

Social assistance among youth in Finland, Norway and Sweden: patterns, trends and interpretations.

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Nordic welfare states are often characterised by their extensive welfare services. However, for young adults there is a development where unemployment spells to an increasingly extent is linked to the reliance of means tested social assistance benefit. In this paper, we ask whether there the last two decades has been a displacement in the type and coverage of welfare services available to young unemployed adults in three Nordic countries: Finland, Norway and Sweden. In order to explain this development, we review two particular areas of interest; the alleged development towards a prolonged and complex transition process from adolescence to adulthood in the Nordic countries, and recent policy development relevant for the social protection of young adults.

Several authors claim that the transition from adolescence to adulthood is not as smooth and seamless as it used to be in the industrial era. This prolonged and complex transition process has gradually become a life phase characterised by unstable and reversible establishment patterns. Large shares of the cohorts in the transition age are now enrolled in tertiary or other education. This prolonged education is positive in many ways but also entail risks as students also are excluded from basic welfare insurance. In this paper, we review recent literature and empirical data shedding light on youth transitions in the Nordic countries over the last two decades. Preliminary evidence identifies a trend towards delayed entry into workforce in all three countries, but particularly in Sweden.

The work orientation of the Nordic welfare states, and the crucial role work plays in defining rights to social security, prompt the question of how universal these welfare states are for young people. Our findings demonstrate how recent policy changes have far-reaching effects for the economic safety of unemployed young adults.