

СОЦИОЛОГИЯ

Baha KALINOWSKA-SUFINOWICZ¹

UDC 005.952+331.101.24(438+470+571)

DETERMINANTS OF THE SITUATION OF THE YOUTH ON THE LABOR MARKET

¹ Ph. D., Associate Professor, Department of Macroeconomics and Development Studies,
Rector's Proxy for Equal Treatment, Poznań University of Economics and Business (Poland)
baha.kalinowska-sufinowicz@ue.poznan.pl

Abstract

This article studies the demand and supply determinants of the youth's situation on the labor market. According to the author's hypothesis, a relatively high unemployment level among the youth is determined both by the demand factors connected predominantly with employers (including age-based discrimination) and by the supply factors associated with young people.

After defining the key terms, the author considers contemporary labor market theories and next statistical data on earning expectations of young people and unemployment in Poland and Russia. The results include the classification of the determinants of the economic situation of the youth in labor market, presented into two groups according to their connection to either the supply or the demand side of the labor market.

The author's recommendations are provided in the conclusion.

Keywords

Youth, labor market, unemployment, expectations, wages.

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Introduction

Transitioning from school to work is difficult process for young people. One of its consequences is the youth unemployment, the rate of which is significantly high when compared to the total population. Various factors have an impact on these difficulties. The first of them is connected with demand on the labor market, where we may observe age-based discrimination. The second one is associated with supply.

This paper aims to study the demand and supply determinants of the youth situation in the process of their economic activation. According to the author's *hypothesis*, a relatively high youth unemployment rate is determined by two factors: demand (which is connected primarily with employers, and includes age-based discrimination) and supply (associated with young people themselves). The study area includes Poland and Russia. The timeframe starts with the global economic crisis of 2009 and ends with the most recent up-to-date statistical data (2017).

This article is structured as follows. *Theory and Methods* section provides the criteria for defining the youth and all the essential terms and discusses the demand and supply determinants of the youth's economic activation on the labor market, followed by the interpretation of the contemporary macroeconomic discrimination theories to explain the relatively worse situation of young people and graduates on the labor market. Subsequently, *Results and Discussion* shows statistical data and compare public opinion surveys (carried out among students of the Poznań University of Economics and Business in 2007 and 2013) with other findings. Special attention is paid to the youth unemployment rate in Poland and Russia in 2008-2017. *Conclusion* contains author's recommendations and ideas on solving the research question.

Theory and Methods

Conceptualizing the Youth

The literature review concludes that the youth is a heterogeneous group. Different organizations (including International Labor Organization and UN) and researchers (C. Loughlin, J. Barling and J. Męcina) distinguish various criteria of classifying young people into several categories, such as age, types of their activity, education, generation, and legal criteria [15, 28, 30, 39].

The demographic parameter refers to the age ranges, which differ among various statistics offices in different countries and international organizations [15]. According to young people's economic activity, one may distinguish economically active and non-active, employed and unemployed, and students. These groups are not separate because a person participate in two or more of them simultaneously (e. g., one might be economically active and a student as well).

The level of education is another classification parameter, according to which one may distinguish college and university graduates — one of the most problematic group in the economic activation [25, 30]. In the field of occupational psychology, some authors compartmentalize young people into *generation Y*, *generation Z*, *millennials*, and others depending on their birth year [28].

The legal criterion is used in juridical acts, especially within the labor code, where the age of discretion and potential economic activation is described in detail. The Polish legal system draws a line between juveniles (16-18 years old) and adults (18 and older) in the workplace [2]. With respect to increasing difficulties observed in the economic activation of the youth, one may distinguish the category of the unemployed, which includes young people up to 25¹ (before 2014) and 30 (since 2015) [1]. According to the types and complexity of the work that young people may perform in accordance with the Russian law, Kienko and Semenova [23] divide the unemployed youth into three groups. The first one embraces the underage (14-18 years old), who perform temporary and/or part-time work. The second group comprises the adults (18-30), mostly students, engaged in seasonal and temporary work, as well as working part-time. The last group includes young people with vocational education, who are looking for their first job.

Literature review mentions various notions, such as *the youth*, *graduates*, *young (younger) people* (or *persons*), and *young generation* [15, 25, 27, 30, 39]. In relation to both education and labor market, the term *graduate* is particularly convenient. In the narrow sense, a graduate is a person who has received a degree or diploma on completing a course of study at a university, college, or school (usually within a year after graduating) [9, 10]. In the broad sense, we use the notion of the youth, which means people at the age range of 18 through 25 (27 — the university level). This group comes across some difficulties in the process of the economic activation. Because of the problems in the labor market, we see that graduates and the youth face discrimination, which is understood as unequal treatment according to the young age. Therefore, discrimination may be considered as one of many barriers of the economic activation. Among other symptoms of youth discrimination, we observe a higher level of unemployment rate among them in comparison to the total population [21].

The economic activation is comprehended as incorporating the individuals into the labor force, thus transitioning the youth from the education system to the labor market. This process is determined by demand and supply factors in the labor market.

Demand Determinants

Labor demand is the employers' need for workers within an economy. In statistics, it is the numbers of jobs and vacancies on the labor market [40]. Therefore, the demand factors, related to the youth on the labor market, pertain mostly to employers, though they may include the functioning of companies and the production process itself.

The first instance includes employers' strategies for retaining the graduates and young people. Here, the rules of recruitment, selection, adaptation, training, and displacement play a crucial role in the economic activation of the youth. The higher the costs of graduate recruitment and selection, the more careful an employer will be when accepting candidates, prone to leave for another company. Becker notes that companies suffer a "capital loss" whenever a trained young worker is bid away by other firms [5].

¹ If an unemployed person had a university education, the age limit was increased to 27 years.

Employers' perception of graduates and youth in general matters in the hiring process as well [23]. Determined by their previous encounters, this experience might be positive or negative. In the latter case, employers do not wish to risk losing resources on worker's training in case they decide to leave the company. Thus, companies may refuse hiring graduates. A candidate's rejection may be formally explained, still, it remains an example of age discrimination. On the other hand, the positive experiences include employers who benefited from hiring younger workers.

W. Loretto, C. Duncan, and P. J. White (1997) [27] showed that young people experience age discrimination¹, whether it was positive or, more frequently, negative. The latter forms included lower wages, worse attitudes, and job deployment.

Trade unions' interest also determines labor demand [35], especially in big companies. Although, according to ILOSTAT, trade union density rate totaled only 30.5% (of the total number of employees) in the Russian Federation in 2015 and 12.1% in Poland in 2016 [16].

Technology and work organization within a company also affect the chances of young people's employment. Rapid technological changes lead to accelerated devaluation of human capital (especially of vocational graduates) because of the higher specificity of the required skills [32]. Depending on the industry's technological advancement, the nature of work, an employer may hire people of certain education level and profile, relying on their personal opinion about young people [35].

The rules of labor market functioning play a vital role as well. Companies work differently according to the socio-economic regime, adopted in particular countries. State policy towards labor market (in particular, employment and labor market policies) conditions the employment sphere, as seen in legal regulations pertaining the graduates and the youth in the country [19, 21], as well as in the official programs and projects aimed to support young people in their economic activation.

Supply Aspects of the Graduates' Economic Activation

The supply in terms of the labor market relates to individuals and how they supply their labor [40]. Supply determinants of the graduates' economic activation relate primarily to the youth.

First of all, socio-professional and demographic traits are pivotal in the process of economic activation of graduates and young people [23]. The education level strongly affects the chances for one's smoother transition from school to work: the higher the level of one's education, the better are one's employment opportunities [5]. Moreover, the education profile has become more substantial, particularly in relation to local labor markets' needs [13]. Furthermore, globalization, fast-growing technologies, and computerization have a huge impact on alternation and volatility of contemporary labor markets. In this regard, one of the most problematic groups

¹ The research sample totaled 460 students of the University of Edinburgh (Scotland, UK) aged 17-29. Out of the 410 students, who claimed to have work experience, 35% experienced age discrimination. Moreover, 16% of respondents replied that they knew of co-workers who had experienced such discrimination [28].

of young people are those who are not engaged in any forms of employment, education or training; such people are also called NEETs — “not in employment, education or training” [31]. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the NEET rate¹ among Russian and Polish 18-24 year-olds amounted to 13.3 in 2017 [33, 41].

External reasons may lead a person to becoming a NEET (which is the opposite of economic activation). Lack of qualifications, skills, and professional experience may prevent people from effectively switching from studies to work [7, 23], as employers emphasize a need for professional practice in the vast majority of job advertisements. However, graduates and young people have either no or insufficient professional background, particularly students who did not work during their studies.

Another limitation of graduate employability is a paucity of *soft skills*. J. Andrews and H. Higson [4] define them as the abilities to cope with uncertainty, to work under pressure, to communicate and interact with other (either in teams or through networking) either verbally or in writing, and to remain self-confident. The scarcity of one’s soft skills are tangible during job interviews, where they are pivotal to success. Interpersonal competencies gain importance within the framework of the economic organization as they provide effective cooperation.

Graduates and young people have currently rising aspirations, as evidenced by the increasing number of people with the university level of education. Their numbers have been rising both in Poland and Russia since 1990 [10, 24]. The young university graduates know foreign languages, they are often creative and resourceful. Many young people have shown a considerable degree of geographical mobility in searching for a job. Nevertheless, it still remains a question whether these features are enough to find a job immediately after finishing the university.

Another problem involves graduates’ and young people’s preferences, especially unreasonably excessive wage expectations [23] and potential positions (e. g. only managerial and executive job titles) [18]. They may be due to a lack of labor-market orientation during studies and because of incorrect conclusions from the average gross monthly salaries in specific industries with no consideration for the characteristics of the professions, including the length of service.

A closely related issue includes assumptions about working conditions [7]. Young people naively expect long-term labor contracts from the employers, which are far from the reality. In Poland, *junk contracts* are frequently proposed to young people, and we observe a dichotomy between the expectations and reality. Many young people do not accept the rules of the Polish labor market, and as a result, they face unemployment or working in the underground economy.

Working on fixed-term contracts, young people may prove their competence, efficiency, and motivation to do the job, which may lead to a longer contract. In Russia, however, the use of non-permanent labor contracts is legislatively limited by a list of legitimate reasons

¹ The NEET rate is defined as the percentage of the population of a given age group who are not employed or involved in further education or training [13].

[14]. Thus, the young people, who cannot find a job, choose grey economy more frequently, neglecting the consequences for their future retirement period [23, 39].

P. A. Samuelson, W. D. Nordhaus and J. Mecina mention exclusively wage conditions [29, 36], although, other employment terms are relevant as well, including the type and length of labor contract, which are especially important for this article.

One of the graduates' most important problem is their lack of professional self-consciousness. They often have no ideas or plans on their future professional lives. This affects their work attitudes, insufficient involvement, particularly when their first job experience does not meet their expectations [19, 35].

Contemporary Labor Market Theories and the Youth

Young people face distinct forms of discrimination in the labor market [15, 39]. The contemporary labor market theories may explain the reasons of higher unemployment among young people and other disadvantages experienced by youth when transitioning from school to work. Therefore, the author has considered the prejudice models, human capital, dual labor market, and statistical discrimination theories to interpret the situation of young people in the labor market.

The prejudice models were presented by G. Becker in his book titled *The Economics of Discrimination* in 1957 [6]. According to Becker's models employers, employees or consumers have a taste for discrimination. He analyzed discrimination towards Afro-Americans, though, he mentioned that these prejudice models might relate to other discriminated groups as well. Employers have a taste for discrimination against the youth, which may manifest in avoidance of employing the young workers. In the result, we observe higher unemployment levels among the youth. Employees discriminate young people avoiding situations in which they have to interact with them. "Old" employees are anxious that they will have to work for themselves and for the inexperienced young people. The consumer discrimination manifests in the customer-service industries, when clients prefer to deal with more experienced workers than younger ones (e.g., in the healthcare). Becker also notes that some people even pay some employees more than others for a service of the same quality. That can lead directly to segregation and indirectly — to discrimination [6].

Becker, Th. Schultz, C. Goldin, J. Mincer, and S. Polachek (among many others) have developed the human capital theory, according to which, human capital is the stock of skills and knowledge, embodied in the workforce. This stock may be either developed or depreciated — e. g., when young people are unemployed and they have no chance to perpetuate their knowledge and to develop their skills [5, 26].

In concordance with the dual labor market theory of M. J. Piore and P. B. Doeringer (1971), later developed by D. Gordon (1974), the labor market is divided into two sectors: primary and secondary. The primary market offers jobs with a high level of earnings, good working conditions, employment stability, equity, and significant career advancement. The secondary market has less attractive jobs (compared to the primary sector). These jobs offer lower earnings, poor working conditions, and very little opportunity for professional advancement. This sector is where young

people may usually find their jobs. Even worse: as the human capital theory emphasizes, young people are often unable to move out of the secondary (or ghetto) economy [8].

L. Thurow (1974), D. Gordon (1974), and R. Edwards (1975) explicated the theory of statistical discrimination. This phenomenon is the result of employers not having all the information about a candidate's potential productivity. Unable to consider all the possibilities when assessing real productivity of young people, employers wrongly assume that the youth are less productive in comparison to the older candidates. This assumption highly affects the chance of a young candidate been accepted [3]

Results and Discussion

Wage Expectations

One of the barriers of youth's successful economic activation includes their unrealistic expectations of higher earnings at their first job [20]. According to the surveys of students at the Poznań University of Economics and Business in Poland in 2007¹ and 2013², the wage expectations differed significantly compared to the reality of the regional and national labor markets (Fig. 1).

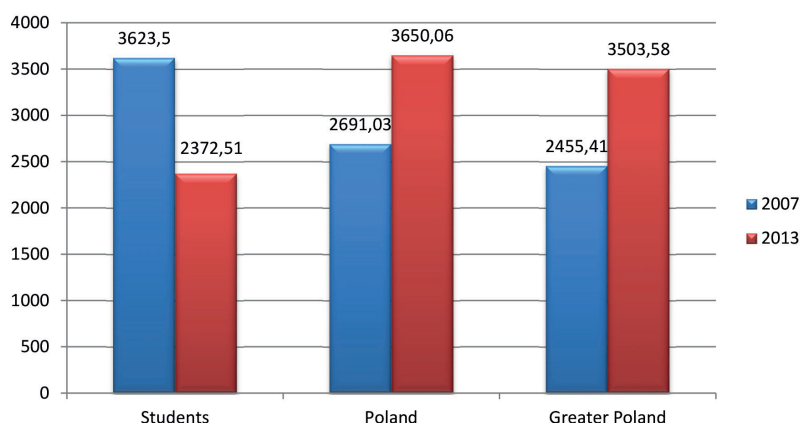


Fig. 1. Wage expectations among students and the average monthly earnings in the Polish and Greater Polish labor markets in 2007 and 2013 (gross value, in PLN)

Note: 2013 shows students' minimum expectations

Source: author's own surveys; [11].

Рис. 1. Ожидаемая (студентами) и действительная заработная плата на польском и великопольском рынках труда в 2007 и 2013 гг. (валовая стоимость, в злотых)

Примечание: для 2013 г. указаны минимальные ожидания студентов

Источник: авторские опросы; [11].

¹ In 2007, the research sample consisted of 181 students (out of 211 students surveyed).

² In 2013, the research sample consisted of 206 students (out of 227 students surveyed).

The Polish Agency for Enterprise Development published *Study of Human Capital in Poland* [34], another source of useful information is Deloitte’s report released in 2013 [11]. These results of Polish public opinion surveys confirm the conclusion about extremely high wage expectations among young people.

According to the results of the research *Labor motivation and adaptation of Russian youth in the labor market* (carried out by R. A. Ukolov in 2008¹ and published in 2014), Russian young people rank the high level of earning the first (84.24%) of most valuable categories in the work. Then, in the order of importance, the other categories included “interesting work” (76.09%), “importance of career growth” (65.76%), “reliability and stability” (53.26%), “convenient work schedule” (40.76%), “the possibility of combining work with other activities (studying, training, etc.)” (40.22%) [38].

Furthermore, the Russian literature shows the discrepancy between the real offered wages on the Russian labor market and the expected ones (by the youth) as one of the most important determinants, which explains the lack of a smooth transition from studies to work [7, 17, 41].

Unemployment Rate

The most relevant challenge, faced by the youth on the labor market, is the problem of finding their first jobs. The unemployment rate among the youth is significantly higher compared to the total population. The divergence is observed in both Poland and Russia (Fig. 2).

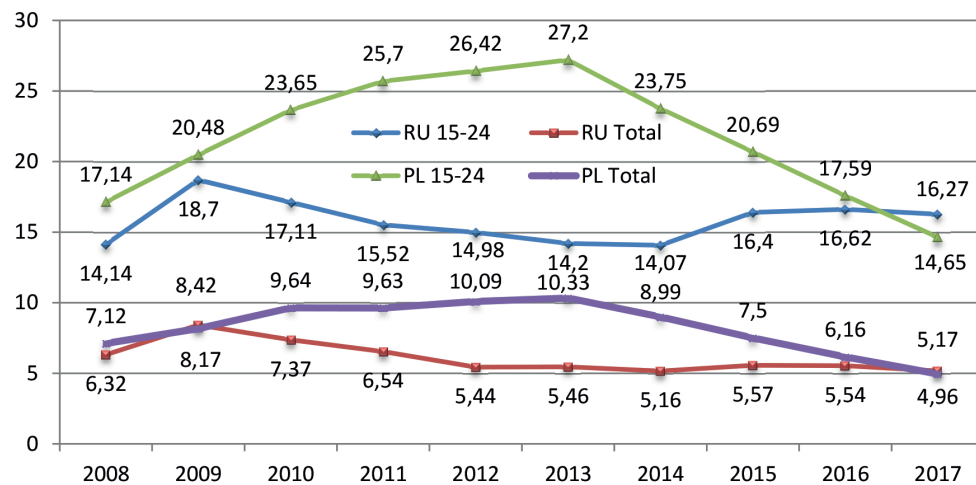


Fig. 2. The youth and total unemployment rate in Poland and in Russia in 2008-2017

Source: [37].

Рис. 2. Безработица среди молодежи и населения в целом в Польше и России в 2008-2017 гг.

Источник: [37].

¹ The research sample consisted of 184 people.

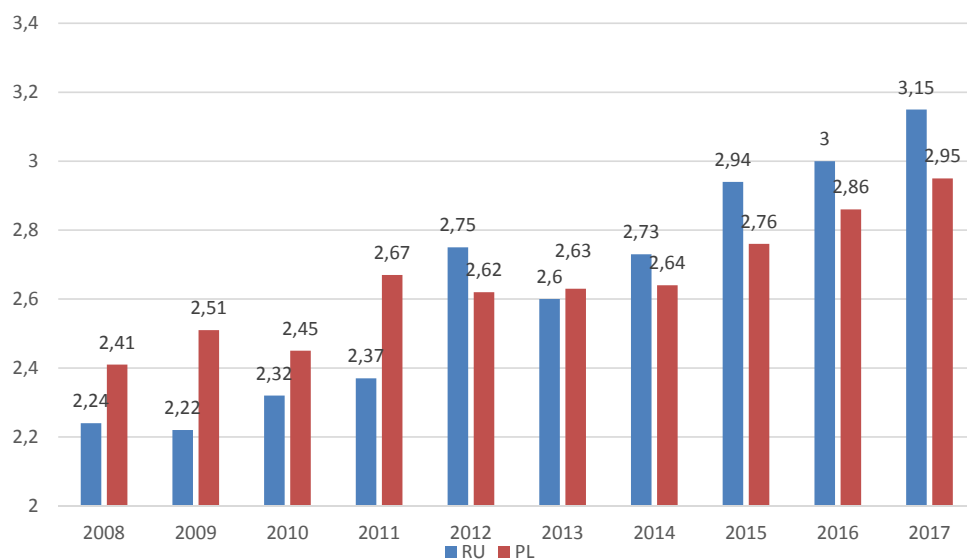


Fig. 3. Ratio of the youth unemployment rate to the total unemployment rate in Poland and in Russia in 2008-2017

Source: author's calculations based on [37].

Рис. 3. Соотношение безработицы среди молодёжи и населения в целом в Польше и России в 2008-2017 гг.

Источник: авторские расчеты на основе [37].

According to the relation of the youth to total population unemployment rate (Fig. 3), the situation of the youth on both the Polish and Russian labor market is worse when compared to the total population. Moreover, in 2008-2017 in both countries, the situation gradually worsened, which is disquieting and proves the inefficiency of both socio-economic state policy towards this socio-demographic group in the labor market and the education system in either of the countries.

Conclusion

This paper has concentrated on the reasons for youth's worse economic position due to increasingly long school-to-work transition. The situation of the youth on the labor market is determined by various factors, which have been divided into the following groups. The first group consists of demand determinants, which include employers' strategies in the employment sphere and their beliefs about graduates, as well as the rules of the labor market's functioning.

The second group of factors involve supply determinants, such as graduates' socio-professional and demographic traits, their professional experiences and wage expectations. The difficulties in the youth's economic activation may be explained using labor market discrimination theories: the prejudice models, the human capital theory, the idea of dual labor market, and statistical discrimination. The discrimination theories of the labor market explain the situation based primarily on employers' attitudes, though, mentioning some of the graduates' features as well.

Age-based discrimination is one of the factors that determines the lack of access to decent jobs, as shown in statistical data. The wage expectations among young people are unrealistic and extremely high for the labor market. At the same time, the youth unemployment rate was twice (or even thrice) higher than that of the total population in both Russia and Poland in 2008-2017. This situation was unfavorable and, what is worse, it was continuously worsening in both analyzed states.

The situation of young people on the labor market requires taking multifaceted actions. Such activities should focus on either the supply (connected with young people) or demand determinants, including reducing age discrimination against the graduates in their transition from school to work. Enterprises should aid young people with this not after but during their education.

No less relevant is raising awareness among young people for changing their attitude and expectations of their first job (in terms of the wage level and employment conditions). At the same time, it is significant to encourage employers to hire young people using the instruments of active labor market policy, e. g., subsidizing companies to provide one or two year contracts for the graduates and young employees.

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Баха КАЛИНОВСКА-СУФИНОВИЧ¹

УДК 005.952+331.101.24(438+470+571)

ДЕТЕРМИНАНТЫ ПОЛОЖЕНИЯ МОЛОДЕЖИ НА РЫНКЕ ТРУДА

¹ доктор философии, доцент кафедры макроэкономики и национальных исследований, заместитель ректора по вопросам равноправия, Познаньский университет экономики и бизнеса (Польша)
baha.kalinowska-sufinowicz@uc.poznan.pl

Аннотация

В данной статье рассматриваются факторы спроса и предложения, касающиеся положения молодежи на рынке труда. Согласно авторской гипотезе, относительно высокий уровень безработицы среди молодежи можно объяснить как факторами спроса, связанными преимущественно с работодателями (включая дискриминацию по возрасту), так и факторами предложения, связанными с самими молодыми людьми. Определив ряд ключевых терминов, автор рассматривает актуальные теории рынка труда и статистические данные об ожидаемых доходах молодежи и безработице как в Польше, так и в России. Результаты исследования представляют классификацию детерминант экономического положения молодежи на рынке труда, представленную в двух группах в зависимости от их связи либо со спросом, либо с предложением на рынке труда.

В заключении представлены авторские рекомендации по решению проблемы.

Ключевые слова

Молодежь, рынок труда, безработица, ожидания, заработная плата.

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