

**Abstract ESPAnet NL-VL Farwell Conference of Prof. Dr. Trudie Knijn  
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**Stream**

C.2 Capabilities, social policy and social work.

**Title**

The Capability Approach and Disadvantaged Youth participating in a Welfare-to-Work Program: a Mixed-Methods Study

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**Abstract (max. 500 words)**

**Purpose**

The youth unemployment rate among immigrants remains high despite economic recovery and a record-high number of vacancies. According to the Capability Approach, unemployed youth may lack capabilities or abilities that prevent them from gaining and maintaining employment, including: resources, the knowledge to use these, have appropriate services available, and the ability or motivation to act. To improve the capabilities of young, unemployed people, some local governments choose to make receiving social assistance contingent on participating in activation. This study investigates a welfare-to-work program aimed at the development of social and workers' skills, and had a duration of six months. The program is focused on progress rather than hard outcomes, and addresses the wider issues that may be acting as barriers to employment. The central research question is: "how does the program enhance the capabilities of young, unemployed people?".

**Design**

We conducted a mixed-methods, longitudinal study among 20 young people (18-27 years old). We included a three months follow-up to test whether the program was effective in improving the labor market position of these youth. Questionnaires, observations and interviews with both the youth as well as the staff were conducted to improve the reliability and validity of the results.

## **Results**

Data-analysis is ongoing. Preliminary results indicate that personal barriers to employment need to be addressed prior to starting the job-search process. A considerable portion of the youth are unaware of what they value and want to achieve in life. They can also be unaware of the range of choices available to them. Identifying and developing positive capabilities is hard for youth who are used to (academic) failure, and have a negative self-image. Motivation remains the key to change, but is hard to affect. Youth showed significant signs of resilience in the face of adversity. A considerable number of youth dropped-out from the program, indicating that the program might be inappropriate for them.

## **Limitations**

Some limitations should be noted. First, our sample was relatively small. Moreover, we are unable to conclude whether the results are due to the intervention, participants (selection effect), or both, because of the lack of a control group.

## **Implications**

Based on our findings, we recommend that any program should pay attention to potential barriers to employment and address them accordingly. We suggest to invest more in matching youth to available services in order to prevent discouragement and further disengagement and de-activation.

## **Originality**

To our knowledge, this study is one of the first to apply a longitudinal design and a multi-informant approach to the context of young people's integration into the labor market.