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Dear Readers

Unemployment has been a central political issue in European countries over the last decades, and will most probably remain a major problem in the coming years. In most countries, young people have been affected more strongly by unemployment than older age groups. However, there is wide variation in youth unemployment levels, both in the actual level of youth unemployment and in the ratio of youth to adult unemployment. The characteristics of youth unemployment thus vary substantially across Europe. It has also been demonstrated that the experience of unemployment has so-called “scarring” effects, with major implications for future labour market prospects in terms of wage penalties, downward occupational mobility and long-term difficulties to find a job. These long-term effects of unemployment on wage and employment trajectories are not something that youth appear to be immune to. However, all EU young people are not equally exposed to such problems. Therefore, empirical studies are needed to assess the extent to which young people are affected by unemployment and its consequences. This issue is of great importance for Switzerland too, especially in the aftermath of the 4th revision of the unemployment insurance which significantly decreased the level of protection provided to young unemployed in Switzerland.

To this purpose, a workshop was organized at the University of Geneva in October 2010 by Prof. Marco Giugni, with a view to investigating the Swiss situation with regard to youth unemployment, precariousness and exclusion. The meeting was organized in connection with the European FP7 project, Younex (<http://www.younex.unige.ch>). The objectives were to take stock of the available studies, to extend knowledge on the situation of Swiss young unemployed, and to provide practical insights into the potential paths for enhancing their social and political integration. One of the main challenges was to interconnect the various dimensions (socioeconomic, political, psychological, etc.) of youth unemployment. Indeed, most previous studies on youth unemployment tend to focus on its socioeconomic dimension, aiming at finding ways to improve the employability of young unemployed and their reinsertion into the labour market (in particular, as a result of targeted policies). At the same time, scholarly work dealing with the social and psycholo-

gical dimensions of unemployment does exist (much less on political aspects), but it has tended to consider all types of unemployed, with no clear focus on young unemployed. Therefore, genuinely interdisciplinary studies are still lacking. Besides, we also lack systematic studies of the social and political exclusion of young unemployed, especially comparing them with other social categories of youth such as those suffering from precariousness and those working under the poverty level. Finally, little systematic and comparative analysis has been conducted with regard to the interplay between unemployment, individual behavior, institutional and societal environments. In fact, previous work on this subject matter has tended to focus on specific aspects and determinants of unemployment rather than on the interaction of different explanatory factors. The aim of the workshop was thus to develop existing insights by addressing the specific interaction between different levels (macro/institutional, meso/organizational, and micro/individual), to help answering the pressing questions about the factors leading to youth social exclusion in Switzerland and to develop policy-relevant findings for the improvement of integration of the youth. The papers in this special issue, coordinated by Prof. Marco Giugni, are the outcome of the workshop, they present extensive empirical data shedding light on the situation of Swiss young unemployed, as well as the causes and consequences of their unemployment. As such, they represent an important contribution to the ongoing reflection about the design of appropriate public policies in order to struggle against youth unemployment, precariousness, and exclusion.

In his paper, Eric Crettaz presents evidence about the degree of exposure of young people to unemployment and precariousness. He clearly shows that workers in their twenties are more exposed to temporary employment than the rest of the workforce; however, they have a below-average risk of being working poor. Workers in their early thirties are more exposed to underemployment, especially female workers who have children. Moreover, 30 to 35 year old workers are more at risk of poverty, due to a below-average labour market participation at the household level and to the presence of children in the household. These results suggest that Swiss authorities should tackle more efficiently the issue of the growing incidence of temporary employment among young people, despite a healthy economy and low unemployment levels. They also show that family policy should be redesigned with a view to helping mothers, esp. lone mothers, to better reconcile work and family life.

Sylvain Weber, Vahan Garibian, Giovanni Ferro-Luzzi and Jean-Marc Falter investigate the specific situation of youth with regard to unemployment. Even though Switzerland is known to suffer from low unemploy-

ment in international comparison, young and unskilled workers are the most vulnerable and therefore deserve attention. Using data from the Swiss Labour Force Survey over the period from 1991 to 2008, the authors conduct several statistical analyses to investigate the labour market situation of unskilled youths and its evolution. The results show that the situation of unskilled young workers has significantly worsened over the last two decades. Transition analysis and logistic regressions indicate more resilient unemployment for unskilled youths. The business cycle, bilateral agreements with the EU granting free movement of labour and technological changes are all potential explanations of this phenomenon.

Jean-Michel Bonvin and Maël Dif-Pradalier suggest using the capability approach developed by Amartya Sen as a yardstick for the analysis and assessment of public policies. In this framework, the efficiency of a social policy is not measured against its impact on the employment rate, but against its contribution to the enhancement of the recipients' capabilities, i. e. their real freedom to lead a valuable life and have a valuable job. This approach is applied to a specific case study, namely the FORJAD programme developed in the canton of Vaud with a view to improving the level of education and the prospects for occupational integration among disadvantaged youth. The objective is to assess to what extent this programme succeeds in tackling the multiple problems of this target group and in durably increasing their capabilities. The results show that if FORJAD clearly contributes to enhancing its beneficiaries' capabilities, it still could be improved in some important respects.

Claudio Bolzman's paper focuses on the situation of young adults of the "second generation" on the labour market and the main factors that influence their professional careers. It explores the relevance of two theoretical approaches – segmented assimilation and straight line assimilation – in the Swiss context. Using data mainly from research on young (18 to 34) Italian and Spanish adults of the second generation in Switzerland, as well as relevant information from other research studies in Switzerland, the paper indicates some of the factors (level of education, discrimination and social capital) that influence the transition from school to labour market for that generation. The main hypothesis is that even though the Italian and Spanish second generation is incorporated into the economic mainstream, segmented assimilation is also observed in Switzerland in the case of "new second generation" national groups.

Jasmine Lorenzini and Marco Giugni examine the impact of three forms of social support (by the partner, the family, and friends) on anxiety and happiness, two aspects of the psychological well-being of young long-term

unemployed. Using in-depth interviews and survey data, their analysis provides evidence of an impact of all three forms of social support on the psychological well-being of young long-term unemployed. In addition, it shows the importance of social integration and, more specifically, the fact of having a social life offering opportunities to go out and meet people not living in one's household. Finally, it emphasizes certain psychological aspects related to how the unemployed understand their unemployment situation, such as the value granted to work and the hopes of getting a job. They also discuss some of the underlying coping mechanisms such as having opportunities to think about something else than unemployment or being included in supportive networks although not providing support directly connected to unemployment.

At the end of this special issue dedicated to "Youth Unemployment, Precariousness, and Exclusion in Switzerland", the reader will find some indications about recent publications in the field of social work and social policies, as well as announcements of upcoming conferences. We would also like to draw your attention to the Call for Papers that can be found at the very end of the issue. It relates to a special issue of our Journal that will be published in the end of 2012 and will be devoted to a most topical subject: "The Issue of Abuse in the Field of Social Work and Social Policies."

For the Editorial Committee:
Jean-Michel Bonvin