

R F A S

Revue française des affaires sociales

Multidisciplinary call for contributions on:

“A new look at youth resources: income, support and capabilities”

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The dossier will be coordinated by

Nicolas Charles¹, Mickaël Portela², and Émilie Raynaud³.

This call for papers is addressed to researchers in sociology, economics, statistics, political science, demography, history, and law as well as to actors in the field of social protection.

Articles are expected before Monday, 5 November 2018.

¹ Lecturer at the University of Bordeaux, external collaborator at the “Youth and Family” office of the DREES.

² Research officer at the “Youth and Family” office of the DREES, researcher at the Centre d’études de l’emploi et du travail (CEET), scientific advisor at the Haut conseil de la famille, de l’enfance et de l’âge (HCFEA).

³ Head of the “Youth and Family” office of the DREES.

The population with the greatest risk of living in poverty is that of young adults⁴. Nearly one person in four aged 18 to 24 — more than one million young people⁵ — live below the poverty line. Young people without a diploma, and those who are unemployed or inactive are the most exposed: six out of ten are poor. Young people are particularly concerned with difficulties in finding housing, whether in terms of leaving their parents' home and continuing to occupy independent housing or living in good conditions (decent housing in proximity to areas with available employment or education and training). Understanding their living conditions and the income inequalities in their access to certain resources has become crucial for public authorities.⁶

Resources are primarily material: they are wage derived from a remunerated activity (regular employment and occasional or additional work). They also include public assistance or benefits, including the benefit of low-cost housing in university residences or social centre⁷ or family support (financial transfers, expenses covered, free housing). At this time of life, these resources are often globally constrained. Going into greater detail, among all young adults, we can see that they are unevenly distributed and highly dependent on their social background.

In fact, in addition to financial transfers, the resources of young people are also symbolic and relational transmissions (social norms, social and cultural capital, etc.) within the family, but also through friendly or professional networks which they can call upon more or less easily. They thus have educational resources such as diplomas but also relationships and networks which can be subsequently activated.

The main ways in which young people access resources (family, government, labour market participation) are well known. They can combine or complement each other. These interactions take place in a very particular national, social, legal and economic context: the economic crisis and the difficulties of access to the labour market specific to young people, the credo of school meritocracy, the “family-based” principles of the French social protection system, and the criteria for access to benefits and different mechanisms (age limits) all have an impact on behaviour and on the obligation of mutual family aid.

The *Revue française des affaires sociales* would like to assemble qualitative or quantitative contributions in the social sciences, on the **resources of young people in the broad sense** in a thematic dossier. The measurement or contour of these resources can be investigated. The articulation of the modes of access to these resources and **the experience that young adults themselves and their family environment** have in accessing these resources, the adequacy of public policies, and their representations of what does or does not constitute resources can figure

⁴ This call does not define strict age limits for defining youth or young adults. Each contribution is free to set them, or not, according to the theme treated and the concepts or data mobilized. However, we will consider that the issues addressed do not fall within the field of youth under 15 years old.

⁵ In 2015, 1,164,000 young people had incomes below the monetary poverty line according to INSEE (source: Revenus fiscaux et sociaux survey, CCMSA; Cnaf; Cnav; DGFIP; INSEE). Poverty strikes 26% of young women and 24% of young men.

⁶ Agnès Buzyn, 2017, at the opening of the public consultation on the strategy to prevent and combat child and youth poverty.

⁷ Housing benefits, scholarships, one-off grants from local authorities, minimum social benefits or allowances under special schemes for young people in difficulty.

prominently. The uses that young people make of these resources, the way in which they mobilize them along their journey towards autonomy, may also be part of the field of analysis.

Various data sources can be mobilized: national statistical surveys, qualitative interviews, observations, etc. Transdisciplinary proposals or the articulation of qualitative and quantitative methods will be highly appreciated, as will international insights, provided that they encourage analysis of French social and family norms for youth.

This call for contributions proposes **4 themes of analysis**:

Income and living conditions of young people

Inequalities in access to resources

Beyond material resources: the environment of young adults, forms of support, and their justifications

Public policies and youth experiences

First theme — Income and living conditions of young people

The resource situation for young people in France has been particularly marked by a strong dependence on the family and in particular on financial transfer received from parents. This role of parents as the main provider of resources to young people derives largely from the French legal framework which imposes on parents the duty of assistance to their children, within the framework of the maintenance and support obligation in the Civil Code (articles 203 and 371-2). More generally the set of rules granting social rights in France has led to the situation for young people that Tom Chevalier describes as “family-based social citizenship”.

Generally, young people entering the labour market are in precarious employment at the time of their first recruitment and during their first years of activity, which makes it impossible to achieve financial independence on their own. Those outside of employment and education, characterized by the new figure of NEETs⁸, are all the more exposed to situations of economic and social vulnerability since they are most often excluded from social minima and are poorly prepared for integration. A deeper investigation into the access to the three forms of financial resources for young adults (family, work, public assistance), taking into account **recent changes or inflexions such as in family solidarity, public solidarity mechanisms, or linked to the economic situation (crisis and the end of the crisis) and access to the labour market** could lead to better understanding of youth today. The forms of interdependence between resources from the private, employment, or public spheres should also be investigated. Several different levels of analysis may be appropriate: generational approaches as well as infra-national, national, comparative, etc.

We would also welcome more methodological proposals on material resources and living conditions of young people. The question of an adequate measure of poverty for young adults is

⁸ Not in Education, Employment or Training.

still a largely open question. Students who no longer live with their parents are excluded from the usual measures of poverty, particularly because of the difficulty of taking into account all the parental assistance which is their main resource. In addition, analyses investigating the hypothesis of the fungibility of young adults' resources within their household may be conducted. Should **more individual approaches to resources** be developed? If so, how could this be achieved? On the contrary, are the dynastic approaches present in economic literature more relevant?

The link between financial resources and **living conditions**, while not automatic, is often a strong one. Studies of such questions based on all categories of young people are few, if not non-existent,⁹ with an exception concerning the conditions and difficulties of access to **residential autonomy**: financing independent housing, living in decent housing, being able to live near areas of employment or university education. This autonomy is not available to everyone: some young people are obliged to live in situations of cohabitation, even against their will. It would be interesting to shed some light on the situation of these young people who are unable to live in residential autonomy.

Other dimensions of living conditions could be the subject of contributions: renunciation of medical care, young people's dietary practices, or access to transport.

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⁹ For example, the recent DREES study on youth consumption, which is quite comprehensive, only covers young people who no longer live with their parents (Portela, 2018).

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Second theme — Inequalities in access to resources

From students to NEETs, young people are certainly not a homogeneous population. Going beyond general ideas, it would also be relevant to study access to the resources of **certain particular populations** and in particular those which traditionally constitute blind spots in the sociology of youth (**the rural world**, the working classes, young people from working-class neighbourhoods, etc.). Very young parents could also be the subject of analysis. More specific categories, exposed to situations of **extreme precariousness**, such as homeless and rootless young people, or isolated foreigners who may have served a term in prison, could open this dossier to an analysis of the financial resources obtained outside the traditional labour market, questions which are rarely taken into consideration in public policies and yet are essential to their survival. The situation of young people leaving prison, as well as of refugees under the age of 25 enjoying subsidiary protection, who, since September 2017, no longer have access to the temporary waiting allowance (ATA), could be examined. Finally, we are also particularly interested in the integration trajectories of young people leaving **child welfare**, who are cut off at the end of support and benefits at the age of 20.

We would also welcome work on **students**. One of the main vectors of inequality in both access to training and academic success is access to financial assistance from parents to pay for their studies or having to finance them by themselves. Economic studies based on French data now agree in identifying a negative influence on academic success of student jobs that have no link to studies. However, the link between financial assistance, access to benefits, and work during studies has not yet been clearly identified. What are the motivations of these young people: **the absence of parental assistance, relatively limited access to social income? Do only “poor” students have to work?** Beyond the instrumental dimension of work alone, students' “odd jobs” are subject to **different social uses depending on the young people**, which are difficult to separate from the social environment from which they come. While work-linked training and all professional experiences are identified as vectors for successful professional integration, some young people benefit from work while others face situations of stagnation in precarious jobs. A

deeper economic, sociological, or socio-historical examination on this theme would be appreciated.

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Third theme — Beyond material resources: the environment of young adults, forms of support, and their justifications

Family, peer groups, work, and the state all offer resources beyond the financial and material sphere. One of the revealing indicators is the polysemy of terms such as “help”, “support”, “solidarity”, and “gift”.

It is probably within the family that these multiple dimensions make the most sense. Forms of assistance in time or services were thus identified at the beginning of the 1990s, notably in Claudine Attias-Donfut's work based on the survey *Trois générations* conducted by the CNAV in 1993. Nevertheless, these forms of assistance can still be regarded as a form of economic exchange.¹⁰ The intensity and quality of the family bond are a help and a resource for young people. Those who lack such a family relationship, as a result of family breakdown or conflict, are often more vulnerable to adversity. Moral support, the very notion of which can be questioned here, can take very varied forms: from “elementary comfort assistance” (Déchaux, 2007) without

¹⁰ Indeed, it is domestic work that can be monetized using various assumptions.

any real investment, to psychological support, or even support for the young person in all stages of the transition to adulthood. This issue of the RFAS will therefore be an opportunity to investigate **the family as a resource** in addition to economic exchange relationships. What non-monetary assistance do young people receive? What does this mean for young people and their families? Does the quality of parental ties promote access to independence for young adults?

Given the importance of family support, whether financial, material or relational, contributions leading to a **better understanding of its justifications** would be greatly appreciated. The focus could thus be not only on young people, but also on those who provide support: parents and step-parents, grandparents, spouses of young adults, their brothers and sisters, etc. In the register of justifications which could be mobilized are educational or parental norms, the principles of justice at work in our society, and the weight of the school norm in France explaining why parents and children make many sacrifices to succeed in “finding a position”. This applies to ethno-accounting studies as well: behind the accounting studies of the estimate of the financial aid provided, however precise it may be, there is a **form of evaluation of the value of the aid which cannot be separated from relational and social aspects**.

From the perspective of an observation **of pathways** or trajectories, the possibility for young people of **using — or not using — this family support** is an important question. Young people faced with a situation of poverty, for example, who have returned to live with their parents are an illustration of this. These young people also highlight the vulnerability and difficulties of those who cannot benefit from family support or who do not wish to activate certain latent resources.

Peers can also be a support and resource for youth. The interest of **networks**, whether of friends, professional relations, or others, has often been noted by the socio-economic literature. How are they a resource for young people? Under what circumstances do they replace kinship networks? Moreover, do the social networks, of which this generation of the digital age is the main consumer, provide support for young people’s development or their transition to adulthood? On this last question, the benefits of social networks in young people’s access to employment could be a possible entry point.

Finally, there is the **environment** in which young people live and their **proximity to certain services** (information services, health centres, local missions and other social and professional integration services, sports facilities, cultural and leisure facilities), as well as the possibility of using them. Access to support and guidance in the construction of one’s educational path is an illustration of this. In addition, the possibility of exchanges between peers, in places other than the family and school, is a means enabling young people to access their own autonomy. Contributions on access and use of these services by young adults would be appreciated.

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Fourth theme — Public policies and youth experiences

Youth policies in France are marked by a concern to give young people a place in society. Public policy mechanisms take various forms. They may have a preventive, incentive, or educational aim. They may take up an access to a right (training, housing, etc.) or simply provide a financial resource necessary for the individual's subsistence. They are often characterized by age limits, or are linked to a specific status (student, employee, unemployed...). This theme aims at highlighting the interactions between public policies, the normative context, and individual experiences.

Throughout Western societies, the period as a youth has been extended while the entry into working and family life has been delayed. In terms of life cycle, at each age a social role predominates, and more than elsewhere youth is linked to a period of training.

In France, the family plays an essential support role in the progression towards autonomy. This French model is first and foremost part of a set of public policies which informs us about the nature of French society. The social state has gradually become a true master of the stages of life by helping to shape social roles according to age, regardless of the preferences and abilities of individuals, which underscores the existence of a society governed by a true “age police”, which has been so well described by Annick Percheron. Proposals could present the **crystallization of age standards** around youth through public policies regulating the relationship between age, work, and social protection. These standards are legal and administrative (age thresholds for social benefits, “maintenance obligation” of children by their parents, etc.). They are also very often social, in the sense that they do not constitute an explicit rule but structure the way

individuals think and build public policies. How can we understand these — by **definition very implicit** — social norms? The analysis of public action mechanisms, in their apparently most technical implementation, is an interesting way of showing the social norms that structure our society, as demonstrated in the analyses of social justice through selection at the entrance to higher education and student financing.

The idea that youth is a time dedicated to education and training is based on a form of division of social work, characteristic of the constitution of modern societies. However this has taken an extreme form in France. For example, representative student organisations are still strongly opposed to paid work and adhere to the ideal of the traditional student, engaged full-time in his studies. In other countries, employment during studies is part of a classic student career path, promoted by the educational administration and by national labour law (Vultur M. and Papinot Ch., 2010). The fight against dropping out has become an issue for young people who leave this educational framework. The instruments of public action can be analysed in a comparative way to highlight the particularities of France and the dynamics at work.

Among young people who are no longer in school, social minima raise the question of age thresholds and standards. Recent changes in these practices are underway, notably with the introduction of the Youth Guarantee. This introduces the possibility for a young person before the age of 25, who is not supported by his family even though he can live with his parents, to receive support and an allowance (up to the level of an RSA [Revenu de solidarité active]). This system thus highlights a form of “family” vulnerability for certain young people and puts into question the cardinal principle of the obligation of supporting them. **A reflection on the age limits for access to minimum income benefits could be addressed in this dossier.**

Proposals could also analyse the impact of the inertia of these social norms on the experience of individuals, the way in which these social images are maintained and reinterpreted by young people and their representatives (youth organisations and student representatives in particular) or the way in which these social norms insidiously shape the instruments of public action. Basically, it can also be a question of showing **what effects social norms have on individuals and public action.**

Analysis of public policy might also take an interest in the transformations to be carried out in these policies, towards a policy of the individual more than of status, and its consequences on the transition to adulthood of young people.

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Further information on the content of this call for contributions can be obtained from the coordinators at the following addresses:

nicolas.charles@u-bordeaux.fr

Mickael.PORTELA@sante.gouv.fr

Emilie.RAYNAUD@sante.gouv.fr

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rfas-drees@sante.gouv.fr

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