

A MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS OF YOUTH WELL-BEING¹

Young people experience a stage of the life cycle characterized by a series of opportunities and challenges: continuing to study, entering the labor market, defining the relationships with the territory, the social and relational context of daily life (friends and peers), the belonging community and the institutions.

These transitions are full of potential risks that can affect individuals' well-being during their lifetime.

As shown by various recent studies, in the last decades demographic trends, the life cycle stages postponing, precariousness spreading and career paths fragmentation, socio-economic inequalities increasing, accompanied by reduced social mobility, have compromised the opportunities of a large part of young people and discouraged their participation at various levels (political, social, cultural)².

Since this group seems particularly fragile, it becomes essential to be able to better understand its condition today in terms of well-being and monitor its dynamics over time. The conditions, both material and non-material, experienced in the transition to adulthood can indeed profoundly affect current and future levels of well-being.

At the international level, various frameworks for measuring well-being or, more precisely, youth conditions can be traced: the more distant in time is the World Program of Action for Youth, adopted since 1995 by the United Nations, which provides a list of priorities, practical actions and useful indicators to outline the situation of young people in the 15-24 age group and to design appropriate policies at a global level³. In Europe, instead, a set of measures aimed at assessing youth well-being can be found in the context of the EU Youth Strategy⁴. The most recent, launched in November 2018, focuses on the key concepts Engage, Connect, Empower, embraces the period 2019-2027, is developed around 11 objectives⁵ and does not give an a priori definition of young people, considering this category as flexible between 15-29 years depending on the socio-economic context and the phenomenon of interest. Moreover, the strategy emphasizes the role of data as key for evidence-based policies and identifies sources, indicators and targets to monitor trends and progresses in its implementation⁶. Among the measurement experiences blossomed in a more strictly well-being oriented perspective, it is also interesting to report that of the United Kingdom developed within the Measuring National Well-being programme. The Office for National Statistics has in fact released a set of well-being indicators for young people aged 16 to 24 (Measures of National Well-being Dashboard) which embraces various aspects of their quality of life⁷.

1 This chapter was edited by Romina Fraboni, Miria Savioli, Elisabetta Segre, Alessandra Tinto and Anna Villa

2 Chen T. et al. 2018, European Commission 2018, Oecd 2017a, 2017b, 2018b, 2019.

3 In order to strengthen its implementation, the program was also joined by the Undp's First Youth Global Programme for Sustainable Development and Peace – Youth-GPS (2016-2020). <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/Youth-GPS.html>.

4 Policy tools specifically devoted to young people have been introduced in Europe since the early 2000s: in 2002 in particular the European Commission published the White Paper "A new impetus for European youth". EU Youth strategy is available on the website https://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/youth-strategy_en.

5 Connecting EU with Youth; Equality of All Genders; Inclusive Societies; Information & Constructive Dialogue; Mental Health & Wellbeing; Moving Rural Youth Forward; Quality Employment for All; Quality Learning; Space and Participation for All; Sustainable Green Europe; Youth Organisations & European Programmes.

6 Eurostat's website provides a collection of objective and subjective indicators for young people between 15 and 29 years old in 9 domains: Population, Education and training, Employment, Health, Social inclusion, Culture and creativity, Participation, Volunteering, Digital world. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/youth/data/database>.

7 The dimensions are: Personal well-being, Our relationships, Health, What we do, Where we live, Personal finance, Education and skills. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/youngpeopleswellbeingandpersonalfinance/2017>.

Beyond these dashboards, as often happens with multidimensional phenomena, some composite measures which synthesize in a single value a more or less wide battery of indicators have been developed. Even if there is a lack of coherence in their definitions it is worth mentioning some of the most popular indexes: the Global youth wellbeing index; the Youth progress index; the Youth Development Index⁸.

Even the OECD, within a project on youth inclusion implemented in the 2014-2017 period, has moved towards this approach. Youth well-being is measured here starting from the How's life framework, through a very wide selection of indicators focusing on five dimensions: health, education and skills, employment, participation and empowerment, satisfaction and other subjective matters⁹. Starting from this framework, a summary measure including a subset of dimensions that represent the minimum conditions for youth is then proposed. The selected dimensions are education, employment, health and civic participation; indicators in each dimension are synthesized in a youth multid deprivation measure: the Youth Multi-dimensional Deprivation Indicator (Y-MDI) (OECD, 2017b).

Starting with this inspiring work, youth well-being is measured here through the development of a multidimensional well-being indicator similar in the calculation method to the Y-MDI, but different in the selection of relevant dimensions and indicators.

Data and methods

The concept of deprivation is here understood, in line with the capability approach defined by Sen (Sen, 1998), such as the failure to achieve a plurality of factors (individual and context) acting in determining the well-being of young people.

The approach proposed by the OECD for the Y-MDI (Youth MultiDeprivation Index) provides a synthetic (and easily visualizable) tool for the evaluation and monitoring of youth well-being. We base this analysis on the OECD approach setting it within the conceptual framework of Equitable and Sustainable Well-being (Bes) developed by Istat.

From an operational point of view, the first step was the identification of key domains or dimensions in order to assess the achievement of the minimum well-being conditions for young people. Five independent dimensions were identified: Health; Work, Education and Training; Subjective Well-being; Social Cohesion (which includes the domains Social Relationships and Politics and Institutions); Territory (which groups the Landscape and cultural heritage, Environment and Quality of Services domains). The correspondence with the 12 domains of the BES framework is not one to one: we focused on those more representative of personal well-being and in some cases, accordingly with data availability, we end up with a composition of two or more domains of the Bes framework into one.

Data availability was hindered by the necessity to base the analysis on a single data source. This specific need is linked with the objective of this work to analyse youth deprivation in its various dimensions and at the same time to identify the coexistence of deprivation in several dimensions (multi-deprivation). It follows that the same youth are measured on all dimensions. In particular, the survey that allows to calculate individual indicators for a wide range of relevant Bes dimensions is the Istat survey on Aspects of Daily Life (Avq).

For each dimension, 3 Avq indicators have been identified, both objective and subjective measures, and for each of them a threshold was defined to identify deprived youth.

Table 1 shows indicators by domain and the corresponding thresholds.

⁸ <http://www.youthindex.org/>; <https://www.youthforum.org/youth-progress-index>; <https://thecommonwealth.org/youthdevelopmentindex>.

⁹ The Youth inclusion project, co-financed by the European Union, aimed at supporting 10 developing countries in defining national youth policies.

The youth is by nature a complex and heterogeneous universe and, depending on the age group chosen, the conceptual framework and its measurement (dimensions, indicators) change substantially.

This analysis is carried out on young people aged 18-34 (about 7,400 interviews, representing almost 10 million and 700 thousand young people). With respect to a specific dimension, a young person is defined as deprived if he/she is below the threshold for at least two of the three indicators.

In a second step of analysis a multi-deprivation indicator is calculated, identifying young people who are deprived with respect to two or more dimensions of well-being. The results, available for 2012 and 2018, are analysed over time, by gender, territory and specific age groups (18-24 and 25-34).

Table 1 – Domains, indicators and definition of deprivation

Domains	Indicators	Definition of deprivation
Health	Perceived health	Not feeling well nor very well
	Alcohol consumption	At least one risk behavior in alcohol consumption (exceeding the daily consumption of alcohol or binge drinking)
	Overweight or obesity	Overweight ($25 \leq \text{BMI} < 30$) or obese ($\text{BMI} \geq 30$) according to the Body Mass Index (BMI) classification by the World Health Organization (WHO)
Work, Education and training	Employment and education	Not in employment nor enrolled in a school in education institute
	Cultural participation	Not carrying out any of the 9 cultural activities considered. The activities considered are: go to the cinema at least four times in the last 12 months; at least once to the theatre, exhibitions and museums, archaeological sites, monuments, concerts of classical music, opera, concerts of other kind of music in the last 12 months; read the newspaper at least three times per week, read at least four books in the last 12 months
	Level of education	At most a middle lower secondary education (for people 20-34 years old); not enrolled in school, courses or institutes (for people 18-19 years old)
Subjective well-being	Life satisfaction	Level of life satisfaction from 0 to 5 (on a scale from 0 to 10)
	Future perspectives	They believe their personal situation will worsen in the next 5 years (negative judgement of future perspectives)
	Leisure time satisfaction	Not satisfied or a little satisfied with their leisure time
Social cohesion (Social relationships, Politics and Institutions)	Satisfied with friends relations	Not satisfied or a little satisfied with relations with friends
	Civic and political participation	People not performing any activities of civic and political participation. The activities considered are: to speak about politics at least once a week; to inform of the facts of Italian politics at least once a week; to attend online consultation or voting on social issues (civic) or political (e.g. urban planning, sign a petition) at least once in the 3 months prior to the interview, to read and to post opinions on social or political issues on the web at least once in the 3 months preceding the interview
	Trust in parliament	Average score of trust in the Italian Parliament below the average of young people (< 4), (on a scale from 0 to 10)
Territory (Environment, Landscape and cultural heritage, Quality of services)	Satisfaction with the landscape	People reporting that the landscape of the place where they live is affected by evident deterioration
	Satisfaction with the environmental	People not satisfied or a little satisfied for the environmental situation (air, water, noise) of the area where they live
	Service accessibility	People who find very difficult to reach 3 or more basic services among the 11 considered (pharmacy, emergency room, post office, police, carabinieri, municipal offices, crèches, nursery, primary and secondary school, market and supermarket)

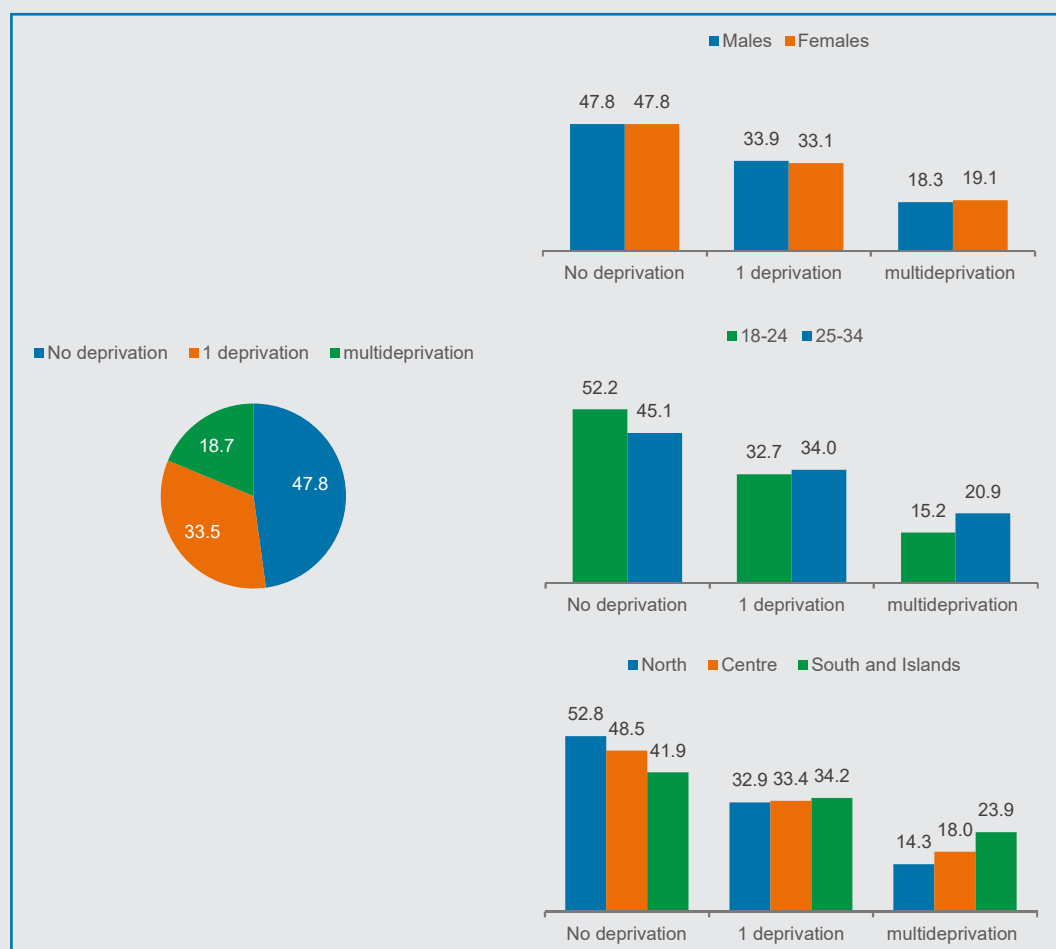
Findings

Overall, slightly less than half of young people aged 18-34 years (47.8%) show no deprivation, while one out of three (33.5%) shows one deprivation and 18.7% (slightly less than 2 million young people) is multi-deprived, i.e. deprived on two or more wellbeing dimensions. The latter group of young people, the multi-deprived one, is the target of the following analysis as it represents the most vulnerable part of the youth population, one upon which to draw policies attention.

Three out of four among the 2 millions of multi-deprived young people are in fact deprived for two dimensions, one out of five for three dimensions and the remaining 5%, the most fragile, for four or even five dimensions. The dimensions affecting the most the multi-deprivation condition are those related to Social relations and Political participation (69.5% of the multi-deprived ones are deprived in this domain), to Work, Education and Training (58.1%) and to the characteristics of the Territory where young people live (47.3%).

Although gender differences are negligible, age and, above all, territorial differences are relevant (Figure 1). Multi-deprivation is higher among young adults (25-34 years) (20.9% versus 15.2% for 18-24 years) and in the southern regions (major islands included), where 23.9% of young people is multi-deprived, 10 percentage points above young people in the North and about 6 percentage points above those in the Centre of Italy.

Figure 1. Young people aged 18-34 years by deprivation and specific characteristics. Year 2018. Percentages



Source: Istat, survey on Aspects of daily life

The most frequent association among dimensions of multi-deprivation is observed between the dimension describing Social relations and that expressing lack of Work and Education participation (two-fifths of multi-deprived cases). It follows a strong association between Social relations and Territory, which affects about a quarter of all cases of multi-deprivation, and between Work and Education and Territory (a quarter of cases). This picture seems to outline a strong inter-relationship between certain aspects of social cohesion, active inclusion in society and tangible and intangible infrastructures of the territory. The association between the domain of Education and Labour and the domain of satisfaction for Social relations is the strongest in all geographical macro areas. There are some aspects of specificity, though: Northern regions are affected also by a strong association between deprivation in Health and Social Cohesion, central regions by an overlap between deprivation in the Subjective Well-being indicators and in those related to the Territory and in the southern regions between Education and Work and Territory.

But what are the indicators, within domains, that contribute the most to make a sub-group of young people disadvantaged on a plurality of domains compared to another group?

Among the youngest (18-24 years old) the most affecting factors on multiple deprivation are alcohol use (25.8% against 18.9% for the older ones) and life dissatisfaction (38.8% against 33.8% for the older ones). But it is undoubtedly the young adults aged 25-34 years who suffer from a multiplicity of disadvantages: excess weight in Health domain (44% against 27.9% of 18-24 years of age), all indicators of the Work and Education domain, dissatisfaction for leisure time in Subjective Well-being domain (51.1% against 42.4% of the youngest) and dissatisfaction for friends in Social and Political Relations domain (33.8% against 25%). As far as territorial differences are concerned, the disadvantage of Southern Italy is characterized by levels of indicators that contribute to multiple deprivation with greater intensity, compared to other areas of the country, for all the indicators of the Education and Labour domain. In the South and Islands also the future prospects are considered to be worsening by a good part of young people (14.3% compared to 11.7% in the North and 13% in the Centre). Moreover, a high proportion of young people do not carry out civic and political participation activities (74.3% compared to about two thirds in other areas) and are dissatisfied about the environmental situation or the accessibility of the services of public utility.

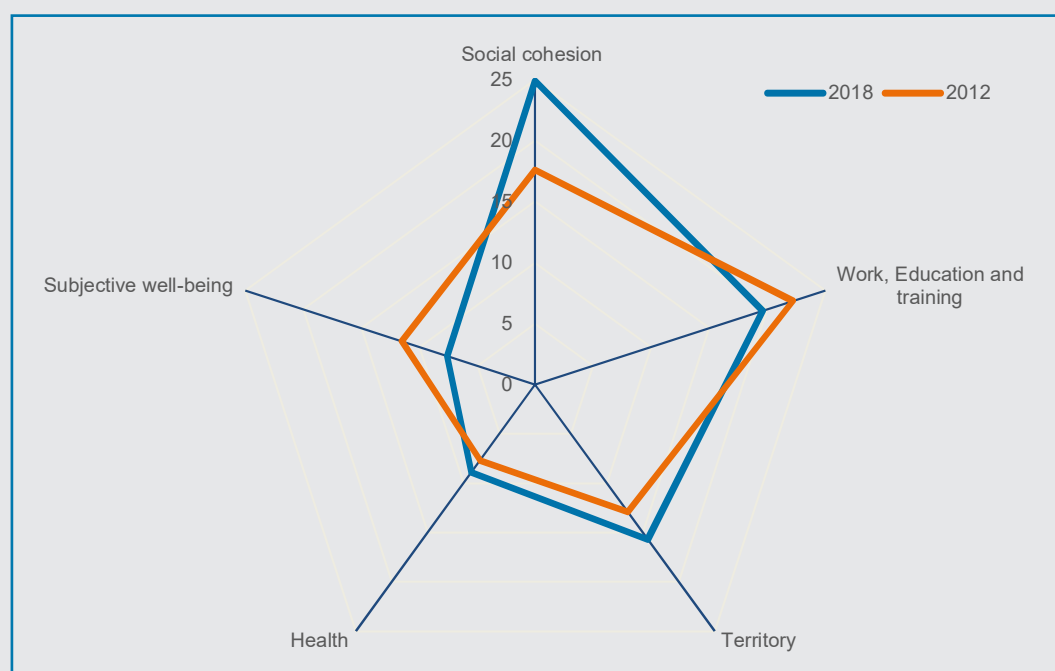
Signs of deterioration using data from the 2012 wave. The share of young people with no deprivation has decreased by almost 4 percentage points, while both the share of young people with a single deprivation and the share of those in multi-deprivation condition have raised (respectively by 2.6 pp and 1.3 pp). There are important differences at territorial level. The worsening in the condition of young people has been stronger in northern and central regions, where the reduction in the share of young people with no symptoms of deprivation have dropped respectively by 8.4 and 4.8 percentage points. The reasons behind this dynamic are rather different, though. While in northern regions has increased the share of young people with a single symptom of deprivation (+3.2 pp), in central regions signals are of greater concern: it has consistently increased the share of multi-deprived young people (3.6 pp). In southern region the situation is stable.

Interesting results also emerge from the analysis by age group. For young people aged 18-24 the increase in deprivation was less intense (the share of young people with no deprivation dropped by 3.6 pp) and is generated solely by the increase in the share of those deprived in only one dimension. For young adults (25 -34) there was a more intense increase (the share of young people with no deprivation dropped by 4.1 pp) attributable to an increase of equal intensity of young adults with a single deprivation and multi-deprived ones. For a better understanding of these difference, it is useful to deepen the analysis looking at the domains. The dynamic in terms of share of deprived within each domain is almost the same by age group with the exception of Work and education. Here the situation for young aged between 18 and 24 has much improved (the share of deprived has fallen by 6, 3 pp), while it has remained almost stable among young adults (-0.2 pp). The share of young people 18-24 who

are not in employment or education has dropped from 27.2% in 2012 to 20.7 in 2018, while for young adults data registered only a small change (from 29.3 to 28.9%).

Overall, looking at Figure 2 it strikes a significant increase in the share of young people deprived in the domain of Social relations and political participation (from 17.6% in 2012 to 24.9%), while conditions improved in the Work and education domain (from 22.2% in 2012 to 19.6%) and in the Subjective well-being domain (7.6% compared to 11.5% in 2012). The latter is the domain which shows the lowest percentage of young deprived people.

Figure 2. Young people aged 18-34 years in deprivation by domain. Years 2012-2018. Percentages



Source: Istat, survey on Aspects of daily life

Final remarks

The analysis highlights a large group of young people, almost 2 million, who are more vulnerable because they are deprived in more than one dimension of well-being. The condition of multi-deprivation is a serious obstacle in the achievement of a young person potential and requires specific policy interventions. One point of particular attention is the well-being dimension which refers to social networks and political participation. This is the area where the disadvantage of young people is most intense and for which there has been a considerable worsening in the last five years. In addition, deprivation in the aspects of social cohesion has been closely associated with that of active inclusion (school/work), a dimension which could be more directly addressed by specific policies.

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