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Youth Life Chances and the Implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights in Lithuania

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Abstract

This article examines the subjective perceptions of life chances among Lithuanian youth (aged 18–35) within the framework of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR). It explores key dimensions such as education and employment opportunities, housing conditions, financial independence, and overall well-being. The research builds on Weber's (1994) concept of life chances and integrates theoretical perspectives from life course theory, employment security, socioeconomic stratification, and intergenerational mobility. Using data from a nationally representative 2023 survey ($N = 1209$), we construct life chances indexes to assess variations across sociodemographic groups, including differences in age, gender, education, regional disparities, and employment status. The findings reveal significant inequalities in youth life opportunities, highlighting the impact of economic stability, family background, and institutional support. While financial security and stable employment emerge as central concerns, the study also shows that political and geopolitical factors play a less significant role in young people's perceptions of their prospects. These insights contribute to ongoing discussions on social inequality and stratification, as well as youth policy, and offer recommendations for enhancing the implementation of the EPSR at national and regional levels. By identifying key determinants of youth life chances, the study informs policies aimed at reducing social inequalities, improving access to education and employment, and fostering economic and social inclusion.

Keywords

life chances; life opportunities; Lithuania; social inequalities; youth; youth inequality

1. Introduction

The life chances of young people are shaped by a complex interplay of social, economic, demographic, and individual factors. Socio-economic changes in recent decades have brought substantial transformations in the life trajectories of young people (Chesters, 2024; Urbaniak, 2014). Over recent decades, globalization, technological advancements, shifting labor market structures, and neoliberal economic policies have transformed the pathways young people take in education, employment, and personal development. These changes have led to increasing individualization of youth transitions, with traditional milestones such as stable employment, financial independence, and family formation becoming less predictable and more fragmented. Researchers highlight the individualization and destandardization of youth life courses, where transitions into adulthood, from education to the labor market, and into family and partnership formation lack stability (Brazienė et al., 2024a; M. Gebel, 2020). Neoliberal policies, emphasizing market-driven reforms and the reduction of state intervention, have reshaped education systems and labor markets, creating both opportunities and challenges for young people. These policies often prioritize skills training and employability but may also exacerbate inequality by restricting access to quality education and stable employment, especially for less privileged youth (Chesters, 2024; Grotowska-Leder et al., 2022). In response to social and economic changes, labor market challenges, and transformations, an increasing number of young people remain in education longer, opting for secondary, vocational, and higher education to secure professional success and personal fulfilment. This has led to delayed entry into the labor market, postponed family formation, and prolonged residential autonomy (Baranowska-Rataj et al., 2017; Brazienė, 2019; Brazienė et al., 2018). The constant flux, relativity, difficulty in consolidating values and capital, and a prevailing sense of uncertainty—characteristic of liquid modernity—have contributed to a growing trend among youth to postpone adult decisions, social commitments, and the adoption of socially accepted roles (M. Gebel, 2020; Grotowska-Leder et al., 2022; Urbaniak, 2014).

In recent decades, primarily due to declining birth rates, migration, and other demographic processes, the number of young people in Lithuania has been steadily decreasing (Brazienė et al., 2024a). These intensive demographic changes have resulted in the current young generation being significantly smaller than previous youth cohorts in Lithuania. At the beginning of 2022, all youth age groups accounted for only 18% of the total population in Lithuania, compared to 28.6% in 2000—a decrease of more than 10 percentage points. Objective youth life chances in Lithuania differ markedly between major cities and remote rural regions. In urban centers, like the capital city Vilnius (and to some extent Kaunas or Klaipėda), youth enjoy better access to quality education, diverse jobs, and public services, whereas those in peripheral areas face more limited opportunities (Brazienė et al., 2024a). For example, rural students tend to have poorer educational outcomes and fewer chances for higher education—only 53% of rural secondary students pass at least three state exams, compared to 65% of urban students, and rural youth are more likely to attend non-university colleges, which leads to lower earnings and higher unemployment later (OECD, 2023).

As a theoretical background for this study, we employ Weber's life chances theory (Weber, as cited in Grusky, 2001), which allows us to determine an individual's class and to predict relevant social actions, based on life chance differentiation in terms of positive and negative privileges in class situations (Anikin et al., 2017). Weber's life chances theory was further developed by different scholars. Giddens (1973, pp. 130–131) sees life chances as "the chances an individual has for sharing in the socially created economic or cultural 'goods' that typically exist in any given society." Breen (2019) suggests viewing inequality in the distribution of life

chances through the lens of the possession of market-relevant assets. Summarizing the insights of previous research, the life chances of young people (Weber, as cited in Grusky, 2001; see also Cho & Brand, 2019; Munro, 2019) are treated in this research as opportunities for young people to achieve their goals depending on their socioeconomic status.

A systematic review of the scientific literature allowed the identification of key research directions, relevant to life chances, including youth education and schooling (Chesters, 2024; Dilytė-Kotenko, 2024), youth transitions to adulthood and life course perspectives (Buchholz et al., 2011; Vosylis, 2017), social mobility and intergenerational transmission of social inequalities (Breen, 2019; Bourdieu, 1984, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Neagu et al., 2024), youth transition from education to employment (Brazienė, 2020; Matsumoto & Elder, 2010), and youth living conditions and housing security (Baranowska-Rataj et al., 2017; Brazienė, 2019; Brazienė et al., 2018; Filandri & Bertolini, 2016; Filandri & Olagnero, 2014; S. Gebel et al., 2022).

Weber's concept of life chances, Bourdieu's theory of capital, and life course approaches (Brady & Gilligan, 2018; Jones et al., 2019), among others, offer contrasting explanations of youth life chances. For example, while Weberian theory highlights the role of structural position in accessing economic and social resources, Bourdieu's perspective emphasizes the accumulation of various forms of capital (economic, social, cultural) and their conversion into life chances and opportunities, which is particularly relevant in understanding youth inequalities in post-Soviet societies like Lithuania. Life course theory, by contrast, provides a temporal and biographical lens to interpret how transitions and trajectories are influenced by institutional settings and social risks.

Youth life chances and success have profound implications for the overall social well-being of society. In recent years, scholars, social policy experts, and practitioners have increasingly focused on youth-related research. However, youth life chances remain an underrepresented topic in theoretical, scientific, and practical discourse, with limited dedicated research. This study contributes to the relevant research on youth inclusion in Central and Eastern Europe while also shedding light on unique regional and institutional aspects in Lithuania. Our findings validate and extend some international research (e.g., confirming the importance of stable employment and financial security for youth success; see, among others, Baranowska-Rataj et al., 2017; M. Gebel, 2020). The purpose of this article is to analyse the subjective attitudes towards life chances (education and employment opportunities, housing provision, housing conditions, etc.) of Lithuanian youth aged 18–35 in the context of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR).

1.1. Lithuanian Welfare State and the EPSR

The EPSR, adopted in 2017, provides a framework for fair and inclusive social policies across the EU. Together with the welfare state, it highlights the crucial role of social policies in shaping youth life chances. The welfare state plays a significant role in providing education, employment support, social protection, and healthcare. Access to quality education and vocational training enhances young people's financial independence prospects. Active labor market measures, such as youth employment schemes, internships, and minimum wage regulations, contribute to addressing youth employment insecurity. Social protection mechanisms, including unemployment benefits, housing support, and family allowances, assist young people in navigating financial instability. Additionally, free or affordable physical and mental healthcare services ensure that young people can maintain their well-being, a factor our study identified as highly important.

Lithuania has been actively implementing the EPSR to enhance youth opportunities in education and employment. The Action Plan of the National Youth Policy 2023–2027 highlights youth social inclusion and the successful integration of youth into the labor market and education system. Efforts include promoting quality education and training, supporting secure and adaptable employment, and ensuring access to social protection. These measures aim to provide young people with the necessary skills and opportunities to thrive in the labor market, thereby contributing to the broader EU targets set for 2030 (European Commission, 2021).

A key initiative is the Youth Guarantee program 2013, which aims "to ensure that all young people under the age of 25 years receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education" (Council of the European Union, 2013, p. 2). The program has made significant progress by improving partnerships with stakeholders, adopting a one-stop-shop approach, enhancing NEET (not in employment, education, or training) profiling systems, and expanding tailored services for various NEET groups. However, despite these advancements, challenges persist in engaging young NEETs and ensuring the long-term sustainability of the schemes introduced (Krauledaitė & Brazienė, 2025).

2. Methodological Approach

A quantitative research strategy was applied for the analysis of youth life chances, and data from the representative survey research carried out by the authors in 2023 in Lithuania were used. Our research instruments were the insights of researchers, methodological literature (among others, Babbie, 2013; Bryman, 2008), and standardized questionnaires and scales (the EU-SILC, the EUROSTUDENT project waves 7 and 8, the 2019 ISSP Inequality Module V, etc. (Brazienė et al., 2024b; Brazienė & Vyšniauskienė, 2023). Survey research aimed to empirically investigate life chances focused on (a) individual and family characteristics, (b) parents' family characteristics and status, (c) learning, study, and training opportunities, (d) work, employment, and career opportunities, (e) income, and (d) material autonomy (housing, financial and decision-making power, etc.; see also Brazienė et al., 2024a). A total of 1209 respondents aged 18–35 participated in the survey.

In this article, we are focused on the attitudes of the Lithuanian youth on life chances, as well as factors that have an impact on life chances. We have thus developed two scales that allow us to measure these subjective attitudes (see Table 1).

Table 1. Quality characteristics of the measurement scales.

Scales	N^{items}	Cronbach's α Coeff.	KMO and Bartlett's Test	Explained variance
Subjective evaluation of life chances	15	0.937	0.941 (*sig. p* < 0,001)	61,2%
Factors that have an impact on life chances	17	0.925	0,931 (*sig. p* < 0,001)	63,6%

For the measurement of life chances, we employed a 5-level Likert scale. As for the data analysis, we employ descriptive statistics, factor analysis, and logistic regression.

3. Research Results

Youth life chances are significantly influenced by political, social, and economic contexts, as well as the place of residence (e.g., urban vs. rural), environment, family, and household. During our research, respondents assessed the impact of family and individual factors, material well-being, the political environment, and other influences. The research revealed that the financial and economic aspects of life chances are highly important for young people, particularly a salary that meets their needs and material well-being (see Table 1). It is important to note that respondents tended to emphasize the impact of individual, family, or community-level factors on youth life chances (Brazienė & Vyšniauskienė, 2023). In their opinion, geopolitical factors—such as the war in Ukraine, the Covid-19 pandemic, or the broader geopolitical environment—were considered less significant (see Table 2).

Table 2. Life chances factors (subjective assessment; N = 1209).

	%			M	Sd.
	Completely disagree, disagree	*Neither agree nor disagree*	*Completely agree, agree*		
Family and good family relations, family life	13,4	7,0	**79,6**	4,10	0,967
Supportive social environment (good relations with parents, relatives, and friends)	16,9	6,2	**76,9**	4,04	0,929
The number of children	35,0	15,8	**49,2**	3,41	1,084
Material welfare	15,5	5,1	**79,4**	4,11	0,912
Work and employment safety	17,0	5,0	**78,0**	4,04	0,877
Satisfying salary	14,2	5,9	**79,9**	4,19	0,951
Health conditions in general	14,5	5,1	**80,4**	4,21	0,922
Psychological condition	16,3	5,5	**78,2**	4,14	0,939
Community life	31,1	7,5	**61,4**	3,69	0,867
Political stability and environmental safety	26,6	9,4	**64,0**	3,75	0,968
Trust in government and political institutions	34,0	12,9	**53,1**	3,51	0,990
Political freedom	27,8	9,2	**63,0**	3,72	0,965
Equal opportunities and non-discrimination	25,0	9,0	**66,0**	3,80	1,015
Climate and geography	30,3	10,3	**59,4**	3,64	0,962
Covid-19 pandemic	40,0	17,2	**42,8**	3,30	1,060
War in Ukraine	35,3	15,1	**49,6**	3,42	1,094
Geopolitical environment	13,4	7,0	**79,6**	4,10	0,967

The study also highlighted that respondents consider health and psychological well-being to be very important. Additionally, it is interesting to note that young people were not inclined to emphasize political freedom or trust in the government and the country's political institutions.

Factor analysis was also applied to analyse the data. Using factor analysis, out of 17 primary items, three life chances indexes were extracted. The created indices meet the requirements of interval scales and normality conditions, allowing the application of various statistical methods (including parametric ones) without significant restrictions. As shown in Table 3, three indices were distinguished: the immediate environment

index, the state political stability index, and the global factors index. These indices essentially reflect different levels of life chances: micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

Table 3. Composite indices of factors affecting youth life chances.

Primary items	Explained variance (%)	L/ITT
Stability of the closest environment scale (index)	63,6	
Material well-being		.792
Satisfying salary		.790
Health conditions in general		.785
Family and good family relations, family life		.781
Work and employment safety		.769
Supportive social environment (good relations with parents, relatives, and friends)		.730
Psychological condition		.683
The number of children		.393
State political stability scale (index)		
Political freedom		.761
Trust in government and political institutions		.740
Political stability and environmental safety		.725
Equal opportunities and non-discrimination		.632
Community life		.620
Climate and geography		.583
Global factors scale (index)		
War in Ukraine		.847
Covid-19 pandemic		.813
Geopolitical environment		.725

The ordinal logistic regression analysis method was applied to the data. The objective of the regression model was to determine the impact of sociodemographic factors on life opportunities. The regression model was applied to both individual variables and constructed indices (scales). The analysis results indicate that men rate their ability to become financially independent lower than women, but this difference is not statistically significant (p-value = 0.080). In terms of age, the younger group (18–24 years old) rates their financial independence prospects significantly higher compared to the older group (30–35 years old).

Regarding education, respondents with secondary education rate their financial independence opportunities significantly lower compared to those with higher education. Statistically significant model results show that younger respondents (18–24 years old) are more likely to view their chances of starting a business favourably, compared to the reference group (30–35 years old). Similarly, respondents with only primary education tend to rate their opportunities to have and raise children more favourably, compared to the reference group of young people with higher education.

Men are more likely to disagree that overall health condition affects their life chances, compared to the reference female group. Additionally, respondents with lower levels of education (primary, basic, secondary,

and vocational education) are also more likely to disagree that general health status has an impact on their life opportunities, compared to those with higher education.

Men are also more likely to disagree that political stability and environmental security influence their life chances, compared to the female group. Similarly, respondents with secondary and vocational education are more likely to disagree that political stability and environmental security affect their life opportunities, compared to those with higher education.

Additionally, men are more likely to disagree that material well-being affects their life chances, compared to women. Respondents with lower levels of education (primary, basic, secondary, and vocational education) are also more likely to disagree that material well-being has an impact on their life opportunities, compared to those with higher education. For further analysis, a multiple linear regression (stepwise method) was applied. The goal of the regression model was to determine the effect of sociodemographic factors on youth life chances. The regression model was constructed for the material life chances index (scale). Tables 4 and 5 present the independent variables that have a statistically significant relationship with the dependent variable.

Although some variables correlate with each other, strong collinearity is not a problem in this model. The variance inflation factor (VIF) values are relatively low (< 5), indicating that the independent variables are not excessively related to one another. This model demonstrates that marital status, education, and age influence how young people evaluate their material life chances. Higher education is associated with a more positive evaluation of material life chances, whereas older youth tend to evaluate their material chances more negatively.

The R^2 values are relatively low (0.021, 0.027, and 0.034), meaning that in this model, the independent variables (marital status, education, age) explain only a very small portion of the variation in the evaluation of life chances.

The results of descriptive statistics revealed that Lithuanian youth rate the safety of their living environment and opportunities for quality leisure time the most favorably. The statement regarding opportunities to start a business received the least agreement ($M = 3.08$) and the highest share of negative evaluations (28.4%). This indicates that starting a business in Lithuania is perceived by young people as either difficult to achieve or risky. Similarly, opportunities to secure suitable housing were also rated rather unfavorably ($M = 3.35$). This may be related to challenges in the housing market, such as high prices, the requirement for an initial down payment, or limited income (see Table 6).

Table 4. Ordinal logistic regression results: "How do you evaluate your life chances?"

Model	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	3.698	0.66		56.409	.000	3.569	3.827					
What is your marital status?	.128	.029	.144	4.426	.000	.071	.185	.144	.144	.144	1.000	1.000
2 (Constant)	3.447	.125		27.658	.000	3.202	3.691					
What is your marital status?	.118	.029	.132	4.041	.000	.061	.175	.144	.132	.131	.978	1.022
What is your highest level of education?	.063	.027	.078	2.371	.018	.011	.116	.097	.078	.077	.978	1.022
3 (Constant)	3.764	.173		21.722	.000	3.424	4.104					
What is your marital status?	.141	.030	.158	4.635	.000	.081	.200	.144	.151	.150	.899	1.113
What is your marital status?	.087	.028	.107	3.098	.002	.032	.142	.097	.101	.100	.877	1.140
What is your highest level of education?	−.017	.006	−.095	−2.629	.009	−.029	−.004	−.007	−.086	−.085	.807	1.239

Table 5. Perceived life chances based on the material factors model summary.

Model	R	R Square	R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.144[a]	.021	.020	.775
2	.163[b]	.027	.024	.773
3	.184[c]	.034	.031	.770

Notes: (a) Predictors: (Constant) What is your marital status?; (b) Predictors: (Constant) What is your marital status? What is your highest level of education?; (c) Predictors: (Constant) What is your marital status? What is your highest level of education? Please specify your exact age.

Table 6. Subjective assessment of life chances (aged 18–35; N = 1209).

	%			*M*	*Sd.*
	Very negatively, negatively	*Neither negatively, nor positively*	*Very positively, positively*		
To work and earn	57,7	31,3	57,7	3,63	1,006
To become financially independent	52,4	31,8	52,4	3,53	1,087
To get suitable accommodation	46,0	32,2	46,0	3,35	1,166
To study	60,3	30,9	60,3	3,71	0,970
To develop professionally (Professional development)	63,8	27,5	63,8	3,77	0,780
To travel	55,9	31,3	55,9	3,61	1,056
To start a business	34,3	37,3	34,3	3,08	1,111
To create a partnership/family	63,3	26,7	63,3	3,78	0,775
To have and raise children	52,0	33,3	52,0	3,54	1,037
To volunteer	51,9	35,9	51,9	3,53	1,022
To take care of your health	60,5	30,5	60,5	3,72	0,974
To maintain a healthy lifestyle	54,5	35,2	54,5	3,72	0,974
To receive quality health services	53,3	33,5	53,3	3,55	1,054
To spend quality leisure time	65,4	27,1	65,4	3,82	0,955
To feel safe in living environment	69,6	24,4	69,6	3,91	0,929

Factor analysis was also applied to the data. From our primary items, two life chances indexes (scales) were extracted. The constructed measurement scale demonstrated a high level of internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.937. The developed indices met the requirements for interval scaling and normality assumptions, allowing for the application of various statistical methods, including parametric tests (see Table 7 for details). In the first set of survey questions, two distinct factors were identified, explaining 61.2% of the data variance (KMO = 0.941, Bartlett's test of sphericity $p < 0.001$). This indicates that the overall correlation matrix significantly differs from zero. The identified indices reflect material well-being, social well-being, and psychological health (see Table 7).

Mean comparison tests (ANOVA) were conducted for the established factors. A statistically significant difference emerged in the first factor (material well-being index/scale) based on gender. The Z-scale difference was 0.21 points, and the t-test confirmed a statistically significant difference between means

Table 7. Life chances composite indexes.

Primary items	Explained variance (%)	L/ITT
Material wellbeing scale (index)	**61,2**	
To work and earn		.734
To become financially independent		.751
To get suitable accommodation		.779
To build a partnership/family		.538
To have and raise children		.612
To develop professionally		.549
To study		.573
To start a business		.708
To travel		.708
Social welfare and psychological health scale (index)		
To take care of your health		.556
To maintain a healthy lifestyle		.815
To receive quality health service		.836
To spend quality leisure time		.741
To feel safe in a living environment		.746
To volunteer		.647

($p < 0.001$). The factor was less pronounced among men, indicating that men are less likely to positively evaluate their life opportunities to secure material well-being.

A statistically significant difference was also observed in the first factor (material well-being) across different age groups. As there was no statistically significant probability that the variances were unequal and the data distribution was normal, the ANOVA test was applied. The analysis indicated a statistically significant probability that at least two group means differed (ANOVA, $p < 0.01$).

The most notable differences were between the 18–24 age group and the 30–35 age group, as well as between the 18–24 and 25–29 age groups. According to the post-hoc LSD test, both mean differences were statistically significant ($p = 0.002$ and $p = 0.004$, respectively). The 18–24 age group's mean differed by 0.225 Z-scale points from the 30–35 age group and by 0.207 Z-scale points from the 25–29 age group. This means that individuals in the 18–24 age group assessed their life chances to achieve material well-being more negatively compared to those in the 25–29 and 30–35 age groups.

3.1. Regional Disparities of Youth Life Chances in Lithuania

To determine whether place of residence (county) affects how young people in Lithuania evaluate their life chances, an ordinal logistic regression was applied. This method is suitable for analyzing an ordinal dependent variable. The model compares the influence of different counties on the probability of selecting a particular response regarding life chances. In the presented analysis, the dependent variable is ordinal (i.e., how young people evaluate their life chances on a 5-point scale from very poor to very good or from

strongly disagree to strongly agree). The independent variable—county of residence—is nominal, as it consists of different categories (various counties).

Not all counties' youth evaluate their employment and earning opportunities equally. The evaluations of youth from Alytus, Marijampole, Siauliai, Telsiai, and Utena counties are statistically significantly lower ($p < 0.05$) compared to the reference Vilnius (capital) county. This means that young people from these counties rate their employment and earning prospects lower than those from Vilnius County. However, there is no statistically significant difference between Kaunas, Klaipeda, and Taurage counties and Vilnius County, meaning that youth in these counties rate their work and earning opportunities similarly to those in Vilnius County.

Additionally, youth from Alytus, Panevezys, Siauliai, and Telsiai counties are more likely to disagree with the statement that job and employment security influence their life opportunities compared to those from Vilnius County. Youth from Alytus, Panevezys, Siauliai, and Telsiai counties also tend to disagree that a salary that meets their needs affects their life opportunities compared to Vilnius county youth.

Similarly, young people from Alytus, Kaunas, Panevezys, Siauliai, and Telsiai counties are more likely to disagree with the statement that overall health status influences their life opportunities compared to youth from Vilnius county. Moreover, youth from Alytus, Panevezys, and Siauliai counties are less likely to agree that trust in the government and political institutions impacts their life opportunities, compared to Vilnius county youth. However, Taurage county youth are statistically significantly more likely to agree that trust in the government and political institutions affects their life opportunities, compared to those in Vilnius.

Compared to Vilnius county youth, those from Kaunas, Klaipeda, Panevezys, Taurage, and Telsiai counties are more likely to agree with the statement that having political connections is important for achieving success in life. Similarly, compared to Vilnius county, youth from Klaipeda, Marijampole, Panevezys, Siauliai, and Taurage counties are more likely to agree that a person's ethnicity is important for achieving success in life.

4. Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the analysis is based on a single cross-sectional survey conducted in 2023, which limits the ability to establish causal relationships or examine changes in youth perceptions over time. Second, the study focuses primarily on subjective evaluations of life chances, which provide important insights into young people's self-perceived opportunities but do not capture objective indicators such as income, employment stability, or housing tenure. As such, the results may not fully reflect structural constraints or disparities. Third, while the regression models reveal statistically significant associations, the relatively low R^2 values suggest that unmeasured factors—potentially psychological, institutional, or cultural—may play a more substantial role in shaping young people's perceptions. Finally, although the survey is nationally representative, regional nuances and qualitative dimensions of youth experience may not be fully captured through the applied quantitative approach.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The research findings demonstrate that youth life changes are significantly influenced by the social and economic contexts, as well as individual and regional factors. The welfare state plays a crucial role in shaping

these opportunities by providing access to education, employment support, social protection, and healthcare. The study findings show that young people prioritize financial security, stable employment, and material well-being, which are directly influenced by welfare state policies. These aspects are directly linked to welfare state policies, which ensure access to education and training, implement labor market policies to address youth employment insecurity, provide social protection such as unemployment benefits and family allowances, and guarantee access to healthcare services.

At the same time, the study reveals that young people are less likely to emphasize political freedom or trust in government institutions. This suggests that while welfare provisions are essential, there is a perceived disconnect between government policies and the realities faced by youth. Strengthening trust in institutions and ensuring that welfare measures are effectively implemented at all levels of governance remains a key challenge.

The EPSR provides a policy framework that aligns with the factors influencing youth life opportunities identified in the study. The EPSR emphasizes equal opportunities, access to the labor market, fair working conditions, and social protection. It promotes education and lifelong learning, active support for employment, secure and adaptable jobs, access to healthcare, and housing assistance. The research findings reinforce the relevance of these principles, particularly in ensuring employment stability, fair wages, education accessibility, and comprehensive healthcare services, including mental health support.

Regional inequalities in youth life opportunities, as highlighted in the study, reflect disparities in employment prospects, financial security, and trust in government institutions. Certain regions demonstrate lower confidence in the impact of job security, adequate salaries, and overall health conditions on life opportunities. These disparities suggest that while the welfare state and the EPSR aim to provide equal opportunities, their implementation varies across regions. Addressing these inequalities requires targeted policies, such as the Youth Guarantee initiatives and EU structural and investment funds, which support education, job creation, and regional economic development.

The findings indicate that young people value immediate environmental factors, such as family, financial well-being, and employment security, over broader political or geopolitical influences. This underscores the importance of strengthening welfare policies that directly affect youth's daily lives, ensuring that support mechanisms reach those who need them most. Policies that align with the EPSR's principles, such as investments in education and vocational training, improved labor market access, enhanced mental health support, and more inclusive decision-making processes, can significantly improve youth life chances.

To create a more inclusive society where young people have equal chances to succeed, it is essential to strengthen welfare policies and fully implement the EPSR. This requires enhancing employment support measures, ensuring accessible and quality education, addressing regional disparities in economic opportunities, and fostering greater trust in political institutions. By aligning welfare state policies with the EPSR's principles, governments can contribute to a more equitable future where all young people, regardless of their background or place of residence, can achieve financial independence and social well-being.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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