YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN SLOVENIA

Abstract

During the independence of Slovenia, youth unemployment rate (YUR) reached two peaks. The first one appeared in 1993 (with 24,2% YUR) as a consequence of economic turmoil following the secession from Yugoslavia. The second peak came about in 2013 (with 23,3% YUR), predominantly as a consequence of a wider international economic crisis. During this time, the ratio between general unemployment rate and YUR has decreased from 1:2,7 to 1:2,2, indicating some improvement for youth in relative terms. Closer analyses suggest that, on the one hand, very high rates of enrolment in (tertiary) education during the past decade prevented the YUR from increasing much more steeply. And, on the other hand, that the increasing majority of work done by young people is framed within the so-called flexible forms of employment, mostly as student work. It can be argued that in 2013, the overall labor market position of young people in Slovenia reached the lowest point within the last 50 years (or more).

1. Introduction

The transition of young people from education to employment has generally been one of the most active areas of Youth studies (Furlong, 2013, 73). During the last decades, this area of studies is becoming more and more difficult and interesting, since the transition takes longer and is much less certain. Some authors (e.g. Furlong and Kelly, 2005) even doubt the justification of the term "transition", since for an increasing portion of the population, stable employment is simply unattainable even in the long term.

Like most European countries, Slovenia has also been facing quite radical changes in the labor market, especially during the last decade. On the one hand, the unemployment rates are at very high levels and still mostly rising, and on the other hand, traditional forms of permanent employment are increasingly being replaced by less secure and more flexible forms of employment. All these changes tend to be even more pronounced among the young. Some authors even speak about the "age-segregation of the labor market" (e.g. Ignjatović and Trbanc, 2009), which characterizes disproportionally high levels of unemployment and temporary employment among young people.

2. METHOD

Most of the data for this study is based on a dataset from the Slovenian Youth Study (2013), conducted by the Center for the Study of post-Yugoslav Societies (CEPYUS). The sample of this study consisted of all citizens of the Republic of Slovenia between 16 and 27 years of age. Target population was first stratified according to 12 statistical regions and 5 settlement types (settlements with a maximum of 2.000 residents, settlements with 2.000 to 10.000 residents, settlements with more than 10.000 residents, Maribor and Ljubljana), which resulted in 35 independent strata. Next, a two-stage sampling method was implemented within each stratum. First, target settlements (primary sampling units) were randomly selected from the complete list of settlements corresponding to particular statistical region and settlement type (stratum) and second, respondents were then chosen from the selected primary sampling units according to the pre-set quota requirements.

Data collection took place between May 29th and July 20th 2013. Data were gathered by means of personal face-to-face interviewing in the field, mostly in households.

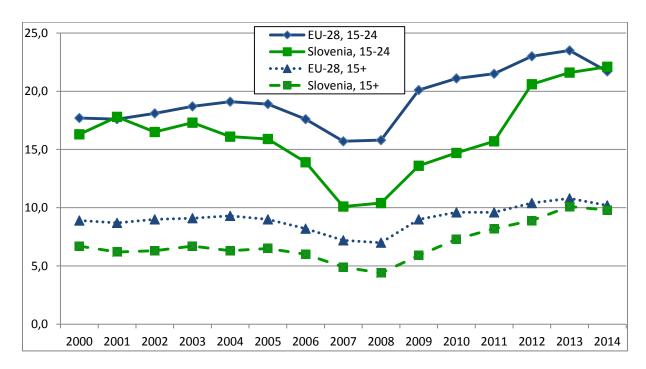
The second source of data for this paper is official databases created by institutions such as the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (SORS), Employment Service of Slovenia (ESS), or Eurostat.

3. BASIC TRENDS IN YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN SLOVENIA AND THE EU

As evident from the below figure, during the period between 2007 and 2012, the youth unemployment rate has risen dramatically both in Slovenia and in the EU. For the most part, it is quite obviously a direct consequence of a general economic crisis in the EU.

Another important finding is that during this period, Slovenian youth has lost its favorable position, compared to the EU-27 average. In fact, according to the latest data as of June 2013, the youth unemployment rate in Slovenia was 24.1 % (European Union Youth Unemployment Rate Chart, n.d.) while the EU-27 recorded 23.2 % (Slovenia Youth Unemployment Rate Chart, n.d.). This can be understood mostly as a direct consequence of recent severe and specific macroeconomic problems in Slovenia, and is also reflected in the converging trends with regard to the adult unemployment rates.

Unemployment rate of the age group 15-24 years and general population, EU-28 and Slovenia, 2000-2014



Source: Eurostat – Population and social conditions/Employment and unemployment (Labor Force Survey).

The third key finding ensuing from the above figure is that the difference in the unemployment rate between young people and the rest of economically active population shows a rising trend. While in Slovenia, the difference between the two groups was 5.9 percentage points in 2007, it rose to 12.7 percentage points in the 2012. Quite a similar trend can be observed with regards to the EU-27. This findings lead to the conclusion that the age gap regarding unemployment has increased during the past ten years. This is in line with the findings of researchers that youth unemployment is generally much more sensitive to economic fluctuations. In a recession, compared to the general rate of unemployment, it rises with markedly greater speed, while during recovery it falls much more quickly (Makeham, 1980; O'Higgins, 2001).

It should be noted, that the age gap in the labor market tends to persist regardless of the general macroeconomic situation. It started to appear as a systematic pattern in Western societies already in the early 1980s, following the recession in the USA and Western Europe (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007, 36-37). In general, Furlong (2013, 77) identifies two basic reasons for the higher unemployment rates among young people. The most important one is that the young are typically in transition from school and therefore seeking jobs, which affects youth unemployment rates especially in times when employers cease recruitment. Another reason is that they are more likely to be in temporary employment and thus more likely to be laid off in times of crises.

Regarding the situation in Slovenia, it should be stressed that the observed age gap still remains within the long term pattern of developed countries, where the unemployment rate of young people is on average two to three times higher compared to the adult unemployment rate. Scarpetta and colleagues (2010) for instance report that in 2008 the youth unemployment in OECD countries was, on average, 2.8 times higher than among adults, which is still a little higher as compared to Slovenia, where it was 2.6 times higher in 2012.

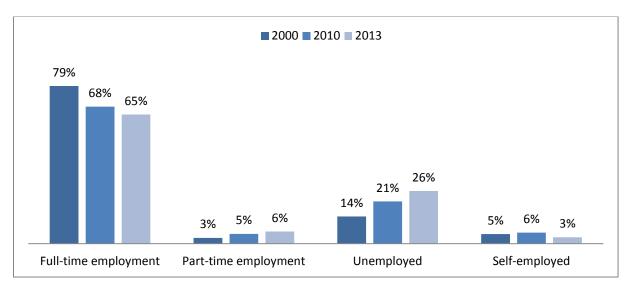
3.1. The subjectively perceived unemployment is substantially higher

It is important to point out here the effect of how unemployment is defined. The Labor Force Survey, on which the above analyzed data are based, defines an unemployed person as someone who, in the week prior to the survey, did not work even one hour for payment (in money or in kind), but who in the past four weeks was actively seeking work and is willing to take work within two weeks.

Unemployed persons also include those that have already found work and will begin that work after the survey (EU labor force survey – methodology, n.d.).

Our survey data enable us to present the youth unemployment rate as it derives from the self-perception of the individual. In line with the established approach, we limited ourselves to just the economically active population, in other words the employed, self-employed (including farmers) and unemployed, where unemployed persons in this analysis are those individuals that perceive themselves to be unemployed.

Employment and unemployment of economically active young people (16–27 years), Youth 2000, Youth 2010 and Youth 2013.



Sources: Youth 2000, Youth 2010 and CEPYUS-FES Slovenian 2013 Youth Study.

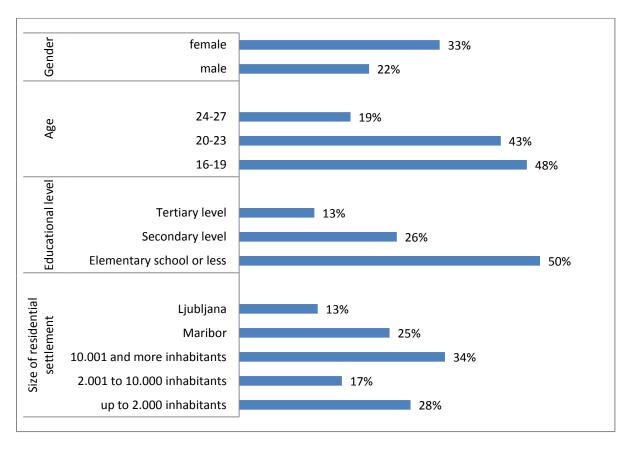
The unemployment rate measured in this way indicates similar trends to those observed using the Eurostat approach: the youth unemployment rate in Slovenia has noticeably increased during the past thirteen years. On the other hand, as one might expect, our "subjective approach" tends to result in considerably higher unemployment rates. If we limit ourselves to the 16–24 age group, which is most comparable with the Eurostat data (15-24 age group), the differences are even greater. According to the methodological approach of self-perceived unemployment, as much as 36.1 % of young people were unemployed, compared to only 24.1 % reported by Eurostat (Slovenia Youth Unemployment Rate Chart, n.d).

So how can we explain this difference? Probably most of it consists of the young people performing some kind of occasional work which they do not consider as a true job and hence consider themselves as unemployed. As described above, these young people don't match the definition of unemployed person according to the Labor Force Survey (LFS) standards. Another group of subjectively, but not officially, unemployed young people might be found in those who simply gave up the active search for employment. Both these groups are likely to consider themselves as unemployed, while the LFS standards consider them as either employed or economically inactive. Of

course, these facts have not passed unnoticed by the research community. As Andy Furlong, one of the leading authors in the field of youth studies puts it; "Unemployment is a term with an internationally agreed definition that is applied in ways that exclude large numbers of workless people" (2013, 74)

Using our subjective approach, we can further observe the presence of unemployment among different groups of young people.





Source: CEPYUS-FES Slovenian 2013 Youth Study.

The gender gap with regards to the youth unemployment is relatively big and has increased substantially since the year 2000, when there were virtually no differences between young men and women. In 2010, the unemployment rate for women was by 12 percentage points higher as compared to men (Klanjšek and Lavrič, 2011, 153) and this difference has remained about the same in 2013.

Not surprisingly, we can also observe sharp differences in relation to age, whereas younger age groups find it more difficult to avoid unemployment. This is undoubtedly partially connected to

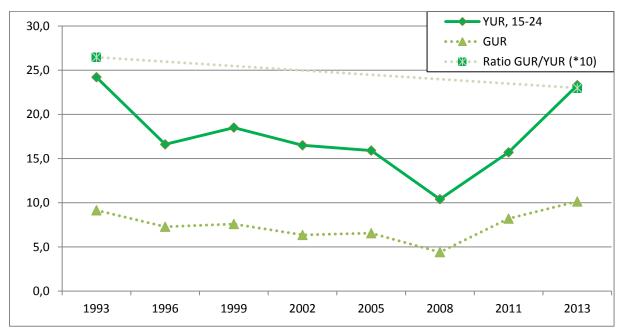
higher attained education by older age groups. Indeed, the differences in unemployment are the most salient in relation to the achieved educational level, with as much as 50 % of unemployed among those with primary level and only 13 % among those with a tertiary level degree. Quite similar patterns in relation to age and education were found in a similar youth study in Croatia (Ilišin et al., 2012, 11). The only (surprising) exception is relatively low unemployment rate among the less educated young (those with primary school as the highest level of attained education).

Interesting differences appear also with regards to the size of residential settlement. The lowest youth unemployment rate was, not surprisingly, found in Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia, while middle-sized towns (from 10.000 to 50.000 inhabitants) with more than a third of economically active young people considering themselves as unemployed.

3.2 Long-term trends in youth unemployment in slovenia

Things become even more interesting if we dig further into the past – up to 1993, when LFS was first applied in Slovenia.





YUR - Youth unemployment rate

GUR - General unemployment rate

We can see that soon after the exit from the SFRY, Slovenia was in an even slightly worse position as to the youth unemployment rate. From this chart one could conclude, that the transition in fact brought about the reduction of youth unemployment rate up until 2008. And that we are now

perhaps witnessing just a temporary turn-around of otherwise clear trend of decline in youth unemployment.

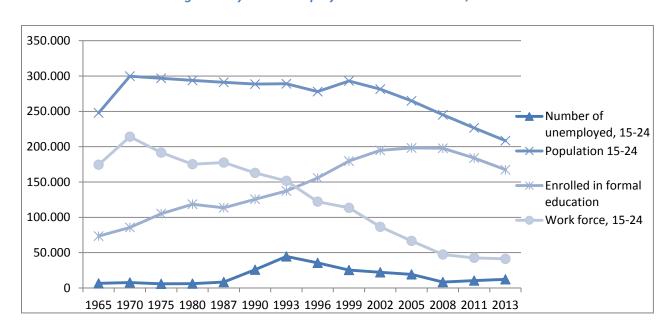
On the other hand, three years appear as a kind of outliers in the chart. And these outliers can quite easily be explained by specific contextual factors:

- In 1993 Slovenia was going through very serious economic turmoil because of the loss of Yugoslav markets and the unsatisfied need to restructure the economy for the European markets.
- 2. In 2008 SLO economy was full of very cheap money which came to Slovenia after introducing the Euro in 2007. The low (youth) unemployment rate was therefore mainly a result of a overheated economy which was unsustainable in a longer term perspective (see: Tajnikar and Došenovič, 2014).
- 3. And in 2013 we are witnessing logical consequence of deeper structural and methodological issues, especially with regards to high school enrollment rate and high proportion of student work since the beginning of 200's.

If we disregard the three mentioned and explained outliers, we can see that the youth unemployment rate in Slovenia was quite stable, at the level between 15 % and 20 %, throughout the observed 20 years. The importance of this idea will become clearer, if we put data on youth unemployment in an even more long-term perspective.

In order to do that, we need to turn to the registered unemployment, for which data exist further into the past.

Basic data related to the registered youth unemployment rate in Slovenia, 1965-2014.



Source: SORS (Statistical office of the Republic of Slovenia) and ESS (Employment Service of Slovenia)

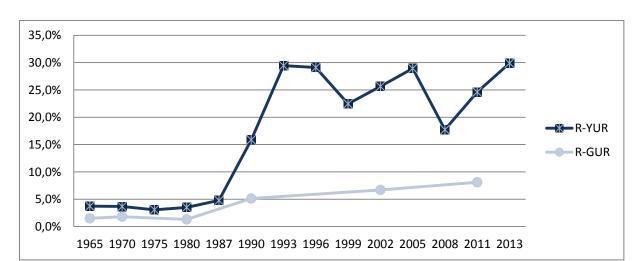
If we look at the number of the unemployed youth since 1970, we can clearly see that it was constantly very low, below 9.000, until 1990's. Immediately after the break-up of Yugoslavia, however, the number of the unemployed youth rose sharply and reached record of 45.000 in 1993.

After that, their number was constantly declining. Based on that curve alone, one could easily conclude that the secession from Yugoslavia took its economic toll in the early 1990's, and that things are getting better ever since.

However, during this period, there were at least two major shifts going on, that need to be accounted for: Firstly, the number of young people was steadily decreasing and fell by more than 30 % during the observed period. That of course means that the share of the unemployed youth in all youth was correspondingly increasing. And secondly, school enrollment of youth increased dramatically, from 85.000 to almost 200.000 in 2008.

Both of these trends contributed to a sharp decline in youth work force, from more than 200.000 in 1970 to less than 50.000 in 2013. And because unemployment rate is computed as the share of unemployed persons in the entire work force, this lead to an increase in the youth unemployment rate despite the fact that the number of unemployed youth was decreasing.

On the basis of the above numbers, we can compute the registered unemployment rate for the period from 1970 to 2013.



Registered Youth (YUR) and General (GUR) unemployment rate

Source: SORS (Statistical office of the Republic of Slovenia) and ESS (Employment Service of Slovenia)

From the above figure, it is quite obvious that we are dealing with two typical situations. The first is the one before 1990's, when youth unemployment rate was between 3 % and 5 %. The second

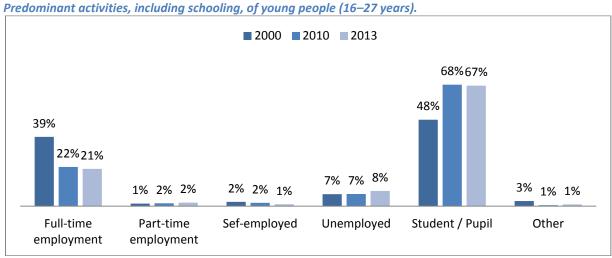
situation represents the period of transition to, and existence in the EU, when youth unemployment rate was roughly between 20 and 30%.

The second important observation is that the ratio between YUR and GUR also increased substantially; from about 1:2 in 1970 to about 1:3 1990 and it remained at approximately the same level up until 2013.

Based on the presented numbers, three simple conclusions can be made. Firstly, youth unemployment rate in the situation of 'peripheral European capitalism' is constantly about 6-times higher than it was in the former Yugoslavia. Secondly, the new reality has disproportionally increased youth unemployment, as compared to unemployment of other segments of the workforce. And finally, the position of youth on the labour market appears to be worse in 2013 than in any point in time within the observed period.

3.3. HAS THE SAFE HAVEN OF FORMAL EDUCATION REACHED ITS LIMITS?

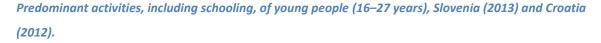
One of the reasons for the rising youth unemployment rate can be sought in the possible declining school enrolment rate. Namely, as Furlong (2013, 78) notes, in some European countries the youth unemployment rate did not increase sharply mainly because the increased educational participation had removed a large part of population from the labor market. According to data presented in Youth 2010 study, Slovenia was in 2008 the country with the highest school enrolment rate in the EU and at the same time managed to keep the youth unemployment rate at relatively low levels (see Flere and Tavčar, 2011; Klanjšek and Lavrič, 2011). Further, one of the leading researchers of youth in Slovenia, Metka Kuhar (2009), also noted that the very inclusive education system in Slovenia "serves mainly as a kind of incubator which enables people to delay their entry onto the labor market" (p. 29).

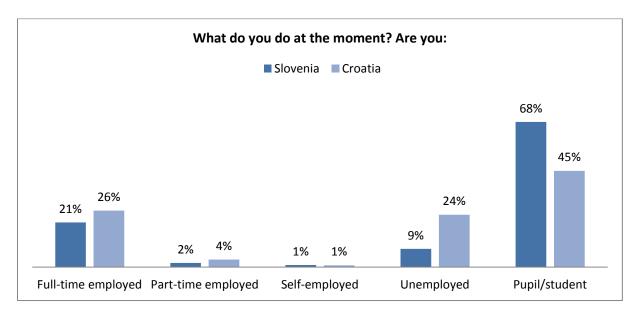


Source: CEPYUS-FES Slovenian 2013 Youth Study.

The above figure reveals that the trend of rising school enrolment and the consequent falling share of economically active youth, which took place in the decade between 2000 and 2010, almost reversed in the period between 2010 and 2013. Thus we can conclude that the stabilization of the education enrolment rate might in fact be one of the important factors of the increasing unemployment rate in a sense that the high enrolment in education of Slovenian youth during the past decade probably prevented the youth unemployment rates from increasing even more.

This conclusion can also be supported by the comparison between youth in Slovenia and Youth in Croatia, where a similar research took place in 2012.



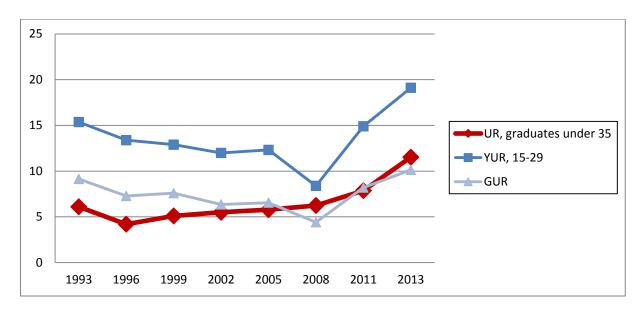


Note: In order to make a comparison more clear, the category "other" was excluded from both samples. Sources: CEPYUS-FES Slovenian 2013 Youth Study and IDIZ-FES Croatian 2012 Youth Study.

As discernible from the above figure, there is a huge difference in favor of Slovenia with regards to the enrolment in formal education. Partially, this results in higher shares of employed youth in Croatia (31 % in Croatia as opposed to only 24 % in Slovenia), but for the most part this difference translates itself into much higher unemployment among Croatian youth.

Thus, the thesis of high levels of enrolment in education as a buffer against unemployment seems quite convincing. At first glance it seems that this macro-economic buffer has reached its limits in Slovenia, partially due to the limited possibilities of financing such high number of students by the

state, and partially because of the increasing saturation of the labor market with tertiary degree graduates (see: Lavrič, 2012).



Unemployment rates of young (15-34) graduates at tertiary level

Source: SORS (Statistical office of the Republic of Slovenia)

This saturation can be clearly seen from the above chart. Interestingly, in 2013 young (15-34) graduates had already higher unemployment rate as compared to the general population. To put it in a different way; in Slovenia, it seems worse to be young and educated, than to be something other than that.

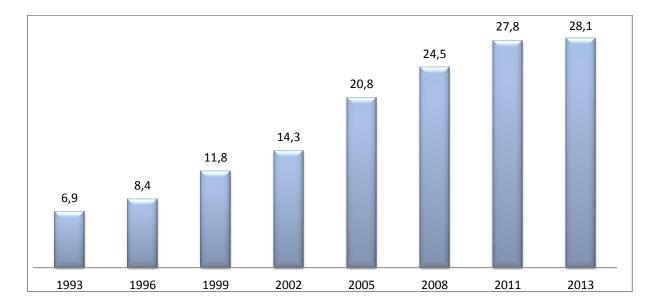
This trend might be considered as an indication, that the buffer of educational expansion as an instrument of controlling the youth unemployment, has been exhausted and Slovenia is now beginning to pay the 'unemployment debt', which was created through disproportional educational expansion.

4. Youth as the flexible workforce

4.1. The rise of precarity

Another important aspect of labor market situation of youth is their security. When/if young people get jobs, what are these jobs like? In this regards, Slovenia holds the first position in the EU in terms

of the share of temporary employments in all employments of young people. The trend of flexibilization of youth workforce has in fact been going on since the beginning of transition.



Highly flexible forms of employment* as percentage of the total number of employees, 15-29.

From the above figure we can see that share of highly flexible forms of employment, like student work; work on copyright contract, work-contract, public works, or no contract, has been rising quite continuously and fast. It was more than 4-times higher in 2013, than in 1993.

Thais of course means, that the overall labor market situation of young people in Slovenia was substantially worse in 2013, than in 1993, despite the already mentioned fact that the youth unemployment rate was about equal in both of these points in time.

The crucial form of flexible youth employment, especially in Slovenia, is student labor. Notably, the Labor force survey considers young people performing student work as employed persons. According to our data, young people in average also devote a substantial amount of time to their student work. In average, student work amounts to 26,3 hours per week, which is more than half of the average number of working hours per week (41,5) when the formally employed youth is considered. The importance of student work becomes even more apparent, if we compute the total number of working hours per week for each of the relevant groups.

^{*} Student work, copyright contract, work-contract, public works, no contract Source: SORS (Statistical office of the Republic of Slovenia), LFS data.

Youth (16-27) by type of employment and by working hours per week.

Average number of working hours	Number of respondents	Sum of working hours	Percent of respondents	Percent of working hours
43	107	4585	20%	28%
31	97	3017	18%	19%
26	313	8232	60%	51%
42	9	375	2%	2%
 32	526	16209	100,0%	100,0%

Note: * *Including farmers.*

Source: CEPYUS-FES Slovenian 2013 Youth Study.

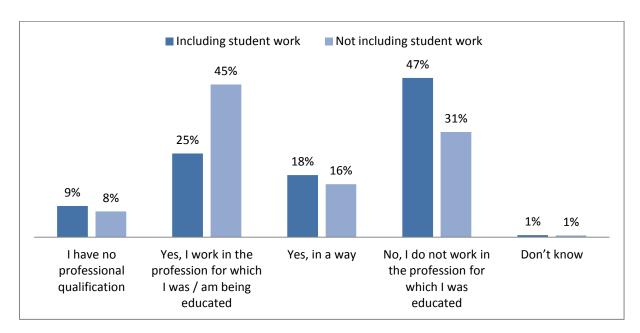
Based on the above calculation we can safely claim that student work is by far most important form of youth's participation in the labor market. Almost 60 % of young people who work use this form of employment and they account for more than half of all the (taxed) work done by youth in Slovenia.

The relative and increasing importance of student work in Slovenia has been, of course, detected and commented by many researchers in Slovenia. Perhaps most recently by Klanjšek and Lavrič (2011), who noted that student labor played an increasingly important role in the lives of young people in Slovenia during the period between 2000 and 2010 (p. 161). For the purpose of this study, we can directly compare the current situation with the situation in 2007, when, according to the Eurostudent SI 2007 survey, student work was performed by 65 % of students at tertiary level in Slovenia (Eurostudent, 2007). According to our data, the current number is about 63 %, which indicates that, along with the enrolment in education, the student labor also reached its peak and began a gradual decline. One of the reasons for this decline can be found in the higher taxation of the student labor since June 2012, as part of the so-called austerity measures. Another one is the reduced demand for any kind of work as a direct consequence of the current economic crises.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, student work remains by far most important form of youth employment. Together with the other two types (part-time and self-employment), the flexible forms employment represents 82 % of officially recognized work done by young people. In other words, only 28 % of working hours by Slovenian youth is done within regular full-time employment.

4.2 Taking a job outside the area of one's education

Another dimension of flexibility of the workforce can be sought in its preparedness and ability to work in different kinds of jobs.



Horizontal skills mismatch among Slovenian Youth.

Source: CEPYUS-FES Slovenian 2013 Youth Study.

According to the data in the above figure, Slovenian youth appears to be a quite flexible workforce, especially, if we also consider as employed those who are performing student work. In this case, only 25 % of the employed young people work within their profession. But even if we exclude the student working group, we can conclude that the majority of young people in Slovenia perform jobs that they have not been directly educated for.

In this dimension of work flexibility we can observe an even more striking gender gap. Whereas a third of working men works within the profession for which they were (or are being) educated, there is only 16 % of such working women. This difference is of course largely related to women being more involved in student work. But even if student work is not included, the ratio remains relatively high, at 50:37 in favor of men.

The horizontal skills mismatch is somewhat less striking with regards to the graduates at tertiary educational level, among which, if we include also the student work, 44 % works in the profession they have studied for.

Specifically for graduates, flexibility can be observed also as preparedness to take on a job that does not require tertiary education. Within Slovenian sample about 35 % of graduates perform jobs for which they are overeducated. Overall, 42 % of Slovenian young graduates work within their occupation (studied for) profession and at the same time doing a job that requires their level of education or higher. On the other extreme we find 21 % of graduates working in jobs outside their profession and without requirements for their achieved level of education.

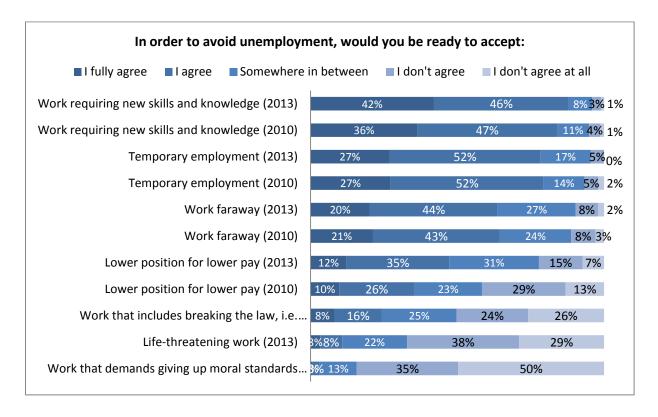
It should be noted that, again, the education-employment match is much better, if we exclude the graduates performing student work. In this case we find 58 % of the employed graduates working within their profession and 27 % of them performing jobs for which they are overeducated.

To sum up: we can conclude that, at least if student work is included in the analysis, the majority of the employed young people in Slovenia, including graduates, works outside professional boundaries of their education, which points to a relatively high degree of flexibility of young workforce.

4.3. What would young people do to get a job?

Another way to approach the flexibility of workforce is to measure respondents' declared standpoints and intentions. In the next figure, the frequency distributions for several such items are presented. In cases where it was possible, the comparisons are made to the situation in 2010, as measured within the Youth 2010 study.

Willingness of young people (16-27 years) to take action to reduce the risk of unemployment, Youth 2010 and Youth 2013.



Sources: Youth 2010 and CEPYUS-FES Slovenian 2013 Youth Study.

The overwhelming majority (88 %) of young people declare to be prepared to learn new skills and knowledge, which is considerably more compared to the 2010 study (84 %). The majority of young people would also be prepared to take temporary job (78 %) and to drive faraway (79 %). While the distribution of these two items hasn't changed since 2010, young people today express greater preparedness to take lower positioned jobs with lower pay (47 % in 2013, compared to 35 % in 2010).

In order to statistically validate the above comparison further, we have also combined all the mentioned four items into one variable¹. The average value of this variable amounted to 3.70 in the 2010 sample and to 3.83 in 2013 sample. The results of the T-test confirmed that the differences between the two samples are statistically significant (p<0.01). Thus, we can conclude that the declared willingness of young people to undertake different actions in order to reduce the risk of unemployment has increased in the period between 2010 and 2013. It should be added, that the study Youth 2010 revealed, that this preparedness had been increasing at least from 2005 (Klanjšek and Lavrič, 2011, 159).

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¹ Cronbach alphas amounted to 0,674 in the 2010 sample and to 0,671in 2013 sample. The combined variable was computed by averaging the values of the four items for each statistical unit.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the presented analyses, four basic conclusions can be made. Firstly, youth unemployment rate of Slovenia in the situation of 'peripheral European capitalism' is constantly about 6-times higher than it was in the former Yugoslavia.

Secondly, the new reality has also disproportionally increased youth unemployment, as compared to unemployment of other segments of the workforce.

Thirdly, the very high rates of enrolment in education during the past decade prevented the youth unemployment rates from increasing even more.

Fourthly, twenty years of transition from socialist to capitalist economic system were marked by a constant and sharp rise in relative share of highly flexible forms of employment. In 2013, the share of such employments was more than 4-times higher than it was twenty years before. Further, the declared flexibility of youth on the labor market appears to have been increasing for at least last several few years.

All this leads to the final assessment that the current position of youth on the labor market is without a doubt much worse than it was at any point in time within the past 50 or more years in the history of Slovenia.

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