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Those Who're in the Gutter look at the Stars?

Explaining Perceptions of Labor Market Opportunities among European Young Adults

Abstract

In the backlash of the global financial crisis of 2008, unemployment has risen worldwide. Young adults are among the first to experience the economic recession because of a delayed entrance on the labor market. In cross-national perspective, research on youth employment has thus far paid attention to the transition from school to work, but underemphasized the importance of the social-psychology of labor market entrance. In this paper, we will analyze European young adults' perceptions of the first-job opportunities in their country. The result of a multilevel regression analysis on the 2008 wave of the European Social Survey (ESS) shows that differences across countries can mainly be explained by the public's perceptions of levels of unemployment and public spending on education. At the individual level, youth in a precarious socioeconomic situation have a depressed view on the opportunities. Moreover, women perceive the opportunities as less positive than men while ethnic youth has, contrary to the theoretical expectations, a more positive outlook on the chances for young people.

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1. Introduction

The economic consequences of the recent global financial crisis have been leading to significant increases in unemployment. In Europe, the total unemployment rate in the EU27 area inclined from 8.0 percent in January 2009 to 9.5 percent in January 2010 (Eurostat, 01.03.2010). As usually, young adults are among the first to get hit by the consequences of the recession since this group enters the labor market with the comparative disadvantage of missing the required work experience. While total unemployment in the European Union increased with 1.5 percent between January 2009 and 2010, youth unemployment rose with 3 percent from 17.7 to 20.9 percent over the same time span.¹

At the same time, in its *European Pact for Youth*, the European Commission underlines the importance of the integration of young people into the labor market as being “essential for ensuring a return to sustained and sustainable growth in Europe” (Commission of the European Communities, 2005). In this Youth Pact, several policy initiatives are proposed comprising three strands, namely (1) employment, integration and social advancement, (2) education, training and mobility, and (3) reconciliation of family life and working life. Since this Pact is especially focused on the adjustments of the labor market and educational systems in order to ease the school-to-work transition, information about this transition is of vital importance to give shape to policies.

Cross-national research into school-to-work transitions is growing (Ryan, 2001) and has paid a particular attention to national characteristics that condition a smooth entry on the labor market (Müller & Gangl, 2003; Breen, 2005; Scherer, 2005). Self-evidently, this entry is facilitated in times of economic prosperity when job scarcity is at its lowest and the queue to enter the labor market is reduced for the unemployed, including those that have recently completed their education (Wolbers, 2007). Additional characteristics of the educational system and the labor market have also been presented to explain these transitions: especially vocational training and apprenticeships (Gangl, Müller & Raffe, 2003; Breen, 2005; Wolbers, 2007)² and low employment protection which enables dismissing employees to create opportunities for young people (Breen, 2005; Scherer, 2005; Müller, 2007) seem to be of relevance. Thus, systems that match schools with the labor market as well as systems with lower employment protection are most successful for a fast labor market entry.

Such structural and institutional approaches to understanding the school-to-work transition do, however, not fully consider the full range of determinants that are involved in a young person’s considerations whether or not to enter the labor market, or to opt for alternatives, like pursuing

¹ Moreover, there is a wide discrepancy in those rates across European countries: data for January 2009 show that youth unemployment is lowest in the Netherlands (5.6 percent) but highest in Spain (33.1 percent).

² The same authors do, however warn that these specific educational systems, with its emphasis on skill development, may provide an easier entry into the labor market but provide less prestigious first jobs and inhibits further career development compared to general education (see also Psacharopoulos (1994) on the returns of vocational vs general education).

another educational degree or doing voluntary work. In this respect, social cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994) emphasizes the importance of personal agency, i.e. person-cognitive assets comprising self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals, in addition to physical and environmental characteristics. While the empirical research following on this theory has empirically disentangled the link between personal assets and labor market entry (Pinquart, Juang & Silbereisen, 2003; Haase, Heckhausen & Köller, 2008), the environmental factors have received only little attention (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 2000). Despite the absence of a consistent stream of research outcomes, Lent et al (2000, p. 37) argue that career development is not only influenced by objective, but also by perceived environmental or context factors.

One of these perceived environmental factors that may hinder students' smooth school-to-work transition regards the individual perception whether the labor market is generous in offering first job opportunities for young adults. When asked about potential barriers to getting a first job, American college students rate a lack of opportunities of the labor market as most prominent impediment above others like missing or necessary qualifications (Swanson & Tokar, 1991). Additionally, anticipated work conditions and exposure to work-relevant activities are important considerations for respectively technical college and university respondents with regard to career choices (Lent et al, 2002, p. 66). The perception that the opportunities for work are rather limited might hinder the decision to work and stimulate other choices, like there is staying on the school benches.

In this paper, we will not touch upon the question what the behavioral outcomes of depressed views on labor market opportunities among youth respondents are. Rather, we are interested in analyzing the individual and context level factors from which these perceptions originate in the first place. We will formulate and test hypotheses drawn from theories of human capital, dual labor market, signaling and social networks (Rosenbaum et al, 1990), and analyze the perceptions of labor market opportunities for young people among a cross-national sample of people age 30 or younger taken from 22 countries that participated in the 2008 wave of the European Social Survey. We will first introduce the theoretical models that might explain these youth perceptions towards the labor market. We will then explain our data and methodology, present our results, and finally discuss some implications of our analysis.

2. Individual and Context Level Influences on Youth Perceptions of First-Job Opportunities

For specifying our hypotheses we will combine arguments from various sources within the literature on labor market research, with a particular focus on school-to-work transitions. Both individual and country determinants will be surveyed.

Individual level factors

Departing with the individual level explanations, a first theoretical model concerns human capital (Becker, 1962), which assumes that in an unconfounded labor market, differences in labor market entrance arise because of educational and skill deficiencies, leading to better access and higher rewards for higher educated people and people with more valuable skills (Rosenbaum et al, 1990). The empirical relation between levels of education and a wide series of labor market related outcomes has widely been demonstrated, with the conclusion that there is a significant positive correlation between e.g. schooling and levels of income (Ashenfelter & Rouse, 2000), but also between schooling and career outcomes (Kerckhoff, Raudenbush & Glennie, 2001), including a smooth school-to-work transition (Bratberg & Nilsen, 2000). With regard to the perception whether one has the capacity to be easily fitted into the labor market, the higher educated tend to regard their employability as significantly higher compared with the lower educated (Berntson, Sverke & Marklund, 2007). While perceptions of perceived employability have shown to be a function of educational levels, likewise it can be expected that the perception of a labor market that gives opportunities to youth is also positively determined by one's educational attainments.

A second theoretical model of the dual labor market adds to the first model the understanding that it is difficult to discuss the labor market as a single entity but instead differentiates between a primary segment (with stable employment and good working conditions) and a secondary segment (with unstable employment and worse conditions). As Rosenbaum et al (1990) note in the case of school-to-work entrance, the theory of the dual labor market usually departs from the understanding that school-leavers almost automatically enroll into the most precarious labor market conditions. Yet, pointing to US research (Granovetter, 1981; in Rosenbaum et al., 1990), the authors nevertheless diagnose that also at a younger age, a divide between the primary and secondary segments can be noted, refuting the claim that school-leavers are *a priori* directed to the secondary segment. Moreover, concerning perceived employability, those that have characteristics that are associated with the secondary segment, like limited contracts and experiences of unemployment, also perceives themselves as less employable than those with primary segment characteristics (Berntson, Sverke & Marklund, 2007). One of those secondary segment characteristics, being the experience of being without a job, has shown to leave 'scars' on future employment conditions and earnings (Arulampalam, 2001; Luijckx & Wolbers, 2009). Yet, experiences of unemployment, low wages, and limited contracts are only a few socioeconomic examples characterizing a secondary market position; students missing the parental cultural capital (Coleman, 1988), female youth and ethnic minorities are also overrepresented in the secondary segment. Derived from this theory, our hypothesis is that those young adults that have characteristics that are associated with the secondary labor market will perceive the labor market entry opportunities in their country as more pessimistic compared with the youth that are in a less precarious situation.

A third theoretical model, signaling theory, predicts that in the labor market career success such as a smooth transition from school to work depends on the exchange of information, or ‘signals’, of the employee to the employer (Spence, 1973). Important signals known from the literature are gender and ethnicity.³ With regard to gender, a glance at youth unemployment rates in Europe shows that they more or less equal for men and women (Eurostat, 2010b).⁴ Nevertheless, students of the labor market repeatedly warn that women are still faced with more disadvantaged labor market positions, often expressed in terms of lower wages and a persistent outlook at the ‘glass ceiling’ (Arulampalam, Booth & Bryan, 2007).⁵ Compared with natives, ethnic minorities have demonstrated to have less success on the labor market, whether it regards being employed or occupational attainments (Heath, Rothon & Kilpi, 2008). While this disadvantaged position has various causes, like e.g. educational level and language proficiency, Heath et al (2008) also point to structural discrimination on the labor market. Social psychological research along gender and ethnical lines has documented that these objective disadvantages have also translated into the perceptions of women and ethnic minorities that they are faced with more career barriers than respectively men and natives (McWirther, 1997; Luzzo & McWirther, 2001). It can thus also be expected that women and ethnic minorities will have more pessimistic perceptions of overall first full-time job opportunities compared with their respective male and native counterparts.

A fourth theoretical model regards the influence of social capital on people’s labor market outcomes. Since Granovetter’s (1973) seminal research into the importance of networks in job selection, researchers have concluded that social ties are important for labor market success (Marsden & Gorman, 2001, Lin, 1999). The mechanisms behind selection based on social networks mainly regard the distribution of information from the employer to applicants with regard to the demand side of the applicant, and economization on information from the supply side of the recruiter. But social capital in the meaning of social networks presents us with only one interpretation of networks, which is of particular importance in economic sociology; a second one relates to the involvement in various types of associations, like voluntary associations. While the latter may be less sounding for research into perceptions of labor market opportunities, it may not be forgotten that social ties and being involved in associations has also the function of teaching individuals norms and behavioral patterns that have benefit in the longer run (Granovetter, 2005). It can thus be expected that those European young adults that are involved in associations have been socialized certain norms and values that are of importance for the labor market, as well as do they have access to social ties that facilitate the entry on the labor market. For this reason, the stance of these involved young adults towards overall first job opportunities in their country are expected to be higher compared with inactive youth.

³ With regard to physical signals, also age is discussed as being a basis that influences career opportunities. However, given that this manuscript deals with young adults and age is therefore a constant, we do not discuss it in this review.

⁴ For 2008 the rate was 15.3 for women and 15.6 for men across the EU27 member states. In some countries (e.g. Greece and Ireland, the gender gap is larger) (Eurostat, 2010b).

⁵ The so-called ‘sticky floor’ effect, meaning that wage gaps are also present at the lowest deciles of the income distribution, does exist but is less outspoken compared with the ‘glass ceiling’ (Arulampalam, Booth & Bryan, 2007).

We extend the aforementioned dominant sociological theories of labor market career and school-to-work transition with elements of social psychology. Since the perception of first-job opportunities are placed central in this manuscript, it needs to be considered that these outlooks are additionally influenced by other employment related perceptions and attitudes. We firstly assume that the individual perception whether the labor market is giving opportunities for young recruits is expected to be a function of ones general attitude towards the economic situation of the country. If young adults perceive an economic malaise with high unemployment rates, they may also rate the labor market as less open for entrance from the school benches. Secondly, an additional attitudinal explanation is derived from the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1978; Tajfel, 1982). As recently having joined or soon entering the labour market, young adults might impose a positive outlook on this market if they offset against those at the margins, i.e. the jobless. Thus, the expectation is that those young adults holding on to negative evaluations of the unemployed have, in general, more positive orientations towards labour market opportunities for the youth.

In brief, from the theories discussed we expect that perceptions of the labor market entry opportunities for young people are less optimistic among: people with lower educational level (human capital theory), females and people from ethnic minorities (signaling theory), people with characteristics associated with the secondary labor market segment, like having a low income level, being unemployed, having had the experience of being without a job, and being uncertain of becoming unemployed (dual labor market theory). In addition, the perceptions towards the availability of jobs for young people is expected to be negatively influenced by the perception of general unemployment levels in the country; contrary, based on social identity theory, the hypothesis is that those who are negative attitudes towards unemployed people.

Context level factors

Bringing possible determinants at the national level into the debate, we need to distinguish between elements concerning the availability of jobs and other indicators for national prosperity, characteristics of the educational system as well as information on the rigidity of the labor market. First of all, it can be expected that there is a negative relation between perceptions of labor market opportunities and the levels of unemployment, since e.g. research on individual perceptions of being employable has shown to be a function of the general economic condition the country is in (Berntson, Sverke & Marklund, 2007). Across Europe, there is a wide discrepancy in unemployment rates, which is expected to be reflected in better perceptions of opportunities for youth in countries with lower unemployment rates. Additionally, also economic prosperity, expressed in terms of GDP per capita, may be of importance. When the national accounts are beneficial, young adults might perceive the economy as in a positive cycle, which should result in better outlooks on first job opportunities. However, not only national wealth per se but also the way in which this wealth is redistributed across social classes might influence perceptions of first-job opportunities. In countries with larger income inequality there are likely

to be stronger feelings and perceptions of competition among individuals generally (Wilkinson, 1996; Uslander, 2002), which may result in the perception that jobs are not that easily available for anybody, including the young.

In addition to these objective factors it is important to consider the effect of peoples' interpretation of the economic situation by the general population. Essentially, this falls back to the Thomas theorem which says that "if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Thomas & Thomas, 1928, p. 572, in Merton, 1995, p. 380). In our case it would mean that it is not actual figures of unemployment that count but instead the subjective assessment of unemployment levels. This leads to the expectation that in countries in which the population rates unemployment levels as fairly high on average, the youth perceive the opportunities for a first-job for young people as rather unfavorable.

Next to the impact of the national economic situation, research has also demonstrated that educational systems matter for the school to work transition (Müller & Gangl, 2003). More precisely, those systems that are best able to lower the barriers between school and work, like for instance vocational education and apprenticeships, have resulted in an easy transition from the school bench to full employment (Breen, 2005; Wolbers, 2007). In those countries where these systems are dominant, it is expected that all young adults, thus not only those that are targeted by these programs, rate the labor market opportunities within the countries as more beneficial. Additionally, these barriers towards employment can also be lowered by employment protection legislation, as research has repeatedly shown that labor market entry is facilitated in those countries where employment protection is weak, making it relatively easy to dismiss employees and recruit school leavers (Breen, 2005; Scherer, 2005; Müller, 2007). The hypothesis derived from this strand of the literature is thus that young adults will be negative oriented towards first-job opportunities in countries with rather rigid employment protection legislation.

In short, we expect that young people living in countries with the following characteristics have a more negative view on perceive the labor market opportunities for young people: higher actual and perceived unemployment rates, lower wealth level in terms of GDP per capita, larger income inequality, more strict employment protection legislation, an educational system that facilitates school to work transitions less.

3. Data and Methodology

Our data are from the 2008 wave of the European Social Survey (ESS Round 4, 2009). This comparative biennial survey project has been carried out in 31 countries, of which we include 22 in our analysis.⁶

We restrict our analysis to the cohort of respondents aged 30 and younger, which in the sample adds up to 10,398 individuals.⁷ An additional comparison of this young age cohort with respondents aged 31 and older regarding the perceptions towards first job opportunities has shown that the young age cohort adheres, on average, to more optimistic perceptions towards first-job opportunities (see Appendix Table A4). Therefore, contrasting these optimistic orientations with pessimistic youth unemployment rates, it can be concluded that those who're in the gutter actually look at the stars. Nevertheless, given the theoretical relevance of the perceived environment, i.e. the perception of labor market opportunities for young people, on the school-to-work transition, we proceed with the analysis on the young age cohort.

Dependent variable

Our dependent variable regards people's perception of first-time job opportunities for young people in their country. More precisely, the question is "What do you think overall about the opportunities for young people to find their first full-time job?", with response scale 0 (very bad) to 10 (very good).

Table 1 shows that, across the ESS countries this cohort of young adults is rather pessimistic towards first time employment opportunities: on the 0-10 scale, the score falls with an average value of about 4 below the scale mean. Nevertheless, there is a considerable variation between countries. The most positive outlook on labor market opportunities are expressed in Denmark, the Netherlands, Finland and Norway, while the Croatian, Turkish and Hungarian youth are most negative oriented towards first-time full employment chances.

⁶ In 2008, this survey has been carried out in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine and United Kingdom. The data for Austria, Ireland and Lithuania are not available yet in data release 3.0 (expected in fall 2010). Israel, Russian Federation and Ukraine are left out of the analysis because of their absence in the Eurostat data base, which has been used as data source for most of the contextual level information. Also Bulgaria, Latvia and Slovak Republic are not analyzed due to missing information on the income level variable (hinctnt).

⁷ While the age of the Eurostat youth unemployment definition ranges from 15 to 24 years old, we have opted to widen the sample of those who still need to make the school-to-work transition with those in the age cohort of having recently made this transition in a successful (employment) or unsuccessful (unemployment) manner

Table 1. Univariate Distribution of the Perceptions of First-Time Job Opportunities and National Unemployment Data

Country	N in ESS Sample	Percentage in ESS Sample	Perceptions of First-Job Opportunities	
			Mean	Std Dev
Denmark	280	17.39	7.05	2.04
Netherlands	300	19.65	6.17	1.70
Finland	493	22.46	6.15	2.04
Norway	343	22.14	6.05	2.23
Switzerland	348	22.26	5.65	1.94
Belgium	421	23.93	5.29	2.12
Great Britain	466	24.08	5.16	2.15
Sweden	410	22.40	4.89	2.06
Germany	512	18.71	4.71	2.11
Slovenia	328	25.51	4.39	2.43
Estonia	396	23.84	4.17	1.96
Poland	489	30.17	4.17	2.32
<i>European Social Survey</i>	<i>10,405</i>	<i>24.26</i>	<i>4,05</i>	<i>2,42</i>
France	403	23.10	3.84	2.23
Czech Rep	414	24.13	3.71	2.44
Spain	613	24.16	3.53	2.06
Latvia	423	21.38	3.23	2.71
Portugal	409	20.52	3.21	2.20
Romania	519	27.36	3.20	2.45
Greece	466	24.96	3.18	2.13
Croatia	395	30.41	3.10	2.16
Turkey	882	41.92	2.96	2.40
Hungary	351	22.81	2.90	2.13

Note: Entries represent the number and percentage of young (30 year and younger) respondents in the ESS as well as their perceptions of first employment opportunities. For calculating the country specific perceptions, cases are weighted by the ESS design weight; the ESS entry is weighted by totweight (combination of design and population weights).

Independent variables

Sex is measured as male (0) and female (1). Ethnic youth are defined as being born outside the country or having at least one parent born abroad; this category will be compared with what is

referred to as the native youth.⁸ Achieved level of education is operationalized in four categories, distinguishing those with none or primary, lower secondary, higher secondary and tertiary education; in the analysis, lower education is the reference. Employment status at the time of interviewing is coded as being employed (having paid work), being unemployed (whether one is looking for a job or not), being a student and being in another status (sick or disabled, in community or military service, doing housework or other); being employed is the reference category. Income level is categorized as low, middle, and high, and there is a separate code for non-responding respondents; low income is reference.⁹ Additionally, an item covers whether one has previously been unemployed for a period of more than three months or not (reference category). One's activities in organizations has been derived from the question whether one has, in the last month, has done only paid work, only voluntary work, both, or neither; paid work is the reference. Perceived risk of unemployment is based on the question to what extent one thinks it is likely to become unemployed in the next 12 months, coded as not likely (reference), likely and not applicable.¹⁰ The perceived level of unemployment is based on the question "Of every 100 people of working age, how many would you say are unemployed and looking for work?" With regard to attitudes towards the unemployed, the item is "Most unemployed people do not really try to find a job," offered with responses ranging from disagree strongly (1) to agree strongly (5). For more information about the variables, as well as the univariate distribution, see Appendix Tables A1 and A2.

The national level variables have, unless otherwise defined, all been gathered from the Eurostat online database (Eurostat, 2010b). Since we are interested in the extent of the influence of levels of unemployment on youth perceptions towards first-job opportunities in their country, we approach unemployment from a multidimensional perspective. Therefore, we do not only consider total unemployment rates, but also youth and long-term unemployment rates. Two additional indicators are constructed, namely the ratio of the youth on total unemployment rates on the one hand, and the ratio of the long-term on total unemployment rates on the other hand. The ESS-survey item questioning the perception of the number of unemployed active people is, for the whole population in the sample, aggregated to the national level. National prosperity is operationalized by the GDP per capita of 2008 and the GDP growth rate of the same year. For

⁸ It needs to be kept in mind that the ESS is not designed for making representative claims on ethnic minorities. Nevertheless, it has been used in this manner before (Dinesen & Hooghe, 2010), and within-country descriptives show that the minority sample provides accurate depictions of the minority population. E.g. in Spain, the ethnic youth is largely composed out of immigrants from North African countries, especially Morocco, and from former colonial countries, like Colombia, Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru.

⁹ In the ESS, this question is asked in terms of an estimation of the total household income after tax and compulsory deductions, which makes that those young adults that live with their parents but are themselves in an individual precarious condition might have an income that is higher of those that are living alone but are being employed. This variable may to a certain degree thus also be considered as a measure of cultural capital.

¹⁰ With regard to indicators testing the dual labor market theory, one can think of other indicators like for instance the difference between unlimited, limited and no contracts. Bivariately, this variable is indeed in the expected relation with perceptions of first-job opportunities, i.e. unlimited contracts being more positive oriented towards the labor market; however, in a multivariate regression model, this relation is absent under control of the listed variables. For this reason, this variable is no longer discussed.

income inequality, the S80/S20-ratio representing the income of the highest income quintile over the income of the lowest income quintile is considered.¹¹ For the educational system three indicators are considered. First, the share of the GDP spent on institutional training (training in schools) (OECD, 2009a); second, we also take a look at the impact of the spending on apprenticeship programs (OECD, 2009a); third, also the share of GDP spent on education is considered.¹² Employment protection legislation (EPL) is measured by the OECD EPL Index, which comprises regulation on individual and collective dismissal, and on temporary contracts (OECD, 2009b). In Appendix Table A3, all country level covariates are displayed.

The fact that an individual perception towards the labor market is expected to be determined by individual and country level covariates requires the use of multilevel multiple regression analysis (Hox, 2002; Gelman & Hill, 2006). Given the drawback of the technique regarding statistical power in case of a limited number of countries involved (Maas & Hox, 2005), as in our case with N=22, the national level covariates are dealt with in a parsimonious manner.

Estimation of the ‘empty’ or ‘null’ model reveals an intraclass correlation coefficient of 24%, meaning that almost one fourth of the variability in perceptions across the countries of the ESS can be explained by factors at the national level.¹³

4. Results

4.1. Individual Level Determinants of Youth Perceptions toward First Employment

In Table 2, the individual level determinants of youth perceptions of first full-time employment chances are summarized in four models. The first one being restricted to gender and ethnic origin (Model I), to which are added consequently current socioeconomic status (Model II), past status and future expectations (Model III), and ideational covariates (Model IV). Looking at gender and ethnic origin in Model I, perceptions towards first-job opportunities seem to be highly differentiated along basic respondent background variables. In line with the theoretical expectations, but contrary to actual unemployment rates, female youth are less optimistic about job opportunities for young people than young males. These pessimistic sentiments among young women may be explained in two ways. It may be that women perceive the market value of their

¹¹ Especially this indicator for income inequality is preferred over the Gini coefficient in this paper since the analysis has demonstrated that the S80-S20 indicator leads to a more significant effect parameter.

¹² In the operationalization of educational systems, we have also included other indicators like work place training and integrated training. With regard to labor market policies, also indicators representing the share of the public expenditure for active labor market policies were modeled. The parameters go in the expected direction (in countries where there are investments in training and in an active labor market strategy, youth is more optimistic about first job opportunities), however the effects are not significant.

¹³ The country-level variance is 1.47 while the individual variance is 5.29. The intraclass correlation is calculated by dividing the country-level variance by the sum of the individual and country level variances, i.e. $1.53 / (1.53 + 4.89) = 0.238$

diploma as less valuable compared to men and therefore also assume that the labor market is less responsive towards their demands.¹⁴ Or, in line with the dual labor market theory, women base their judgment on the first-job opportunities on persistent disadvantages in career development, like the overrepresentation of women in the secondary segment as well as the ‘sticky floor’ and ‘glass ceiling’ phenomena.

As for ethnicity, contrary to the proposed hypothesis, ethnic youth are more positive on the labor market chances of young people compared with natives of the same age cohort. What is more important is the increasing significance of this effect parameter when adding additional socioeconomic and attitudinal covariates; the positive orientation of ethnic youth towards first job opportunities is thus clarified when socioeconomic disadvantages are taken into account. When giving meaning to this positive effect of an ethnic background, a number of interpretations can be given. First of all, a number of studies (Fischer, 2010; Andriessen & Phalet, 2002; Hirschman, 2001) have given at least partial support to the ‘immigrant optimism hypothesis’ (Kao & Tienda, 1995) arguing that immigrants’ success on the labor market depend on career-oriented motivations that are a result of their parents’ optimistic outlook on the future. However, based on bivariate correlations, the finding that ethnic youth is more likely to be pessimistic on individual employment in the next 12 years refutes this idea. Second, an alternative explanation based on the theory of segmented assimilation (Portes & Zhou, 1993) is that given the overrepresentation of ethnic youth in the secondary labor market segment, the ethnic youth might actually perceive the labor market chances, having the secondary segment in mind, as beneficial.¹⁵ Third and perhaps more plausible, ethnic youth can interpret the question towards the perceptions of first-job opportunities for young people in terms of in and out-groups; i.e. these young people might perceive the overall labor market chances as more beneficial for youth in general, yet, not for themselves.¹⁶

¹⁴ Separate analyses (available upon request) on the male and female samples for instance also shows that the negative overall effect of having enjoyed a higher education on the perceptions of first-job opportunities can largely be attributed to the negative sentiments among the higher educated women, while higher educated young men do not significantly differ from the lower educated.

¹⁵ Separate analyses (available upon request) on the native and ethnic sample moreover show that the effect parameters of levels of education are double for the ethnic compared with the natives, which supports the understanding that especially the lower educated ethnic young adults are quite positive towards first-job opportunities.

¹⁶ The analysis among ethnic youth moreover reveals that there is no positive effect of being a student (compared with being employed), while this effect is present among native young adults. Thus, while those who still need to make the school-to-work transition are more positive than those that already have done this transition, the fact that studying ethnic minorities are not more optimistic might be interpreted as the perception that their degree is of less benefit on the labor market.

Table 2. Individual Model for Explaining Perceptions of First-Job Opportunities

	Model I		Model II		Model III		Model IV	
	Background		SES		Past & Future		Attitudes	
Fixed effects	Param	T	Param	T	Param	T	Param	T
Intercept	4.54***	17.14	4.73***	17.35	5.06***	19.54	5.34***	21.16
Woman	-0.33***	-7.52	-0.36***	-8.00	-0.34***	-7.62	-0.26***	-5.63
Ethnic minority	0.09	1.51	0.14*	2.27	0.18**	2.91	0.22***	3.45
Education level:								
- Lower secondary			-0.42***	-4.83	-0.37***	-4.28	-0.41***	-4.48
- Higher secondary			-0.44***	-5.15	-0.41***	-4.75	-0.51***	-5.62
- Tertiary			-0.12	-1.28	-0.16	-1.64	-0.31**	-3.03
Ref: Primary								
Employment status:								
- Unemployed			-0.50***	-6.16	0.01	0.09	0.05	0.50
- Student			0.22***	4.16	0.18**	2.65	0.17*	2.45
- Other category			-0.08	-1.01	0.04	0.42	0.05	0.57
Ref: Employed								
Income level:								
- Average income			0.21**	3.50	0.16**	2.74	0.17**	2.76
- High income			0.38***	4.99	0.27***	3.52	0.22**	2.89
- Missing data			-0.01	-0.17	-0.07	-1.06	-0.03	-0.44
Ref: Low income								
Previously unemployed					-0.54***	-9.27	-0.50***	-8.48
Activity last month:								
- Voluntary work					0.11	0.82	0.13	0.98
- Paid & voluntary					0.11	1.26	0.08	1.01
- Neither					-0.16*	-2.39	-0.12	-1.68
Ref: Paid work								
Perc un'ploym risk:								
- Likely					-0.54***	-9.34	-0.48***	-8.10
- Not applicable					-0.17**	-2.74	-0.24***	-3.57
Ref: Not likely								
Perceived u'ploym rates							-0.10***	-11.57
Negative to unemployed							0.13***	6.22
Random effects	Param	Z	Param	Z	Param	Z	Param	Z
Respondent variance	4.86***	71.52	4.79***	71.25	4.69***	70.69	4.53***	67.52
Country variance	1.52**	3.21	1.44**	3.21	1.26**	3.20	1.07**	3.20
N	10,255		10,185		10,042		9,158	

* p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001. Note: Entries represent the results of three multilevel multiple regression models among the younger cohorts (aged 30 and younger) in ESS2008 explaining the perceptions of first employment opportunities in their country. Cases are weighted by the ESS design weight.

In Model II, current socioeconomic status is added to gender and ethnic origin. It shows that those with a middle educational level, i.e. those that are or have enjoyed (lower or higher)

secondary education, are significantly less positive about first job opportunities compared with those with a primary degree, while those who enjoyed tertiary education do not differ significantly from this reference category. Yet, when adding other relevant individual covariates, the higher educated youth becomes less positive towards labor market opportunities for young people compared with the lower educated. In line with the negative female outlook on first job opportunities, this might first of all mean that the higher educated do not have an accurate view on the market value of their degree. Second, an alternative interpretation is that the response patterns reflect orientations towards different segments of the labor market. While the higher educated are attracted by the primary segment and the lower educated by the secondary, the middle educated might receive hardly any signals from both segments, i.e. they are overeducated for the primary segment but undereducated for the secondary, leading to depressive views on the overall job opportunities.

With regard to employment status, those who are at present unemployed have a more pessimistic stance towards labor market chances than those that are employed while students, on the other hand, are slightly more optimistic. Yet, these effects fade when adding the effect of the likelihood of becoming unemployed in the next 12 months, resulting in a weak significant effect of being a student and a null effect of being unemployed.¹⁷ Thus, while the unemployed are in general more negative oriented towards first-job opportunities for young people, this effect is largely explained by the persistent negative impact of a perception that one still will be unemployed in the near future. Students, on the other hand, are quite optimistic about the overall labor market compared with the employed. Thus, the group that still needs to make the transition from school-to-work and thus without direct labor market experiences yet has more positive orientations than those young adults that have already left the school benches and joined the labor market. Regarding income, there is a positive association the higher the income, the more positive young people's perception of job opportunities. Or to put it differently: those young adults that are financially worse off do perceive the overall opportunities for young people to get a first job as rather negative.¹⁸

In Model III, past employment status and future employment expectations have been taken up in addition to Model II. Those that have been previously unemployed for more than three months carry over that negative experience to their perception of labor market opportunities for young people generally. Also those with work, but who fear to be unemployed in future have more

¹⁷ Stepwise regression revealed that the perceived unemployment risk and not the unemployment status in the past is responsible for the disappearance of the negative effect of present unemployment status.

¹⁸ As aforementioned, since the ESS surveys income levels by questioning the household income, this effect can also be interpreted as the effect of cultural capital on these perceptions: young adults that miss the necessary financial resources have depressed views on the labor market chances.

negative perceptions. What's more is that the addition of these past and future socioeconomic covariates cancels out the effect of present unemployment.¹⁹

Adding attitudinal labor market related items to Model IV, we see that young adults who think that unemployment rates in the country they live in are rather low perceive the labor market opportunities as more favorable. Additionally, negative sentiments towards the unemployed go together with a better outlook on the first-job opportunities for young adults. Thus, social identity predicting that a more positive view on the in-group is fostered through negative sentiments towards an out-group can also be applied to for explaining positive views on the labor market at the expense of negative views towards the unemployed. Interestingly, the two attitudes give extra statistical significance to the negative effect of higher education on youth perceptions towards first-job opportunities in their respective countries.²⁰ Thus, additional variance in the relation from educational level to perceptions of labor market chances is added when attitudes are introduced.

4.2. The Impact of National Characteristics on First-Job Perceptions

To assess the impact of context factors we first regressed the individual perceptions of labor market chances bivariate on each of the contextual variables controlled for the individual level covariates as they have been presented in Model IV of Table 2. Table 3 shows first of all an effect of unemployment: in countries in which a higher share of the active population is without a job, young adults perceive employment opportunities for the youth as less favorably. Importantly, when looking at the significance of the regression parameters, the long-term unemployment rate is most determining and outweighs the significance of the total unemployment or youth unemployment rates, or additionally the ratios of youth and long-term unemployment on total unemployment rates. This finding suggests that especially longer term labor market malaise impacts negatively on young persons' perceptions of labor market opportunities. Remarkably, the ratio of youth to overall unemployment has no significant relationship with such perceptions. Apparently, young people's perceptions of their own labor market chances are more dependent upon the job losses among the general population than upon the unemployment among their fellow peers.

This is given additional weight by the finding that also the perceived level of unemployment by the general public is highly related to youth perceptions of first-job opportunities for young people. In other words, in those countries in which the general population regards

¹⁹ The stepwise entry of these past and future covariates to Model II has demonstrated that the expectation of unemployment in the near future cancels the effect of unemployment on labor market perceptions.

²⁰ One can argue that this negative effect is attributable to the item nonresponse on the two attitudes. More specifically, the number of respondents drops with 884 from Model III to Model IV. However, additional analyses of Models I to IV on only those respondents without missing information reveals the same pattern.

unemployment rates as considerably high, young adults generally perceive the opportunities for a first employment more negative. Next to objective information, it is also the overall perception of labor market malaise in a country that is of relevance for explaining individual perceptions of the labor market.

Table 3. The Effect of National Characteristics on Individual First-Job Perceptions

Indicator	# Countries	Parameter	T-Value
Youth unemployment rate	21	-0.11**	-3.15
Total unemployment rate	21	-0.31**	-3.75
Long-term unemployment rate	21	-0.55**	-4.00
Ratio youth-total unemployment rate	21	0.10	0.19
Ratio long-term – total unemployment rate	21	-3.69*	-2.67
Aggregate perception of unemployment rate	22	-0.59***	-5.40
GDP per capita	22	0.02***	5.46
GDP growth	22	-0.04	-0.40
S80S20 measure for income inequality	20	-0.40*	-2.21
Expenditure on institutional training	15	6.84**	3.18
Expenditure on apprenticeship programs	15	-5.28	-0.54
Public expenditure on education	22	0.70***	5.29
Employment Protection Legislation Index	20	-0.79	-1.99

^o p < 0.10; * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001. Note: Entries represent the results of several separate multilevel multiple regression models explaining the perceptions of first employment opportunities among the younger cohorts (aged 30 and younger) in their country (ESS 2008). Each national covariate is added separately in addition to Model III of Table 2. Cases are weighted by dweight.

With regard to general levels of economic prosperity, the variables enclosed in the model are not pointing at the same direction. On average, young adults living in countries that have a higher standard of living, expressed by the GDP per capita, hold on to more positive perceptions on job opportunities for the young. However, doing well at present time, i.e. in the short term, expressed by the growth in the GDP per capita in the year of interviewing is not related to these youth perceptions.²¹ So, as is the case for the unemployment indicators, looking at the statistical significance of the parameter effects, it seems that the longer term situation is of more importance for perceptions than the shorter term. As expected, the distribution of wealth in the country is related to general first-job perceptions: larger income inequality is associated with more negative outlooks on the labor market for young people. When bringing education into the debate, the results are rather mixed. In general, in countries that invest significantly in education have also a young age cohort that is more positively oriented towards the labor market.²² This

²¹ Given the economic cyclic relation between levels of unemployment and gdp growth, not only the 2008 figures were brought in relation with youth perceptions regarding a first-time full employment, data for 2007 and 2009 were also tested on its significance. However, none of the indicators was close to statistical significance.

²² There is a strong positive correlation between public expenditure on education and the gdp per capita (.62), and a positive correlation between public expenditure on education and institutional training (.60) but a weak negative one between public expenditure on education and apprenticeship programs (-.17).

positive parameter of public expenditure on education also translates in the positive relation of institutional training. Contrary to the proposed hypothesis, perceptions in countries in which apprenticeship programs are well-funded, do not differ from those in countries with less spending. Thus, at first glance, extensive institutional schooling systems seem to be very beneficial for positive perceptions of labor market opportunities. Finally, while the parameter of employment protection legislation on youth perceptions is in the expected direction, the regression parameter does not reach conventional significance levels, meaning that in those countries that have rigid measures protecting employees, young adults are not significantly more negative oriented towards first-job opportunities. Thus, while educational systems and employment legislation have shown to explain the school-to-work transition (Breen, 2005; Wolbers, 2007), they are only weakly related to perceptions of first job opportunities for young people.

To assess the effects of context factors multivariately we applied forward stepwise regression, departing the analysis with the GDP per capita in 2008 added to the individual level Model IV of Table 2. The results of Table 4 shows that of all relevant country characteristics that have been discussed above, the general public's perception of unemployment rates and public expenditure on education are best able to explain youth perceptions towards first full-time job opportunities in their country.²³ Thus, European young adults' assessment whether the labor market creates general opportunities for their age cohorts is, regarding national covariates, mainly influenced by both public ideas on unemployment, more than by actual figures, as well as size of the educational system, of which it is the claim that sizeable systems are better able to match the markets of education and labor.²⁴ There are remarkable implications of this finding. First of all, the actual levels of unemployment of their peers is less decisive for explaining young adults' perceptions of labor market opportunities than could have been expected. Second, the effect of objective indicators of unemployment are outweighed by the effect of the perception of the general population of the overall unemployment levels within the country. Perceived unemployment has a stronger effect than actual unemployment. Third, while national prosperity is associated with perceptions of first-job for young people bivariately, it is of importance how the wealth is distributed: more precisely, having an extensive school system is able to generate positive orientations towards first job chances. Thus, while at the individual level educational level is in a curvilinear effect with labor market perceptions, in countries where there is a well-developed institutional school system, all young adults benefit with regard to a more positive outlook on the overall labor market opportunities for young people.

²³ Providing some additional information on the analyses, the effect of gdp per capita was cancelled out due to the effect of public expenditure on education while none of the unemployment rates was able to show a significant impact on perceptions regarding labor market opportunities under control of the aggregate perceived unemployment rates among the general population.

²⁴ With regard to the latter, it needs to be emphasized that countries with a high level of public expenditure does not necessarily represent the general level of education of the young adults, since these levels are harmonized in the pooled ESS data file by the educational level variable, which is controlled for at the individual level.

Table 4. An Integrated Model Explaining Youth Labor Market Perceptions

Fixed Effects	Parameter	T-Value
Intercept	5.13***	4.71
Woman	-0.26***	-5.65
Ethnic minority	0.22**	3.41
Education level:		
- Lower secondary	-0.42***	-4.52
- Higher secondary	-0.52***	-5.66
- Tertiary	-0.31**	-3.04
Ref: Primary		
Employment status:		
- Unemployed	0.05	0.54
- Student	0.17*	2.43
- Other category	0.06	0.63
Ref: Employed		
Income level:		
- Average income	0.17**	2.73
- High income	0.22**	2.91
- Missing data	-0.03	-0.47
Ref: Low income		
Previously unemployed	-0.51***	-8.52
Activity last month:		
- Voluntary work	0.13	0.99
- Paid & voluntary	0.08	0.99
- Neither	-0.12	-1.68
Ref: Paid work		
Perceived unempl risk:		
- Likely	-0.48***	-8.08
- Not applicable	-0.24***	-3.53
Ref: Not likely		
Perceived unemployment rates	-0.10***	-11.42
Negative attitudes to unemployed	0.13***	6.25
Public expenditure on education	0.42**	3.27
Aggregate perception of total unemployment rate	-0.39**	-3.65
Random effects	Parameter	Z-Value
Respondent variance	4.53***	67.52
Country variance	0.28**	2.96
# Respondents		9,158
# Countries		22

Note: Entries represent the results of a multilevel multiple regression models explaining the perceptions of first employment opportunities among the younger cohorts (aged 30 and younger) in their country (ESS 2008). Cases are weighted by the ESS design weight. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

5. Conclusion

While empirical research is to an increasing extent interested in the role of perceived barriers to young adults' labor market success, with a particular focus on the school-to-work transition, the literature on the individual and country level determinants of perceived labor market opportunities for young people among this age cohort is absent. Nevertheless, in a volatile market as we are facing now, information about what drives young adults to be oriented in an (un-)favorable manner towards the labor market for the young is essential given that having a perception of less rigid barriers encourages young people to consider entering the job market over alternatives, like continuing education.

Our findings show that national differences in unemployment have a strong influence on young adults' perception whether there are opportunities on the labor market for them. Remarkably, however, it is not being confronted with unemployment of fellow peers, i.e. levels of youth unemployment, that is most decisively related to these perceptions, but essentially the general labor market situation. General labor market malaise that leads to depressed perceptions. While the mechanisms behind this relation can, at this point, not be disentangled – is there for instance an impact of seeing family and relatives, neighbors and other people falling without a job, or has it more to do with the representation of unemployment in the media – evidence in this paper suggests that the salience of unemployment determines youth perceptions of labor market chances. More specifically, the more the general population regards the level of unemployment as high, the worse the youth perceives the labor market opportunities for their age cohort. Of equal importance is the positive influence of public expenditure on education. While the more affluent countries also spend more on their educational system, it is remarkable that educational spending is more decisive for youth attitudes towards labor market opportunities for young people than general GDP per capita measures of wealth. In contrast with research outcomes on structural determinants of the school-to-work transition, it are not programs of apprenticeship – acquiring insights and skills at the workplace – that generates a positive outlook on young job opportunities, but rather the extent of institutional schooling – acquiring insights and skills in school benches.

While the unemployment perception of the general population has a considerable (context) effect on youth perceptions of first-job opportunities, individual perceptions of national unemployment rates have an additional negative impact. The finding that both simultaneously impact first-job perceptions shows that they are conceptual different concepts, i.e. that the ecological distinction of how macro level perceptions drive individual level perceptions need to be taken into account; second, unemployment perceptions generally have a strong influence on young adults' perception of the labor market. In this respect, the introduction of the social identity perspective for explaining these youth perceptions, namely that the labor market is perceived as more responsive when the unemployed are regarded in a negative manner provides additional weight to this conclusion.

Regarding the literature on the school-to-work transition, it needs to be emphasized that students, i.e. those that still need to make the transition, are on average more positive about labor market opportunities for young people compared with those that are already on the market. This is an interesting finding. If those that have already made the transition, whether they are employed or not, are best suited to assess the chances for young people to get a first job, then students have a biased view on how responsive the market is. Students may thus on the one hand overestimate how beneficial the job market for young people essentially is. On the other hand, this biased view may represent an underlying desirability bias, meaning that students adjust their perception of labor market opportunities in an upward manner for the simple reason that they sooner or later will enter the job market with the aspiration of finding a job quickly. Framing these positive perceptions in the social cognitive career theory, perceiving a barrier lower in comparison with the perception of those that made the transition already suggests positive externalities with regard to job seeking strategies; yet, further research needs to qualify this interpretation in a more detailed manner.

Discussing other proposed theoretical expectations, only partial evidence for the classic labor market theories has been discovered. The dual labor market theory has been given most convincing support for explaining youth perceptions of first-job opportunities. Precarious situations, and especially uncertainty about job stability and financial resources, are detrimental for the assessment of labor market opportunities for the youth. However, physical signals that have previously been associated with the secondary labor market segment, i.e. being female and having foreign roots, do not support the theory. Women, notwithstanding no overrepresentation in youth unemployment figures, perceive the chances as worse compared with men, which provides additional support for the finding that it is not necessarily the actual labor market situation that drives young adults' labor market perception, but rather its interpretation. Ethnic youth is on the contrary more positive about the labor-market opportunities for young people. While female perceptions may be driven by perceptions of disadvantages in further career stages, the perceptions among ethnic youth, which contrasts objective information about employment opportunities and conditions, foremost questions which labor market they had in mind when giving their response on perceived labor market chances for young people. This issue concerning the representation of the labor market is also apparent when discussing the effect of human capital on youth perceptions: those that perceive the labor market opportunities as less beneficial are those with a secondary education degree who may receive signals neither from the primary (underqualified) nor from the secondary (overqualified) segment.

Our findings stem for further research. More specifically, despite the evidence pointing into the direction that among categories of young adults, there is not one single interpretation of the national labor market, the data does not allow for testing these different interpretations. In the near future, qualitative research among young adults, and in particular along gender and ethnic lines, as well as levels of education, need to disentangle what labor market young people actually

have in mind. Moreover, in this paper, young adults' perception of first-job opportunities has served as dependent variable. Yet, while perceived barriers have been brought into relation with this transition from school benches to the labor market, the analysis of the influence of negative perceptions of labor market chances on career success, including the school-to-work transition, is scarce. Yet, given the attention the social cognitive career theory has given to the perception of environmental characteristics on school-to-work transitions, the investigation of the individual and contextual determinants of job opportunities for young adults has nevertheless contributed to the understanding of the social-psychology of the youth labor market.

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Appendix

Table A1. Individual-Level Continuous Variables

Variable	Range	N	Mean	Std Dev
Opportunities for young people to find first full-time job	0-10	10,202	4.23	2.49
Of every 100 working age, how many unemployed and looking for work?	1-11	9,481	5.36	3.01
Most unemployed people do not really try to find a job	0-4	10,209	2.09	1.09

Note: Cases are unweighted. Source: ESS2008 and own calculations

Table A2. Individual-Level Categorical Variables

Variable	Categories	N	Pct
Gender	Men	5,090	48.9
	Women	5,308	51.0
Foreign origin	Native	8,798	84.5
	Foreign (born abroad or born abroad parent)	1,614	15.5
Education level	Primary (no education or primary)	1,046	10.0
	Lower secondary	2,948	28.3
	Higher secondary	4,512	43.3
	Tertiary	1,853	17.8
Employment status	Employed	4,379	42.1
	Unemployed	982	9.4
	Student	3,780	36.3
	Other category	1,214	11.7
Income level	Low (first tier of response categories)	2,745	26.4
	Middle (second tier of response categories)	3,104	29.8
	High (third tier of response categories)	1,521	14.6
	Missing data (item nonresponse)	3,043	29.2
Previously been Unemployed	Not been unemployed for more than three months	7,846	75.4
	Been unemployed for more than three months	2,446	23.5
Perceived risk	Not likely unemployed next 12 months	4,847	46.6
	Likely becoming unemployed next 12 months	2,663	25.6
	Not applicable (never worked or not looking)	2,902	27.8
Activity last month	Only paid work	4,491	43.5
	Only voluntary work	337	3.3
	Both paid and voluntary work	838	8.1
	Neither	4,667	45.2

Note: Cases are unweighted. Source: ESS2008.

Table A3. Country-Level Variables

CRY	TU	YU	LT	YT	LTU	PER	GDP	GR	S8S2	EXP	TRA	APP	EPL
BE	7.0	18.0	0.5	2.6	3.3	5.4	115.2	1.0	4.1	6.0	0.18	0.00	2.6
CH	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	2.8	140.8	1.8	NA	5.5	NA	NA	1.8
CZ	4.4	9.9	0.5	2.3	2.2	3.5	80.4	2.5	3.4	4.6	0.01	0.00	2.3
DE	7.3	9.9	0.5	1.4	3.8	4.6	115.6	1.3	4.8	4.4	0.18	0.06	2.6
DK	3.3	7.6	0.2	1.4	0.5	3.2	120.1	-0.9	3.6	8.0	0.31	0.03	1.9
EE	5.5	12.0	0.3	2.2	1.7	5.0	67.4	-3.6	5.0	4.8	NA	NA	2.4
ES	11.3	24.6	0.2	2.2	2.0	5.4	102.7	0.9	5.4	4.3	0.09	0.01	3.1
FI	6.4	16.5	0.2	2.6	1.2	3.5	116.9	1.2	3.8	6.1	0.30	0.02	2.3
FR	7.8	19.1	0.4	2.4	2.9	5.0	108.0	0.4	4.2	5.6	0.09	0.08	2.9
GB	5.6	15.0	0.3	2.7	1.4	5.3	116.2	0.5	5.6	5.5	0.02	0.00	1.1
GR	7.7	22.1	0.5	2.9	3.6	5.7	94.3	2.0	5.9	4.0	NA	NA	3.0
HR	8.4	21.9	0.6	2.6	5.3	6.3	62.7	2.4	4.5	4.1	NA	NA	NA
HU	7.8	19.9	0.5	2.6	3.6	7.4	64.4	0.6	3.6	5.4	0.06	0.00	2.1
LV	7.5	13.1	0.3	1.7	1.9	6.8	57.3	-4.6	7.3	5.1	NA	NA	NA
NL	2.8	5.3	0.4	1.9	1.0	4.0	134.0	2.0	4.0	5.5	0.04	0.04	2.2
NO	2.5	7.2	0.1	2.9	0.3	3.0	191.2	1.8	3.7	6.6	0.22	0.00	2.7
PL	7.1	17.3	0.3	2.4	2.4	4.7	56.4	5.0	5.1	5.3	0.02	0.06	2.4
PT	7.7	16.4	0.5	2.1	3.7	6.3	76.0	0.0	6.1	5.3	0.11	0.05	2.8
RO	5.8	18.6	0.4	3.2	2.4	5.8	41.6	7.3	7.0	3.5	NA	NA	1.8
SE	6.2	20.0	0.1	3.2	0.8	3.7	120.1	-0.2	3.5	6.9	0.11	0.00	2.1
SI	4.4	10.4	0.4	2.4	1.9	5.1	90.9	3.5	3.4	5.7	NA	NA	2.8
TR	9.7	18.4	0.2	1.9	2.3	7.0	45.5	0.9	NA	2.9	NA	NA	3.5
<i>ESS</i>	<i>6.9</i>	<i>16.1</i>	<i>0.3</i>	<i>2.4</i>	<i>2.4</i>	<i>5.2</i>	<i>91.6</i>	<i>1.3</i>	<i>4.8</i>	<i>5.0</i>	<i>0.13</i>	<i>0.02</i>	<i>2.5</i>

CRY = Country; TU = Total unemployment rate (source: Eurostat); YU = Youth unemployment rate (source: Eurostat); LTU = Long-term unemployment rate (source: Eurostat); YT = Ratio of youth unemployment rate on total unemployment rate (source: Eurostat + own calculations); LTU = Ratio of long-term unemployment rate on total unemployment rate (source: Eurostat + own calculations); PER = overall perception of share of unemployed in the country (source: ESS2008 + own calculations); GDP = GDP per capita (source: Eurostat); GR = GDP per capita growth (source: Eurostat); S8S2 = S80/S20 ratio for income inequality (source: Eurostat); TRA = share of gdp to institutional training (source: OECD); APP = share of gdp to support of apprenticeship programs (source: OECD); EXP = public expenditure on education (source: Eurostat); EPL = Employment protection legislation index (source: OECD); all data are for 2008 or the nearest year. BE = Belgium; CH = Switzerland; CZ = Czech Republic; DE = Germany; DK = Denmark; EE = Estonia; ES = Spain; FI = Finland; FR = France; GB = Great Britain; GR = Greece; HR = Croatia; HU = Hungary; LV = Latvia; NL = Netherlands; NO = Norway; PL = Poland; PT = Portugal; RO = Romania; SE = Sweden; SI = Slovenia; TR = Turkey; ESS = average across the ESS countries, unweighted. NA = not available.

Table A4. Univariate Distribution of the Perceptions of First-Time Job Opportunities and National Unemployment Data

Country	≤ 30 years	> 30 years	T-Value	Sign
Denmark	7.05	7.09	0.36	
Netherlands	6.17	6.14	-0.30	
Finland	6.15	5.39	-7.52	***
Norway	6.05	6.67	5.20	***
Switzerland	5.65	5.32	-3.10	**
Belgium	5.29	5.03	-2.31	*
Great Britain	5.16	4.49	-6.70	***
Sweden	4.89	4.60	-2.73	**
Germany	4.71	4.71	0.00	
Slovenia	4.39	3.87	-3.84	***
Estonia	4.17	3.70	-4.15	***
Poland	4.17	3.67	-4.13	***
<i>European Social Survey</i>	<i>4.04</i>	<i>3.97</i>	<i>-2.69</i>	<i>***</i>
France	3.84	3.47	-3.47	***
Czech Rep	3.71	4.02	2.55	*
Spain	3.53	3.30	-2.53	*
Latvia	3.23	3.01	-1.67	
Portugal	3.21	2.78	-4.46	***
Romania	3.20	3.04	-1.38	
Greece	3.18	3.15	-0.32	
Croatia	3.10	2.87	-1.90	
Turkey	2.96	2.68	-2.73	**
Hungary	2.90	2.61	-2.41	*

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Note: Entries represent the perceptions of first full-time job opportunities among the younger age cohorts (≤ 30 years old) and the rest of the national ESS samples (aged 31 and older). For calculating the country specific perceptions, cases are weighted by the ESS design weight; the ESS entry is weighted by totweight (combination of design and population weights). Survey information per country is weighted by the design weight; the ESS entry is weighted by a combined dweight and pweight variable.

Table A5. Bivariate Correlation of the Continuous Variables and First Full-Time Job Perceptions

Variable	Correlation coefficient
Of every 100 working age, how many unemployed and looking for work?	-0.23***
Most unemployed people do not really try to find a job	0.01

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Cases are weighted by totweight (combination of the design and population weights).

Table A6. Bivariate Test of Association between Categorical Data and First Full-Time Job Perceptions

Variable	Categories	Mean	Std Dev
Gender T = 7.14***	Men	4.22	2.48
	Women	3.88	2.35
Foreign origin T = -10.47***	Native	3.95	2.40
	Foreign (born abroad or born abroad parent)	4.68	2.43
Education level*** F = 21.88	Primary	3.64	2.57
	Lower secondary	3.99	2.43
	Higher secondary	4.06	2.36
	Tertiary	4.36	2.40
Employment*** F = 93.23	Employed	4.25	2.34
	Unemployed	3.19	2.53
	Student	4.29	2.39
	Other category	3.50	2.40
Income level*** F = 31.29	Low (first tier of response categories)	3.78	2.44
	Middle (second tier of response categories)	4.12	2.35
	High (third tier of response categories)	4.52	2.40
	Missing data (item nonresponse)	4.05	2.43
Previously un*** T = 15.58	Not been unemployed for more than three months	4.26	2.41
	Been unemployed for more than three months	3.40	2.33
Perceived risk*** F = 226.18	Not likely unemployed next 12 months	4.57	2.35
	Likely becoming unemployed next 12 months	3.37	2.37
	Not applicable (never worked or not looking)	3.87	2.42
Activity last month*** F = 99.87	Only paid work	4.42	2.45
	Only voluntary work	4.74	2.42
	Both paid and voluntary work	5.23	2.43
	Neither	3.83	2.48

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Cases are weighted by totweight (combination of the design and population weights).