for work in any way possible and wanted to explore job opportunities and training that were more consistent with her project/dream to become a stylist and to work in the fashion sector. Despite this, she was open to considering job opportunities in other sectors also because she needed to cope with job and economic insecurity. She attributed great importance and value to work in general and even considered it as a source of independence and compared it to the air one breathes, she could not live without working.

She felt that she had no future where she lived in Sicily, so she was seriously considering the opportunity of moving to the USA with her boyfriend, an American marine, looking for a dignified life that, here in Italy, she thought she would not be able to build and live. This would be a hard and emotionally costly choice for her to do since – she said – she would not leave her country, her city, for reasons linked to the lack of work and to the impossibility of achieving both her dream and life project in her own land; she loved Sicily.

In some cases, health problems mattered in the search for work and the chance to preserve it, adding another risk factor to already vulnerable youth paths. For example, Matteo (28, M, ME, U), a 28-year-old from Catania in the south of Italy, because of an accident, had been taking medication and appeared isolated from the network of friends he previously had. His interview was a continual switching between his stating that he was "*fit for the world of work*" and his recourse to the accident as a biographical fault line, and to the present marked by rejections and failures.

### **Participants at Low Risk of Social Exclusion**

The participants at low risk of social exclusion did not experience severe forms of deprivation in terms of basic and essential goods, unlike the participants of the first category. In addition, most of them received to some extent family social support, which prevented them from experiencing social exclusion.

As already mentioned, living with one's own parents, and receiving financial support from them appears a natural strategy for coping with job insecurity and economic uncertainty in Italy. Overall, lack of housing autonomy seems not to be a factor of social exclusion for most of the Italian interviewees, because that condition, as we have already mentioned, is perceived as widely widespread among Italian young people.

As a matter of fact, most of them felt neither socially isolated nor at risk of being excluded. Their family of origin was both the major source of economic and social



support and a vehicle for social integration: it could balance their limited access to the labour market and the subsequent economic consequences.

Supportive interactions with parents granted them the opportunity to save money and be protected against the spell of unemployment. Family relationships were often described as quite good. These respondents did not feel at risk of being marginalised. We did not find a widespread perception of segregation or disengagement from society in the interviews.

In this category, there were interviewees who were not only strongly supported by their social networks but also highly educated. They could be considered “autonomous” but, at the same time, and to some extent, exposed to some vulnerability factors. Their autonomy assumed a limited connotation in space and time: it did not result in a wide range of options of choice and opportunities in life. Their limited autonomy could constitute a risk factor if it involved exposure to the possibility of falling into situations of social and economic vulnerability. In other words, their condition did not imply having a full chance of planning their lives. The risk here was that they would be excluded from adult roles for a long time and would not develop their ability to take responsibility and to move in a labour market that implied more and more an active behaviour for facing flexibility. The economic context and the inadequacy of institutional support did not provide young people with the tools they needed to foresee and build their future.

This category consisted of sixteen individuals from our sample, ten women and six men.

**Lara** could be considered an emblematic case of the respondents at low risk of social exclusion. She was 26 years old and highly educated. She held a linguistic high school diploma, a bachelor's degree in Intercultural Communication and earned a Master's degree in Modern and Comparative Culture at the University of Turin (ISCED 6). She still lived with her mother, being able to count on her mother's support including financial support, and not only that; her father had died 10 years before. She was formally unemployed, but had, in fact, done many jobs. At the time of the interview, in addition to private lessons, Lara taught an intensive English course once a week at a middle comprehensive school, as part of her afternoon extracurricular activities.

Overall, combining her different jobs, Lara seemed very busy. The opinion expressed concerning her teaching activity was positive, even if it was a discontinuous job during the year. Regarding work, Lara emphasised the dimension of self-realisation, doing what she liked, as well as social and cultural exchange. Instead, thinking of work in the more usual sense of stable employment, routine, perhaps office work, which she said she was not interested in. About her job search, Lara said that she first went to the University Job Placement centre, just after finishing her studies, but it was a huge disappointment. She complained about a widespread negative attitude towards those who undertook a study course in humanities and the implicit assumption that the outlet of such a path was necessarily teaching.





She represented herself and the youth of her generation as strongly committed to finding opportunities, but without any support from the institutions. Her decision was to focus on the dimension of personal satisfaction in building her life path, even if this goal involved some sacrifices. Formally unemployed, she perceived herself as a precarious worker in search of a fulfilling work experience. However, in the interview, the medium- and long-term economic consequences of job insecurity were not raised as an issue.

Regarding her plans for the future, she was considering moving to France, which she imagined offered greater opportunities for growth, cultivating a project for a PhD in Nice, with the idea of combining her training in cultural studies and her interest in dance. This idea however sounded more as a dream than a project with a strategy to fulfil it. She was keen to create a personal working and existential path in which she felt realised, eschewing the idea of necessarily having to adapt to the socially shared expectation of a linear life path.

She revealed she had a network of friends and acquaintances not only in Italy but also abroad.

**Emma** was 20 years old, she obtained her diploma in 2015 at a hotel and catering school, specialised in reception work and, after 20 days, she got a job at a hotel to which she had sent her CV before her diploma exam. She had a six-month traineeship through Youth Guarantee, which was imposed by the hotel, which she tolerated badly, and then was confirmed with a 3-year apprenticeship. She did a lot of overtime and earned up to €1,100 a month. She had to support herself and her pets; she lived alone with two dogs.

Emma's parents divorced when she was little. She left the parental home when she found a job through a four-year apprenticeship contract within a year after obtaining her diploma. She decided to go and live alone only after signing the contract, sought a low rent (€380) taking on the partial restructuring expenses of her house, in which she was helped by her parents.

Emma was a good example of a young person who was careful about managing her every-day budget. She kept her expenses under control with a forecast over time, using an Excel programme provided by her father, which calculated a simulation of future spending commitments, both regular (rent) and one-off (car insurance), thus not spending in the present if the programme reported that she would not have enough money to support the one-off expenses in the future. This led her to renounce leisure-time activities, which her friends, still living at home, did not do. But she thought that compared to them she was living better, because she used her own money for her all-important autonomy: she said that it was a question of priorities.

The rhetoric of determination and self-control are common among young interviewees who have a job, and are quite or fully economically autonomous, keep under control their expenses and are able to save also a little amount of money. This self-assessment is associated in many cases with the idea of being different from their



peers and friends, to be more responsible and, in some sense, ahead in the transition to adulthood.

This did not seem to move Emma away from them but rather constituted a kind of role play in which she was the responsible “granny”.

Moreover, going deeper into the narration of this young person with a success story, the family role emerged. On the one hand, Emma described her hard work to find both success and a job, e.g. during her studies she never missed an opportunity to do internships: given 600 compulsory traineeship hours, Emma did about 1000. On the other hand, she lived very close to her mother’s house (5 minutes by car), and her parents helped her by paying for renovation expenses and her first rent, even if Emma then tried to do everything based on her salary, her mother occasionally did the shopping for her if she saw the fridge was empty, and her grandparents left her some money in their will with a clause that stated, “*she had buy a new car*”, which she did after she got her licence.

Emma, thanks to a positive combination of her capabilities, parental support and good opportunities, reached a stable situation. Planning for her was the key to her success, she felt able to achieve her goals in life because she finally had great responsibility. The only element of uncertainty that emerged from her interview was the job Emma would have in the future to balance her work and family: Emma considered her work not compatible with her projects for a family, in terms of timing and, even at that moment, she was showing signs of dissatisfaction with the division of time between labour and home. Also, in the perception of For Emma, maintaining her autonomy and future work-life balance were the main sources of worry with regard to her future. To avoid these risks, from the point of view of policy, and considering her future projects, Emma appeared to be a typical case of a target of measures for women's self-employment; in fact, she hoped to have access to them in the future.

This was important to highlight: in fact, Emma did not turn to the institutions to look for work because she thought that their offers were not tailored to her, and her expectations in this regard were not met on the rare occasions in which she interfaced with them. Therefore, she was a good example of young people who achieved autonomy thanks to their commitment and family support, but who might need specific policies in their future, in order to maintain autonomy in a particular step of their life, such as maternity, but also training, career improvement or starting a self-employed career.

**Costantino** represented an interesting case of vulnerable young people living in the south of Italy. He was a highly educated 26-year-old. He had worked since he was 19, and lived in the parental house in Catania. When talking about the future, he spoke about work and his plan to improve his skills and knowledge, aware of the intense competition among young people. However, his plans for the future appeared to be poorly defined.



At the time of the interview, he had a fixed-term job, but his contract was expiring soon after.

He showed awareness of the problems of the labour market in Southern Italy and the difficulties of achieving a stable job position because of a structural shortage of qualified job opportunities. A risk factor that emerged from the interview was precisely that of territorial belonging: the contextual constraints might limit his chances of stable integration into the labour market. Having put aside savings, thanks to living with his parents (protective factor), and the coping strategy that he intended to implement was investment in his training.

He did not rely very much on policies and public institutions. When he was finishing university, Constantino had an internship as part of the Youth Guarantee Programme, but his judgment on that experience was very negative, not with regard to the company or the type of work, which he liked, but for the lengthy bureaucratic process necessary for starting the internship and carrying it out, which did not last long, and because he found a better offer. He had been there only a couple of months and was fed up, so as soon as he received a better offer from a company he had previously worked for, he left. The first reason was that the salary bothered him because it was low (about €400 for a full-time job). Then there was the bureaucratic process: signatures, signatures, signatures, and a whole range of things, including appointments at INPS (the Italian National Social Security Institute), and he was fed up. Although as a workplace he liked the first job's environment, it just wasn't possible.

### 3.6 Summary and concluding remarks

In order to identify key mechanisms leading from labour market exclusion or job insecurity to social exclusion, it is important to highlight both vulnerability and protective factors.

The young people at high risk of social exclusion in our sample were those who had low labour market attachment, and both their educational and working paths were non-linear and downward. Not a coherent educational path and not oriented to developing young people's abilities, exposed young people to an unstable work career and periods of unemployment and career paths that were not consistent with their skills. The lack of an efficient system of orientation in education and from education to work emerged from the interviews. In very few cases, our young interviewees were given the possibility of guidance and vocational training. Income discontinuity could expose these youth to economic vulnerability, due to the inadequacy of the Italian social protection system to cope with insecurity associated with a flexible labour market in both passive and active labour policies. In Italy, most of the interviewees, despite being unemployed, were not eligible to receive any kind of unemployment benefits, as were mainly atypical and irregular workers. Moreover, there were no unemployment benefits for those seeking their first job.



In this scenario, family economic and cultural backgrounds were a very important variable and the availability or not of family support, seemed to be a factor of inequality. First, because the youth who had a supportive family did not feel under economic strain and, if the parental financial resources were good, not only could they cover their personal expenses but they could also make savings. The youth who had less supportive families, were forced to take on sacrifices and self-imposed limitations. Second, in fact, the cultural capital of the family was able to support the orientation between educational and working choices.

However, as we stressed, if dependency on parents protected Italian young people against the spell of unemployment and therefore against material deprivation, it disguised their lack of opportunities and risk of poverty; working as the main protective factor, it could also contribute to postponing children's real independence. Moreover, it was interesting to note that this dependency did not seem to lead to youth's feelings of being left out of society because, thanks to their parents, most of the unemployed or precarious workers interviewed seemed able to live anyway according to the normal standard of living of their peers, as unemployment was a very common condition among young people (youth at low risk of social exclusion).

Furthermore, particular attention needed to be paid to the interviewees' housing arrangements, as this variable was one that seemed to make the difference. As already mentioned in the Italian report on autonomy, most of the respondents lived in the parental house and giving up their housing autonomy was for them the outcome of the lack of economic self-sufficiency, due to their very limited financial resources. Living at the parental home was a protective factor also because it was possible to make ends meet, to save and accumulate the kind of resources that provided a buffer against economic stress and financial pressures.

Their limited autonomy could constitute a risk factor if it involved exposure to the possibility of falling into situations of social and economic vulnerability. In other words, their condition did not imply having a full chance of planning their lives. The risk was that they would be excluded for a long time from adult roles and would not develop their ability to take responsibility and to move in a labour market that always implied a more and more active behaviour for facing flexibility.

Lastly, it was important to consider the crisis; family solidarity was able to shoulder the loss of income and employment among family members, making use of savings. However, as the crisis persisted, the family's ability to support their young members decreased (Istat 2016).

The education level was a variable that deserved particular attention. In the Italian sample, the high level of education, although still mattered for finding a (qualified) job, especially in the long-term period, did not always protect youth from job insecurity and the risk of future unemployment, as some of the cases described in this report showed. Previous studies (Bertolini, 2012) demonstrated that in Italy, a high level of education



did not guarantee immediate access to a stable and good quality job but, instead, played a role in the ability of the individual to hold together their different work experiences. The interviews revealed a worsening of this condition. Although young working men and women with higher educational qualifications were willing to build unstable work paths, they were at a high risk of slipping into a state of economic and social vulnerability, not only in the face of unsettling events, as in the past, but also as a result of non-virtuous intertwining among their different work and family careers and economical conjuncture.

Furthermore, specific attention was devoted to the immigrant status as a possible risk factor, because in the Italian sample there was a minority of foreigners. Growing up in a host country meant sometimes being faced with discriminatory processes and a lack of social resources (Brettel & Hollefield, 2015). It was important to remember to what extent the economic crisis had had a greater effect on migrants than on natives (Ambrosini & Panichella, 2016). Indeed, as we already pointed out in the report on socio-economic consequences, according to the literature, youth with a migratory background, arrived at adulthood more quickly than their Italian peers did due to several constraints they had to cope with (especially from the legal point of view in a country like Italy where the legal status was strictly linked with job opportunities). In this framework, where feelings against migrants – both adults and young, recent-arrivals, and also those who had been in Italy for more than ten years – our results were interesting in order to confirm that what was happening at local level was quite different from the national narratives outlining only stories of a lack of integration and inclusion (Ricucci, 2017).

According to the experiences gathered in the project, interviews showed similarities between migrant and Italian youth autonomy itineraries. Of course, we had to distinguish between those who had clear integration paths in Italy and those who belonged to the subgroups of young migrants suffering from their recent arrival and lack of social capital. The former were boys and girls strongly committed to their goals: getting their educational qualification/diploma, obtaining a job, developing their skills as much as possible and gaining the maximum from their educational capital either in Italy or in other European countries.

In the second sub-group, i.e. those who had the weakest social ties and a low level of integration (measured by language knowledge and skills in understanding how the context worked), attention was mainly devoted to achieving a stable societal position so that they could help relatives in the home countries.

The fear of being the 'second best' was in the air: it was not explicitly mentioned; and the topic of the lack of Italian citizenship remained backstage – a lack which could create differences in accessing rights and receiving social benefits. Our interviews swung between those who were unaware of this crucial issue and those who were



conscious of the condition of liminality, whereby they were tolerated but not really accepted by Italian society, necessary but not welcome (Kirk, Bal, Janseen, 2017).

Some elements of the Italian institutional and economic context played a significant role as vulnerability factors and had to be considered among the disadvantages that could lead to social exclusion. The territorial variable continues to be crucial in Italy: living in the South is a factor of risk as it increases the probability of being unemployed, exposed to poverty and material deprivation and living in a jobless family.

To conclude, two important findings concerning the risk of social exclusion among the Italian interviewees must be highlighted. First, the widespread inability among the interviewees to project themselves into the future and plan for it is an important risk factor of social exclusion. The future seems visible on the horizon with only a short-term plan, which triggers a devaluation of long-duration time references and their limited opportunities for agency. Second, a generation that has no tomorrow is a generation that feels excluded from the possibility of taking on those responsibilities that are socially attributed to adult roles. In fact, exclusion from the labour market and limited autonomy, also for those who have higher educational qualifications, can be translated in the risk of exclusion from adult roles.

### 3.7 The voice of youth about policies in Italy: main findings

The collected interviews shows the ability of youth – which cannot be taken for granted – to develop the critical view of their own educational path and at the same time the difficulty of accessing the labour market: it reveals competence in critical analysis of the policy instruments used as well as awareness of the validity of continuous learning – as long as it is close to the world of work and its characteristics (not theoretical and often anachronistic like the school milieu).

The following interview extract is emblematic of the relationship between young people and policies in Italy, characterised by a sense of worthlessness. Referring to the question “What kind of help/support would you like to receive from institutions to improve your working situation and that of young people finding themselves in a worse situation considering labour market insertion and the transition to an autonomous life”, we can synthesize their answers using the words of Dario, a young man, 28 years old, who lives in Catania (in Southern Italy), highly educated with a part-time permanent job:

*“That's pretty much the million dollar question (smiling) in the sense that I think we'll try for a while to find the perfect recipe. I don't know, I would not be able to respond with an honestly great idea, because then I think that the difficulties, in this historic phase, are also linked a little to the economic difficulties in general. In times of economic prosperity maybe, you know, one thing leads to another” (4)*





The words of Dario describe what some interviewees reported in a less-linear and clear way:

*“Something more should be done in terms, on the one hand, of early labour orientation in school - to and, on the other, of creating a stronger link between universities and the labour market -t not only the simple university internships... something stronger, I do not know. Then, for me, the internship I did after graduation was important but, in general, I know that I am one case among many (...) In other words, I think a university internship is too evanescent a form of contact between the two worlds”. (4)*

When we meet young people with a lower level of academic qualifications and a more culturally impoverished family environment, a certain vagueness emerges speaking about policies, social benefits and social welfare. Often, these issues are covered by strong statements and negative feelings that are, however, inaccurate or based on word of mouth.

Young people frequently give up no relations with special services, with initiatives which could help them, because they are conditioned by a negative prejudice: *“if you want to obtain a job you need a kick in the ass” (14)*

Some interviewees cite friends' negative experiences with the employment services. These stories have increased youth's disillusion with public institutions and they hard back to a kind of golden age where students found jobs just after having got their diplomas.

There is no shortage of disseminating voices, those who – thanks to an active employment policy (e.g. Youth Guarantee) – were able to turn the corner in their professional lives. For Margherita, 24-years-old: the Youth Guarantee experience was a turning point for her as it gave her opportunities and self-confidence:

*“It gave me a little more confidence than just going in blindly [...] the fact that they looked after me, that I always had someone to speak to about certain things gave me a little more confidence and made it possible for me to have a much longer work experience, instead of working for 4 days I managed to stay on for 6 months, that at least. And in fact I worked in the restaurant there”. (25)*

It should be underlined, however, that several young people distinguish between Youth Guarantee, which they appreciate because specifically directed at them, and employment and other related-topic services in general. While for the former there are mixed feelings, the latter are, for the most part, roundly condemned.



Indeed, young people cannot really understand what employment services are doing and, in general, they think that there is a lack of information about the policies or benefits that might be available.

*R: "There's an unbelievable queue (to gain access to the Employment Office), you have to be there at*

*7am register in 2 minutes... If it was online it would be easier, but... and... there are two Employment Offices, it depends on where you live, and... What can I say, you register." [...]*

*I: "Is there anything else they could do or that they should do, in your opinion?"*

*R: "No, I don't know, because I've never really... I mean... never really stopped to think about what they do, because I don't really understand what they do, I mean, ok, they register you, but then..." (1)*

To sum up, the interviewees underlines the following points:

- defects of the school system in supplying solid cultural bases for interacting with a complex, rapidly changing and unpredictable world of work;
- the necessity of orientation service as early as school years;
- -difficulty of the schools in building positive relationships with the world outside; the importance of recognizing non-formalised educational and work experience (e.g. odd jobs, voluntary work) in developing professionalism;
- clear perception of labour-market closure and insufficient services facilitating labour supply and demand;
- the necessity of improving synergy among (not only work-related) youth services, including from the informational point of view;
- emphatic criticism towards the language used by public operators and services, considered cryptic and difficult of comprehension in concrete everyday life.
- Therefore, referring to the policies helping the youth entering in the first steps of their careers:
- absence of measures to help the youth to face the discontinuity or the low level of income (e.g. long period as trainees, stages and other jobs underplayed are very widespread in Italy). This issue regards also the problem of affordability of house that leads to low youth autonomy;
- absence of information from the employment services about measures to help self-employment or the constitution of a start up, also referring to the access to European funding or banking credit.

Alongside, and in a sense fundamental to these elements there is a paradox related to the information available to young people in meeting the world of work, a paradox which is highlighted on several occasions. The vast amount of information available,



especially online does not seem to help youth to move more self-assuredly in the difficult task of job-seeking or in creating professionalism which employers will find appetising. On the contrary, it is seen as another problem in the absence of considerable ICTs skills and of assistance in using existing informational skills without wasting time and energy.

### **Possible answers to the voices of youth:**

Thus, it becomes clear that certain factors should be bear in mind when planning and putting into practice educational, training and employments policies in Italy:

- Rethinking school and university program starting from the necessity of labour market
- In training operators, in-depth rethinking of which skills are really useful for effective interaction between youth and public services.
- Improving the effectiveness of employment services with the provision of training with experts who prepares young people for the instability of the labour market and developing their ability to built a coherent job path among instable contracts.
- Importing and/or implementing the activities of counseling and budget skills within the job services
- Reinforcing the activities of orientation of young people at school and in their main transition from school to work and between contracts.
- Implementing a **skills certification system** should establish rules to ensure that expertise gained in a *previous career path, even if with short-term contracts be recognized* and that in the stipulation of a successive contract requires a higher job position and an increased income.
- The revision of the **guidance devices** and contact with the labour market, starting in the educational and training pathways.
- Creation of places and ways for the encounter between atypical workers. These subjects no longer recognize themselves within the unions or other institutions; they feel isolated since they perceive their employment status to be unique.
- **Supporting access to credit and/or the creation of forms of microcredit for young people, even if working with short-term contracts.**
- Having an income protection system of an insurance nature, developing **unemployment benefits for those seeking their first job**. In addition, there is still the lack of both a measure of support for the cost of children and a universal measure of income support.
- Beyond the horizon of young people, instead there is the subject of **entrepreneurship**. While the media delineate the figure of the start-upper with the identikit of the self-made man/woman in the 2.0 era, the majority of the respondents - in a transversal way from North to South, men and women, college graduates or with only compulsory education - represent themselves in the future as employees. Self-employment is generally not a contemplated option. The experience of respondents shows the aporias of a country's system for socio-economic structure and policy definition that remains anchored in a dual labour market that is segmented and highly protected, in which room is made for new measures without a **proper accompaniment on the level of social and cultural policies**.



- **facilitate rent** policy to support the housing autonomy of young people and the affordability of house expenses. The young people interviewed mostly leave a home that is owned.
- The **territorial divide (with a South Italy poorer than the North)** continues to be crucial, leading to new migration patterns from south Italy within the country and abroad, interweaving the stories of highly qualified young people and young people with low skills, both looking for a job that will allow them to stop being "eternally young and still in training", destined to go from one internship or temporary job to another ,without ever becoming an adult and to be treated as such.
- Also interventions on the side of employers aimed to reinforce their awareness that young workers can be an important human "resource" to invest on are desirable. The words of Italian young interviewees seem in fact to reveal in some cases the perception that employers consider not so useful and valuable youth as workers, and rather a burden, and therefore poorly inclined to invest on their training especially in a long-term perspective.



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## Annex 1 – National sampling scheme

	<b>Total sample</b>	<b>Turin</b>	<b>Catania</b>
<b>Sample</b>	50 (of which 25 youth involved in policy programs)	30 (of which 15 youth involved in policy programs)	20 (of which 10 youth involved in policy programs)
<b>Gender (*)</b>	25 young men 25 young women	15 young men 15 young women	10 young men 10 young women
<b>Age (*)</b>	30-32 (18-24) 18-20 (25-30)	18 -19 (18-24) 11-12 (25-30)	12-13 (18-24) 7-8 (25-30)
<b>Occupational status (*)</b>	21-24 Temporary workers 15-18 Unemployed 7-9 NEET**	13-14 Temporary workers 9-11 Unemployed 5-7 NEET **	8-10 Temporary workers 6-8 Unemployed 2-4 NEET **
<b>Education</b>	20-22 isced 0-2 16-18 isced 3-4 12-14 isced 5-6	12-13 isced 0-2 10-11 isced 3-4 8-9 isced 5-6	8-9 isced 0-2 6-7 isced 3-4 4-5 isced 5-6
<b>Legal status</b>	8-10 young people belonging to ethnic minorities **	8-10 young people belonging to ethnic minorities **	--

(\*) occupational status, age and gender are considered nested each other; (\*\*) specific risk group for Italian context;

In the final sample size we will take into account also the successful stories of youth with permanent contract (3 -5 cases).



## Annex 2 – Structural indicators of the geographical contexts

Socio-demographic data																																					
	Year	Catania (municipality)		Turin (municipality)		Italy																															
Resident population*	1/1/2015	315,601		896,773		60,795,612																															
Resident population aged 18-30 years*	1/1/2015	50,226		110,658		8,206,503																															
Resident population aged 18-30 years (% of total population)*	1/1/2015	15.9%		12.3%		13.5%																															
Married persons aged 18-30 years (% of total population aged 18-30 years)*	1/1/2015	11.7%		10.9%		11.3%																															
Resident foreign population (% of total population)*	1/1/2015	3.8%		15.4%		8.2%																															
Resident foreign population by citizenship (% of total resident foreign population, top 5)*	31/12/2014	<table border="1"> <tr><td>Sri Lanka</td><td>20.0</td></tr> <tr><td>Romania</td><td>14.6</td></tr> <tr><td>China</td><td>12.2</td></tr> <tr><td>Mauritius</td><td>10.2</td></tr> <tr><td>Bangladesh</td><td>6.2</td></tr> </table>		Sri Lanka	20.0	Romania	14.6	China	12.2	Mauritius	10.2	Bangladesh	6.2	<table border="1"> <tr><td>Romania</td><td>39.5</td></tr> <tr><td>Morocco</td><td>13.3</td></tr> <tr><td>Perù</td><td>6.6</td></tr> <tr><td>China</td><td>5.6</td></tr> <tr><td>Albania</td><td>4.5</td></tr> </table>		Romania	39.5	Morocco	13.3	Perù	6.6	China	5.6	Albania	4.5	<table border="1"> <tr><td>Romania</td><td>22.6</td></tr> <tr><td>Albania</td><td>9.8</td></tr> <tr><td>Morocco</td><td>9.0</td></tr> <tr><td>China</td><td>5.3</td></tr> <tr><td>Ukraine</td><td>4.5</td></tr> </table>		Romania	22.6	Albania	9.8	Morocco	9.0	China	5.3	Ukraine	4.5
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Persons aged 65 years and over (% of total population)*	1/1/2015	20.3%		25.2%		21.7%																															
Persons aged 30-34 years and tertiary education	2011	20.6%		30.6 %		23.2%																															
Persons aged	2011	51.9%		64.6 %		57.6%																															





25-64 years with at least secondary school				
Persons aged 18-24 years with at most lower education and not in a training program	2011	29.8%	16.7%	18.1%
Neet persons aged 15-29 years	2011	39.8%	19.8%	22.5%

Sources: UrBES 2015; \*Demo Istat

**Net migration (difference of immigrants and emigrants). 2013**

	Transfers of residence				
	Internal			International	Total
	Inside the same province	Between provinces			
		Provinces of the same region	Provinces of other regions		
Turin (municipality)	-2.818	-184	1.532	4.904	3.434
Catania (municipality)	-876	232	-556	758	-442
Italy	-12.194	882	16.894	90.427	96.009

Source: Demo Istat

	Internal emigration <sup>10</sup>			International emigration <sup>11</sup>		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Turin (province)	31,596	31,374	62,970	2,695	2,353	5,048
Catania (province)	13,484	13,505	26,989	945	799	1,744
Italy	678,946	683,353	1,362,299	67,329	58,406	125,735

Source: Demo Istat

**Youth involvement in the labor market**

	Year	Catania	Turin	Italy
--	------	---------	-------	-------

<sup>10</sup> People move in other Italian city or region.

<sup>11</sup> People move *abroad*.



		<b>(province)</b>	<b>(province)</b>	
<b>Unemployment rate – persons aged 18-29 years*</b>	2014	42.9% (+13.1 in comparison to 10 years before) 45.3% Men 38.9% Women	34.2% (+ 21.2 in comparison to 10 years before) 33.1% Men 35.6% Women	31.4%
<b>Employment rate – persons aged 20-64 years</b>	2013	42.1%	65.9%	59.8%
<b>Inactivity rate – persons aged 15-74 years</b>	2013	41.6%	16.6%	21.7%
<b>Employment rate of women aged 25-49 years with pre-school children/ Employment rate of women without children (ratio)</b>	2011	76.8%	88.0 %	84.0%
<b>Children aged 0-2 years enrolled in day-care institutions</b>	2012	5.7%	14.5 %	13.5 %

Sources: UrBES 2015; \*I.Stat

<b>Long-term unemployed persons (at least 12 months) (aged 15 years and over). 2014</b>	
Sicily region	15.3%
Piedmont region	6.7%
Italy	7.7%

Source: I.Stat

<b>Relative poverty. 2002-2014 (%)</b>													
Year													
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014 <sup>12</sup>
Piedmont region	7.5	7.4	7.0	7.3	6.9	6.6	5.7	6.5	5.3	5.3	7.0	5.1	6.0
Sicily region	17.8	19.8	24.2	25.0	23.0	21.0	22.1	18.0	20.4	21.0	21.9	24.1	25.2

Source: Istat <http://www.istat.it/it/archivio/164869>

<sup>12</sup> In Italy, as a whole, in 2014 relative poverty rate is 10,3%.

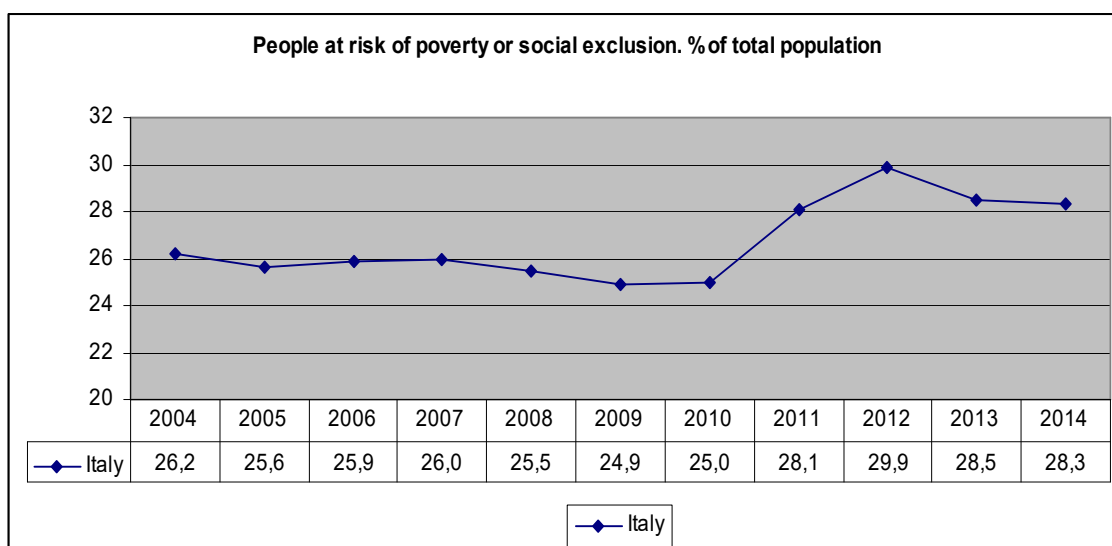


Absolute poverty. 2014, %				
	Northern Italy	Central Italy	Southern Italy	Italy
2014	4.2	4.8	8.6	5.7

Source: Istat

Relative poverty. 2014, %				
	Northern Italy	Central Italy	Southern Italy	Italy
2014	4.9	6.3	21.1	10.3

Source: Istat



Source: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/>

People at risk of poverty or social exclusion. 2013-2014. %		
	2013	2014
Piedmont region	16.5	18.8
Sicily region	55.0	54.4

Source: Istat, Reddito e condizioni di vita, 2015



Annex 3 - Table for the sample overview

N. of interview	Alias	Access point	Involvement in Policies	Gender	Education	Year of birth	City where he/she lives	Geographical context	Legal status	Belonging to national specific risk group	Occupational status	Living in parental house
	<i>invented name for privacy</i>	<i>institutional/informal</i>	<i>yes/no</i>	<i>F/M</i>	<i>ISCED n.</i>	<i>YY YY</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>1=Torino 2=Catania*</i>	<i>national cit./other</i>	<i>yes/no (specified)</i>	<i>unemployed, temporary job, secure job, non contractual job, NEET</i>	<i>yes/no</i>
UNIT O_01	Mara	informal	NO	F	3	1986	Torino	1	national citizenship	NO	unemployed	YES
UNIT O_02	Giulia	informal	NO	F	6	1989	Torino	1	national citizenship	NO	secure job	YES
UNIT O_03	Franco	informal	NO	M	5	1986	San Gregorio di Catania (Ct)	2	national citizenship	NO	non contractual job	YES
UNIT O_04	Dario	informal	NO	M	6	1987	Catania	2	national citizenship	NO	secure job	YES
UNIT O_05	Costantino	informal	YES	M	5	1989	Catania	2	national citizenship	NO	temporary job	YES
UNIT O_06	Carlo	informal	YES	M	2	1990	Torino	1	national citizenship	NO	temporary job	NO
UNIT O_07	Lara	informal	NO	F	6	1989	Torino	1	national citizenship	NO	unemployed	YES
UNIT O_08	Anna	informal	NO	F	6	1989	Torino	1	national citizenship	NO	temporary job	YES
UNIT O_09	Elena	informal	YES	F	2	1988	Torino	1	national citizenship	NO	unemployed	YES



UNIT O_10	Concilia	informal	NO	F	3	1993	Trecastagni (Ct)	2	national citizenship	NO	unemployed	YES
UNIT O_11	Gaia	institutional	YES	F	3	1991	Catania	2	national citizenship	NO	unemployed	YES
UNIT O_12	Luigi	institutional	YES	M	3	1987	Catania	2	national citizenship	NO	non contractual job	YES
UNIT O_13	Matteo	institutional	YES	M	3	1988	Catania	2	national citizenship	NO	unemployed	YES
UNIT O_14	Giacomo	informal	NO	M	2	1996	Misterbianco (Ct)	2	national citizenship	NO	temporary job	YES
UNIT O_15	Grazia	institutional	YES	M	3	1993	Catania	2	national citizenship	NO	unemployed	YES
UNIT O_16	Erika	institutional	YES	F	2	1987	Mascalucia (Ct)	2	national citizenship	YES	NEET	YES
UNIT O_17	Michelangelo	institutional	YES	M	3	1994	Catania	2	national citizenship	NO	unemployed	YES
UNIT O_18	Leonardo	institutional	YES	M	2	1992	Catania	2	national citizenship	YES	NEET	YES
UNIT O_19	Renata	institutional	YES	F	3	1994	Catania	2	national citizenship	NO	unemployed	YES
UNIT O_20	Paolo	informal	YES	M	2	1993	Misterbianco (Ct)	2	national citizenship	NO	temporary job	NO
UNIT O_21	Camilla	informal	NO	F	3	1993	Trecastagni (Ct)	2	national citizenship	NO	non contractual job	YES
UNIT O_22	Tamara	institutional	YES	F	3	1993	Gravina di Catania (Ct)	2	national citizenship	YES	NEET	YES
UNIT O_23	Pedro	institutional	NO	M	3	1995	Torino	1	other	YES	secure job	YES
UNIT O_24	Andrea	institutional	YES	M	3	1992	Torino	1	national citizenship	NO	temporary job	YES
UNIT O_25	Margherita	institutional	YES	F	3	1992	Torino	1	national citizenship	NO	unemployed	YES
UNIT O_26	Arianna	institutional	YES	F	3	1996	Torino	1	national citizenship	YES	NEET	YES



UNIT O_27	Claudia	informal	NO	F	3	1995	Torino	1	other	YES	unemployed	YES
UNIT O_28	Flor	institutional	NO	F	2	1988	Torino	1	other	YES	non contractual job	NO
UNIT O_29	Antonio	institutional	YES	M	2	1997	Nichelino	1	national citizenship	NO	temporary job	YES
UNIT O_30	Marius	institutional	YES	M	3	1993	Moncalieri	1	national citizenship	YES	temporary job	YES
UNIT O_31	Dante	institutional	NO	M	2	1997	Torino	1	national citizenship	NO	NEET	YES
UNIT O_32	Giovanni	institutional	NO	M	2	1990	Torino	1	national citizenship	NO	secure job	NO
UNIT O_33	Ester	institutional	YES	F	3	1990	Torino	1	national citizenship	NO	non contractual job	YES
UNIT O_34	Emma	institutional	YES	F	3	1996	Torino	1	national citizenship	NO	temporary job	NO
UNIT O_35	Edoardo	informal	YES	M	6	1985	Torino	1	national citizenship	NO	temporary job	NO
UNIT O_36	Ionela	institutional	YES	F	6	1991	Torino	1	other	YES	temporary job	NO
UNIT O_37	Francesca	institutional	YES	F	2	1993	Torino	1	national citizenship	NO	temporary job	NO
UNIT O_38	Isa	institutional	YES	F	3	1994	Torino	1	national citizenship	NO	unemployed	YES
UNIT O_39	Tomaso	institutional	NO	M	3	1994	Torino	1	national citizenship	NO	unemployed	YES
UNIT O_40	Gilda	institutional	YES	F	3	1994	Torino	1	national citizenship	NO	temporary job	YES
UNIT O_41	Lorenza	institutional	YES	F	3	1994	Torino	1	national citizenship	NO	unemployed	NO
UNIT O_42	Gianpiro	informal	NO	M	6	1988	Catania	2	national citizenship	NO	secure job	YES





UNIT O_43	Katia	informal	NO	F	6	1988	Zafferana (CT)	2	national citizenship	NO	temporary job	YES
UNIT O_44	Aurelio	informal	NO	M	3	1993	Trecastagni (Ct)	2	national citizenship	NO	temporary job	YES
UNIT O_45	Mohammed	institutional	NO	M	2	1996	Torino	1	other	YES	unemployed	YES
UNIT O_46	Chiara	institutional	NO	F	4	1988	Torino	1	national citizenship	NO	temporary job	NO
UNIT O_47	Veronica	institutional	NO	F	6	1989	Torino	1	national citizenship	NO	unemployed	NO
UNIT O_48	Alessandro	informal	NO	M	6	1989	Torino	1	national citizenship	NO	unemployed	NO
UNIT O_49	Max	institutional	YES	M	3	1989	Torino	1	national citizenship	NO	secure job	NO
UNIT O_50	Marco	informal	NO	M	3	1990	Cafasse	1	national citizenship	NO	temporary job	NO



## Annex 4 – Criteria for the description of educational and working paths.

With respect to the educational paths we looked mainly at:

- the types of courses of studies attended and at the degrees obtained by our interviewees, taking into account that according to the literature different courses of studies and, at the end, different degrees give different (in number and kind) occupational opportunities to the young; for example Maura Franchi (2005) classifies University degrees in “strong”, “medium” and “weak” degrees considering the number of years the boy/girl spends unemployed in the Italian labour market before to find any job, or a good and permanent job; in the first category, the “strong” degrees, she puts for example university degrees in engineering and informatics, in the “medium”, university degrees in political sciences and in the “weak” the degrees in humanities, education sciences, communication sciences.
- the “quality” of the educational paths and their effective length; in this sense we looked at any interruptions in the interviewees’ courses of studies or changes of courses and at the reasons behind these turning points, and at how many experiences compose the young people’s educational paths (are they paths rich of educational experiences or not?)

With respect to the working paths we looked at:

- the length of the working paths (number of years since the beginning of their working career, since the interviewees are in the labour market from the first job/search of the job)
- the density of the working paths (that is the amount of past work experiences)
- the quality of the working path (based on the income, the type of contract, the kind of jobs, if they are qualified jobs or not)
- the level of consistency with the degree of education obtained
- the level of internal consistency of the working path (that is the consistency of all the jobs carried out by the interviewee in his/her life)
- the job continuity (for example the interviewee has ever worked despite the temporary contracts or on the contrary he/she worked discontinuously)
- the recurrence and length of unemployment spells
- the overlapping of education and work experiences (has the interviewee worked during the school or university?).

This allowed us to build up the following typology of working paths useful also in order to identify risk individual profiles and if there has been (or not) somehow “career



mobility” toward better or worse working conditions in the interviewees’ biography and life:

- upward career mobility
  - downward career mobility
  - stable career
- circular career (=trap in the precarity).