

A scoping review of research on coordinated pathways towards employment for youth in vulnerable life situations

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Abstract

For youth in vulnerable life situations, pathways to employment can be challenging, suggesting the need for coordinated services. The aim of this review is to explore the existing research on coordinated services for youth in vulnerable life situations. Considering the heterogenous nature of the literature, we adopted a scoping review methodology. We selected works from a base of 92 papers on youth, coordinated services, and pathways to work that were published in English during the period of 1990 to 2018. Additionally, to identify research streams, we performed a bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer to create network maps based on shared terms in the papers' titles and abstracts. The synthesised findings show two streams of research that we refer to by the following narrative titles: (1) 'Enabling transition to adulthood for youth with disabilities or severe health problems', and (2) 'Preventing the social exclusion of youth at risk'. The first stream seems to represent a more established area(s) of research, while the second stream appears to be more fragmented. The life situations of the youth in both streams, however, overlap, indicating possibilities for knowledge exchange, such as social workers engaging in policy practices and advancing efforts towards enacting system changes.

Keywords: Youth in vulnerable life situations, interagency collaboration, pathways to employment, scoping review

Introduction

Youth are especially vulnerable to unemployment in contemporary labour markets (Eichhorst & Rinne, 2018; Liang et al., 2017; O'Reilly et al., 2015), particularly when facing multiple intersecting problems, such as severe disabilities, homelessness or mental health problems in combination with substance use disorder. Enabling employment for youth in such vulnerable life situations encompasses the management of problems beyond just joblessness. Multiple welfare sectors and services are needed in the individualised and personalised work inclusion process, in addition to employment, social, educational, health, and rehabilitation services (Heidenreich & Aurich-Berheide, 2014, p. S7). Therefore, there is a need for coordinated services and interagency collaboration.

In this paper, we apply the concept of a 'vulnerable life situation' (Virokannas et al., 2020) and focus particularly on disadvantages that cannot be resolved by one sector or service alone. Virokannas et al.'s (2020) approach to vulnerability draws attention to the social processes generating vulnerability, including society and its institutions, and recognises vulnerability as temporal, situational, and relational (Virokannas et al., 2020, p. 336). As highlighted, the role of welfare institutions is to reduce vulnerability; however, and importantly, welfare institutions may also produce it. Many vulnerable life situations involve disadvantages that are the responsibilities of different welfare services and sectors to resolve. Interagency coordination and service integration may therefore be crucial in reducing vulnerability. It is thus important to map out how this topic has been addressed in existing research.

Social work has a long tradition of dealing holistically with the life challenges of disadvantaged people. The global definition of social work emphasises an increasingly collective approach to solving individual problems through interventions that incorporate multiple system levels and inter-sectorial and interprofessional collaborations (IFSW, 2014; Ornellas et al., 2018, pp. 226-227). Hence, collaborative approaches are part of the social

work mandate, as they allow for the whole life situations of youth in vulnerable life situations to be addressed with the aim of enhancing personal wellbeing.

The necessity of coordinated services and interagency collaboration has been recognised for a while in the health policy arena and is also addressed in the areas of education and social policy (Eurofound, 2012a, 2016; Goodwin et al., 2017; IFSW, 2014; Kamp, 2018; OECD, 2015; Ornellas et al., 2018). A lot of research efforts in social policy have focused on structural changes, youth labour markets, institutional features, benefits, activation, and policy initiatives related to youth unemployment (e.g., Eichhorst & Rinne, 2018; Kluve et al., 2017; Mawn et al., 2017; O'Reilly et al., 2015). However, the research on collaborative approaches to employment for youth in vulnerable life situations is limited and of a heterogenous nature.

Collaboration and coordination are ambiguous concepts associated with a broad range of efforts. This variation poses a challenge to the evaluation of research and the accumulation of research-based knowledge. Earlier literature reviews on collaborative approaches have shown a tendency to focus on process issues, with less emphasis on outcome success (Dowling et al., 2004; Winters et al., 2016). In addition, this research covers multiple disciplinary fields, and there is no consensus regarding research agendas, key questions, or designs. The research approaches vary according to policy area (e.g., ALMP), sector (e.g., education), or the target group of different disciplines or services (e.g., disabled youth or those in contact with the child welfare systems).

The aim of this review is to analyse research on coordinated approaches and interagency collaboration that enable pathways to work for youth in vulnerable life situations. More specifically, and in line with the scoping review methodology, the objective is to examine the extent, range, and nature of the existing research (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005, p. 21), or in other words, to systematise the research rather than the study's findings. In the next sections, we outline the scoping review method applied, describe the data selection and analysis, and

then provide an overview of the material and the characteristics in a findings section. We then synthesise the findings and outline two research streams and two meta-narratives based on the identified characteristics and the bibliometric analysis. We end the paper by discussing the findings with an emphasis on their implications for social work.

Method

In narrowly planned reviews, the opportunity to explore heterogeneous literature may be limited (Tranfield et al., 2003, p. 212). We therefore conducted a scoping review, allowing for a broader approach to the systematic research review (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). This approach is a preferred review method when the research questions are broadly defined, and when the aim is to examine the extent, range, and nature of research activity and identify knowledge gaps (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005, p. 21). Adding to this, our review is informed by the meta-narrative synthesis approach, which is considered appropriate when there is no definite agreed-upon process as to how to 'put together' heterogeneous bodies of literature (Greenhalgh et al., 2005, p. 429; Tranfield et al., 2003). This interpretative approach means that the process unavoidably involves subjective choices by the researchers to pick out 'story threads'. The challenge here involves mapping the diversity and conveying the complexity of how various research approaches contribute to improving our understanding of a problem (Greenhalgh et al., 2005, p. 427).

Data selection

The selected papers are based on a former explorative literature review by Authors (2020). Our search strategy was to identify (a) all relevant concepts connected to (or synonymous with) collaboration/coordinated services (e.g., 'integrated services', 'interagency collaboration', and 'interdisciplinary collaboration') and (b) keywords associated with employment services for disadvantaged groups (e.g., 'employment', 'work inclusion', and

‘labour market inclusion’; cf. Table 1, Supplementary file). We narrowed our search to peer-reviewed articles published in English during the period of 1990–2018¹ that were found through Academic Search Premiere (2,122 publications), SocINDEX (1,059), Scopus (1,658), and the Web of Science Core Collection (1,570), with a subsequent search in MEDLINE (23). In total, the search yielded 6,432 articles, from which we eliminated approximately 2,100 duplicates.

Based on a reading of the publication titles, abstracts, and keywords, we excluded texts that were irrelevant as well as non-English texts. We continued by excluding texts published in outlets with no impact factor in Journal Citation Reports 2018² or others that were not registered in the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). For the first review (Authors 2020), only papers that addressed *both* coordinated services and employment services were included. In the current review, all studies focusing on youth were included, irrespective of whether they focused on both coordinated and employment services, resulting in 92 records. For detailed information about the steps of the literature search, see Figure 1 (Supplementary file).

In the first step of this review, we divided the 92 youth-focused papers between the four authors of this article, who then read them in full. Because our primary interest was coordinated approaches and interagency collaboration, we excluded papers that only focused on employment, those in which coordinated services were only a backdrop, and those that mostly focused on giving grounds for the need for coordinated services. The final selection included 48 full-text articles for further analysis (cf. Figure 1, Supplementary file).

A limitation is that the selected papers were drawn from a former literature review not designed to study research about youth in particular. We therefore cannot confirm whether the

¹ “Peer-reviewed articles” was an optional limiter only in Academic Search Premiere and SocINDEX.

² <https://www.annualreviews.org/about/impact-factors>

keywords may have influenced the selection of papers about youth. Our search strategy was nonetheless broad, with no age limiters. Our review material should therefore broadly cover the relevant literature on coordinated approaches to employment, including works focusing on youth.

Analysis

In the next step, we applied a joint analytical framework and collected standard information on all the included papers (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005, p. 26). The background information was coded in a data charting form using Excel. We coded the aims of the studies, what they characterised as vulnerable life situations and disadvantages of the youths (e.g., youth at risk of NEET and young adults with disabilities), information on the national context, and the concept or term of the service integration in use.

Because we were particularly interested in service integration, we wanted to code the papers according to a model of integrated services. The conceptual models of integrated services vary both within and across scholarly disciplines and research traditions (Fisher & Elnitsky, 2012; Goodwin et al., 2017). Here, we chose Valentijn et al.'s (2013) model, which is the Rainbow Model of Integrated Care (RMIC). The model conceptualises the inter-relationship between different dimensions of integrated care (Goodwin et al., 2017, p. 19) and distinguishes between four dimensions or *types* of integration—system, organisational, professional and clinical integration—that play interconnected roles across the macro, meso and micro levels.

Second, we performed a bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer to visualise the co-occurrence of terms in network maps based on titles and abstracts (Van Eck & Waltman, 2011, p. 1). This analysis was used to explore and guide the interpretation of distinct research streams or knowledge communities within our material. We produced a network map based

on binary counting (cf. Figure 2, Supplementary file). Binary counting means that only the presence or the absence of a term in a paper matter. Out of 1,287 terms, 63 terms met the threshold of a minimum of five occurrences in the map. The top 60% most relevant terms (38 terms) were selected based on a relevance score. Based on the mapping of terms, we identified different sets of interconnected key terms, which are indicators of different streams of research.

In line with the scoping review method, we did not weigh the quality of the evidence; rather, we aimed at providing a narrative account of the existing research (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005, p. 27).

Findings

Most of the included papers were from the Anglosphere welfare context; these consisted of 24 papers from the United States (US), nine from the United Kingdom (UK), eight from Australia, and four from Canada. Beyond the Anglosphere welfare context, one paper focused only on Germany (ID 41), one paper on Germany and Europe (ID 40, Table 2, Supplementary file), and one on European Union (EU) member states (ID 39).

We wanted to identify the character of the included papers. A large group of 22 papers examined, discussed, or provided a detailed outline of a programme/intervention or partnership. We labelled this category 'case studies' (cf. Table 2, Supplementary file). In the category labelled 'evaluation/outcome studies', we included empirical studies with a focus on results and outcomes in a broad sense. This category included eleven papers. Furthermore, eight papers were encompassed in a 'discussion paper' category, which included papers discussing or analysing policy, interventions, methods, or dimensions related to our theme. These papers were not primarily empirical studies or descriptions, even though they may have

drawn on some form of empirical data. The smallest category included seven empirical papers on involved parties' perceptions/experiences with a programme or intervention.

Concept of coordinated services

The concept of coordinated services varies across scholarly disciplines and research traditions. In our review, we found that the term 'partnership' was often used. Specifically, this term was often used in papers about relationships that involved a diverse set of actors and stakeholders, often outside public sectors or agencies, such as businesses (e.g., ID 4, ID 7, ID17, and ID 45; c.f. Table 2, Supplementary), parents/families (e.g., ID 3, ID 28, ID 7, ID 17, and ID 19), not-for-profit and private sectors (e.g., ID 38, ID 40, and ID 23), and community networks (e.g., ID 43). Few papers, with some exceptions (e.g., ID 35), used concepts in a theoretically informed manner or as a part of a broader conceptual framework. Interagency collaborations, partnerships, or work were used in some papers (e.g., ID 31, ID 9, ID 35, ID 12, and ID 23), and some also used a combination of terms (e.g., ID 27, ID 35, and ID 38). A few papers used terms reflecting the focal actors involved, such as 'community college partnership' (ID 1), 'school-college collaboration' (ID 30), or 'community conversations' (e.g., ID 5, ID 10, and ID 20; c.f. Table 2, Supplementary file).

Dimensions of coordinated services

With regards to the RMIC advanced by Valentijn et al. (2013), we found that several papers focused on more than one dimension. While 26 papers addressed only one dimension, 14 addressed two, and only a few concentrated on three or more dimensions (cf. Table 2, Supplementary file). Most of the studies addressed the organisational dimension, or, in other words, the type of inter-organisational relationship, such as contracting, strategic alliances, or knowledge networks (Valentijn et al., 2013, p. 6). As many as 34 of the papers addressed this dimension. Only six of the papers concentrated on the professional dimension (i.e., interprofessional partnerships based on shared competences, roles, and responsibilities;

Valentijn et al., 2013, p. 7). Furthermore, 18 papers were aimed at the system level; according to the framework of Valentijn et al. (2013), this level refers to the alignment of policies, rules, and regulations. Also, 14 papers addressed the clinical type of service integration and its effect on coherence in the delivery of services to individual youth.

We found that the dimensions of service integration were addressed in our material in varying ways. A few examples may serve to illustrate this. One is a qualitative study on perceived successful school experiences for students with cerebral palsy in Australia (ID 3) that addresses success factors along the micro- and meso-levels. In this study, the organisational dimension involved collaborative partnerships between families, schools, and outside organisations. The professional dimension involved allied health practitioners as part of home and school teams where the health practitioners were familiar with each other's skills. The micro level involved knowledge of the child, the provision of service from early in the child's life, and support across the school years (i.e., continuity of services). Another example is a US study, categorised as an evaluation (cf. Table 2, Supplementary file), which explored the effect of interagency collaboration on vocational rehabilitation outcomes for youth with disabilities (ID 9). This study addressed the organisational dimension (i.e., service system collaboration) as well as the professional dimension in terms of collaboration among community-level transition team members. Furthermore, in a case study from Canada (ID 22), the clinical dimension involved the individualised partnership developed between a young man with mental illness and the professional staff in a supported employment programme. Lastly, a discussion paper that examined the educational and employment environment facing young Australians in regional communities, offering policy recommendations to moderate welfare dependency (ID 45), is an example of a paper addressing the system dimension.

Youth in vulnerable life situations

The enablement of employment for youth in vulnerable life situations can be researched in many ways depending on the disciplinary area and associated research agendas. We assumed, therefore, that the varying approaches would emphasise different features relating to the youth's disadvantages and life situations. We found that the literature framed youth in vulnerable life situations based on different characteristics that we grouped into four often overlapping groups: youth with severe illnesses or disabilities, youth leaving care, NEETs, and a more heterogeneous group of 'at-risk youth'. While many young people may theoretically belong to more than one of these groups, the framings of their disadvantages signal the researchers' different points of attention.

Youth with severe illnesses or disabilities included youth with cerebral palsy (CP), autism spectrum disorders (ASD), intellectual or developmental disabilities (I/DD), learning disabilities, and serious mental health conditions (e.g., ID 1, ID 3, ID 6, and ID 11; Table 2, Supplementary file). According to the papers, these youth face multiple barriers and are highly dependent on comprehensive and long-lasting access to related services; however, they often experience service silos rather than collaboration. As a group, they share a high risk of poor progress in the transition to adulthood (ID 7), including experiences of unemployment, underemployment, a lack of competitive employment (rather than sheltered), and a lack of continued education. Beyond barriers to employment, they face risks of economic dependence, low social participation in mainstream society, dependent living, and low quality of life.

Youth leaving state-funded out-of-home care lack financial, practical, and emotional support from their families and must handle key dimensions of the transition process to independent living by themselves (e.g., ID 27 and ID 43). Although youth leaving care constitute a

heterogeneous group, many, particularly the ‘strugglers’, are, according to the papers, in especially vulnerable life situations and may face disadvantages related to health and social and educational problems, including homelessness and juvenile crime. They also face the risk of being socially excluded from participation in many arenas of society (ID 43, pp. 69–71).

Youth not in education, employment, or training is a group commonly referred to by the acronym ‘NEET’ in the policy discourse (Eurofound, 2016). According to the papers in our review, youth in danger of negative post-school destinations and becoming NEET include recent school-leavers facing multiple barriers such as disabilities, learning disabilities, youth leaving state-funded out-of-home care (e.g., ID 32, ID 33, and ID 47), and homeless youth (ID 40).

The heterogeneous category of various *at-risk youth* included ‘cross-over youth’, referring to youth who are involved in both the childcare and juvenile justice systems and who are vulnerable to future engagement with the criminal justice system. The assumption, according to the papers, was that providing the right services (e.g., housing, behavioural health, and social mentorship) increases the likelihood of these youth transitioning back to school, work, and the community (ID 31). Other papers focused on youth experiencing homelessness and unemployment or mental illness (e.g., ID 34, ID 35, ID 36, and ID 40), as well as ‘excluded youth’ lacking democratic participation (ID 42). Furthermore, youth from rural areas suffering from disadvantages (i.e., social, educational, health, community, economic, and family factors), those lacking education and employment opportunities (ID 45), and young people with dual diagnoses (e.g., mental illness and substance use disorders) experience significant barriers to employment and are at risk of ‘social alienation, criminal or other antisocial activity’ (ID 44, p. 191).

Co-occurrence of terms in research and research clusters

We performed the VOSviewer analysis to visualise the co-occurrence of terms in network maps based on titles and abstracts (Van Eck & Waltman, 2011, p. 1). This provided a way of exploring whether there appeared to be clustering within our material that could guide the interpretation. The analysis (Figure 2, Supplementary file) showed three clusters of terms. We interpret the cluster at the right-hand side of the figure as disability-oriented, depicted by terms such as ‘disability’, ‘developmental disability’, ‘young adult’, ‘youth’, ‘family’, ‘employment outcome’, ‘system’, and ‘system change’. We also interpret the cluster in the upper middle as a disability-oriented cluster, but focusing in particular on students with learning disabilities in colleges (offering furthering education) and their employment opportunities (e.g., ID 15, ID 16, and ID 21). The cluster is depicted by terms such as ‘college’, ‘employer’, and ‘experience’ (c.f. Figure 2, Supplementary file). Finally, we interpret the cluster on the left-hand side of the figure as a more heterogenous ‘youth’ array, depicted by terms such as ‘initiative’, ‘training’, and ‘research’, in addition to ‘young person’ (c.f. Figure 2, Supplementary file).

If our readings are correct, we can group all the disability-oriented papers into one cluster. The papers seem to belong to a rather homogenous cluster of related disciplines/areas of research, such as disability, rehabilitation, and vocational rehabilitation, that are published in journals such as *Disability and Rehabilitation*, *Journal of Rehabilitation*, *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, *Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities*, and *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, as examples (cf. Table 2, Supplementary file). This cluster seemed to represent a more established area(s) of research with a (more) common base(s) of knowledge/knowledge community. Exploring the reference list of the publications in this cluster confirmed that the authors cite each other’s work to some extent. For instance, the works of John Butterworth, perhaps the most cited author in

our material, are cited in several papers (e.g., ID 5, ID 7, ID 12, ID 13, ID 19, and ID 24). Butterworth is affiliated with the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) at Massachusetts University in Boston, together with other authors represented in this cluster, such as Jean Winsor, Karen Flippo, and Debra Hart, some of whom are cited in Butterworth's own work (ID 6). ICI's area of research focuses on the inclusion of people with disabilities in school, work, and community activities.³ Authors Jennifer Bumble and Erik W. Carter are also cited (e.g. in, ID 6, ID 10, ID 17, and ID 24). Both researchers work in the area of special education. Also, Lauren Lindstrom and Michael R. Benz are cited (e.g. in ID 4, ID 7, and ID 9) in the area of developmental disabilities and special education, among others.

The second research cluster is highly fragmented. In this case, there are several disciplines/areas of research involved, and while there is some weight on education, educational psychology, and, to an extent, youth research, present are also social work, social policy/welfare, and political science. The papers are published in journals such as *Australian Educational Researcher*, *International Journal of Education and the Arts*, *Journal of Education and Work*, and *Journal of Education Policy* in addition to *Journal of Interprofessional Care*, *Australian Social Work*, *International Journal of Social Welfare*, *Vulnerable Children & Youth Studies*, and *Policy and Politics* (cf. Table 2, Supplementary file), to name some examples.

Due to the multiple disciplines/research areas involved, the works in the second cluster do not necessarily relate to each other, and they appear to represent more or less isolated contributions from different disciplines and research traditions. Exploring the reference lists of the publications confirmed this, as the authors in this cluster seldom cite each other, with few exceptions, such as Roz Currie and Louise Goddall (ID 33) citing the works of Ron

³ Institute for Community Inclusion. https://www.communityinclusion.org/project.php?project_id=35 (retrieved, 27.08.2020).

Crichton and Cyril Hellier; however, in this case, the authors were reporting from the same project in educational psychology in the same issue of *Education and Child Psychology*. One rare example of ‘cross-stream’ citing was found in the work by Kristin M. Ferguson (ID 34) on a university-agency research partnership aiming at improving employment and clinical outcomes of homeless youth with mental illness, where E. W. Carter was cited.

Table 2 in the supplementary file summarises the studies in the review and their characteristics, which are grouped by research streams.

Synthesising the findings: ‘Enabling transition to adulthood’ and ‘preventing social exclusion’

In this section, we synthesise the findings and outline two research streams and two narratives based on the identified characteristics and the bibliometric analysis. Based on the clusters in the VOSviewer analysis, the author citations, the journals that the papers are published in, and the youth groups outlined, the findings suggest two streams of research on coordinating pathways to employment for youths in vulnerable life situations. The first stream we refer to by the narrative title ‘Enabling transition to adulthood for youth with disabilities or severe health problems’ (stream 1), and the second is titled ‘Preventing social exclusion of youth at risk’ (stream 2; cf. Table 2, supplementary file).

For works in the first stream, the research agendas are focused on disabled youths’ overall wellbeing, independent living, and inclusion into society (e.g., ID 2, ID 5, ID 7, ID 10, ID 13, ID 18, ID 24, and ID 26). Here, the motivation is that the ‘intractable problem of low employment’ of youth and young adults with (intellectual and developmental) disabilities ‘cannot be solved by one agency alone’ (ID 19, p. 307). The aim of collaborative policies, programmes, and partnerships is to counteract unemployment and underemployment and enable transitions to competitive and coordinated employment or continued education and

inclusion in all aspects of the community for disabled youth. Meaningful employment is thought to increase the likelihood of participation in other arenas of life (ID 7).

Seven out of 11 evaluation studies were found in this stream, indicating, partly, that the research has to some extent moved beyond discussions and single case studies. All studies on involved stakeholders' perceptions of experiences were also in this stream, showing that their perspectives, and not just those of experts, are considered in research (Winters et al., 2016, p. 16). However, 11 of the papers in this stream are case studies describing programmes, projects, or partnerships offering recommendations for policy, practice, and research (e.g., ID 5 and ID 8). Some case studies address system change programmes/projects (e.g., ID 6, ID 7, and ID 19), and most concentrate on the system or organisational dimension of service integration.

The second stream we refer to by the narrative title 'Preventing social exclusion of youth at risk' (e.g., ID 30, ID 32, ID 33, ID 39, and ID 41). The common research agenda focuses on the varying disadvantages that young people face that put them at risk of disconnection from future education and/or employment (ID 29), which can lead to social exclusion (ID 30).

Attending to the multiple barriers/disadvantages (e.g., homelessness, mental health problems, a lack of a support network, juvenile delinquency, dropping out of school, and living in socioeconomically deprived rural areas) cannot be accomplished by a single agency or service; rather, these issues require 'joined-up' needs-led services to meet their [youth's] many and complex problems' (ID 44, p. 196).

Seven out of the eight 'discussion papers' are in this stream. These papers address coordinated services at the system and organisational level while also discussing the need for coordinated approaches. The case studies (11 out of 22), like those in the first stream, often report from a specific programme or partnership and consider implications for policies and lessons for good

practice. Only four out of 11 evaluations are in this stream, which indicates that the research in this stream is (still) predominantly at the stage of discussing/problematising the need for coordinated services and, to a lesser degree, that of evaluating existing programmes and policies.

In the next section, we discuss the findings and their implications, with an emphasis on the implications for social work research.

Discussion

The aim of this scoping review was to analyse research on coordinated approaches and interagency collaboration to enable pathways to work for youth in vulnerable life situations, as voiced in the policy discourses. The analysis here revealed that most papers are from an Anglosphere welfare context. This finding was surprising given that youth unemployment and the issue of ‘how to effectively’ engage as many young people as possible have been at the heart of the EU policy agenda since 2010 (Eurofound, 2016, p. 1). The NEET, for instance, a concept widely used as a tool to inform youth-oriented policies in the EU member states, was referred to for the first time in European policy discussions in the Europe 2020 flagship initiative ‘Youth on the Move’ (Eurofound, 2012b). The Youth Guarantee (YG), conceived in 2013, covered immediate and long-term interventions with measures and reforms through partnerships among key stakeholders, bringing together educational providers, labour market actors, social partners and youth organisations to address the long-term needs of young people (Eurofound, 2016, p. 48). So far, these studies have mostly been concerned with the YG function as an EU policy tool altering national policies, attending to the extent to which the key principles of the YG have been transformed into national and regional policies and comparisons between countries (e.g., Author, 2021). This review shows that there is a lack of

systematic research on collaborative approaches to employment for youth in vulnerable life situations.

One of the key insights of an Eurofound report (2012a, p. 60) reviewing existing evidence on policies that effectively tackle youth unemployment was that interagency work is necessary to provide a ‘joined-up’ youth employment policy. The report nonetheless shows that there is a general lack of rigorous evaluations of policies tackling youth unemployment (Eurofound, 2012a, p. 2), which was also reflected in our review of collaborative approaches to employment.

The findings show that most papers focus on the organisational dimension of service integration and address inter-organisational relationships. The next most common type of paper concentrates on the system dimension (i.e., focusing on the alignment of policies, rules, and regulations). Several papers focused on more than one dimension, illustrating that collaborative approaches and integrated services often involve multilevel and multidimensional processes. This multilevel and multidimensional characteristic also indicates how complex it is to achieve coordinated seamless services in practice (i.e., to move from [discussing] policies at the system level to their implementation). Public policymaking and service delivery in networks require coping with complexity because definitions of problems, solutions, and knowledge are often disputed (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2014, p. 64). When the number of actors involved increases, as seen examples of in our material, the ‘collaborative advantages’ (Huxham & Vangen, 2005) may be even more difficult to realise. Researching (collaborative) interventions targeted at youth in vulnerable life situations can also produce ambiguous results (Grace & Gill, 2014, p. 435). Hence, this complexity, both in terms of the problems attended to on the one hand and of delivering coordinated services on the other, may explain the scattered research in this area.

Having said this, some of the examples in our material from the first stream (e.g., ID 10, ID 19, ID 24, and ID 25) are worth considering in terms of links and knowledge exchange in the context of social work. These are all examples of instances of ‘system change’, such as thorough community conversation involving stakeholders in the community as a strategy to build consensus for system change at the grassroots level and contribute to policy and practice development (e.g., ID 10). Further examples are the forming of consortiums consisting of alliances of stakeholders to foster system change (e.g., ID 19 and ID 24). Seeking to influence policies and contributing to social change is a key part of the social work profession (Gal & Weiss-Gal, 2013). Social workers are often in a position to implement policies and have direct knowledge of the disadvantages of youth at the margins of the labour market and the impact of existing policies or a lack thereof. Moreover, social workers often work with other stakeholders and are thus in an advantageous position to facilitate youth employment (Liang et al., 2017, p. 574). The notion of ‘policy practice’ refers to tasks taken on by professional social workers who, as part of their professional responsibility, seek to change policies to improve the situations of their service users (Gal & Weiss-Gal, 2013, p. 6). There is, however, a breach in the emphasis of involvement in policy practices and the actual involvement of social workers in such practices, where social workers mostly work at the individual level (Gal & Weiss-Gal, 2013, p. 8). Hence, valuable lessons from existing research from the first stream, which resonates with the value base and social work discourse, is that of engagement in system change efforts to change policies as a way of improving the employment outcomes and overall wellbeing of youth in vulnerable life situations. This engagement is relevant for both professional and academic social workers undertaking more action-oriented research, as seen in some examples from our material.

Important examples of policies influencing unemployed youth in vulnerable life situations are those seen during the last two decades of activation policies in Europe, where there has been a

move from passive income protection to investment in activation and labour market participation for all. This development has occurred in parallel with an increasing emphasis on incentives, obligations, sanctions, reciprocity, and individual responsibility (Jenson, 2011, p. 497; Van Berkel & Van Der Aa, 2012). This is a policy development that is also recognised in social work (Lorenz, 2005, 2017). Hence, the field of policy concerned with welfare and social policy can be said to be characterised by a strong ‘work ethos’ (Lövgren & Hamreby, 2011, p. 91) and an underlying logic or discourse of a ‘duty to work’ for all, where reducing the risk of social exclusion of marginal populations is perceived as a necessary policy investment. The field of policy in relation to the disabled, in contrast, can be said to be characterised by a logic or discourse of a ‘right to work’ for all (Lövgren & Hamreby, 2011, p. 91) and perhaps ‘the right to social inclusion’ and equal participation in society. Despite the fragmentation of the second stream in our material, one interpretation of the two streams of research found in this paper is that they, at least to some extent, are examples of these different discourses. One example addressing the first discourse is the article by Zeller et al. (ID 48, p. 182) focusing on care leavers. In this case, the authors argue that European social policy should change the focus of transition discourse from ‘transition to work’ to ‘transition into adulthood’, considering the whole life situations of disadvantaged youth and not only focusing on vocational training. De Corte and colleagues (2017) argue that one of the promises of inter-organisational collaboration in social work is to engage in critical debate on dominant definitions of social problems that cross organisational and sectorial boundaries. This can also be seen as an example of the policy practice mentioned above.

Lastly, shifting focus from changing policies and practices to theory and theoretical concepts, the use of concepts of coordinated services varies across scholarly disciplines and research traditions. Few papers in our review, with some exceptions (e.g., ID 3, ID 35, and ID 39), appear to use the concepts of service coordination in a theoretically informed manner or as a

part of a broader conceptual framework. According to Halley (1997, pp. 146–147), the service coordination/integration discourse can be described at two levels. One level consists of practice (e.g., reform and programme design), action, or intervention (e.g., coordinated services, co-location, or multi-problem clients). Here, the objective is to change a fragmented service system at the policy, operating, or local level (i.e., the frontline; Halley, 1997, p. 146). The other level consists of reflection or explanation. Most of the work is focused on the first level and less on the latter level of explanatory theory (Halley, 1997, p. 151). The dominance of practice still seen in our material is likely one chief reason why this area of research is hampered by ambiguity and a plethora of different terms. An important way ahead in this area of research is therefore to strengthen the theoretical and conceptual foundation of this body of work, including research that aims to change policies and practices, by drawing on disciplines that are more theoretically oriented, such as public administration and organisational studies.

By way of a conclusion, coordinated services and collaboration are necessary and perhaps even a moral issue when the problems faced by youth in vulnerable life situations, like the ones addressed in this paper, cannot be resolved by one organisation or service alone (Huxham & Vangen, 2005, p. 7). Our review nonetheless indicates that there seem to be missing issues in research on collaborative approaches to youth employment and education, particularly research concerning the youth in vulnerable life situations in the European context. Despite apparent differences in the identified streams, taking as a point of departure youth illness and disability in the first stream and inactivity or risk of disconnection in the other, the vulnerable life situations of the youth in both streams of research largely overlap, and they are all vulnerable to social exclusion. This insight indicates possibilities for links and knowledge exchange across research communities.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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Supplementary file

Table 1. Search strategy of explorative literature review; terms and databases.

Databases	Terms connected to collaboration/coordinated services	Terms connected to employment services
Academic Search Premiere SocINDEX Scopus Web of Science MEDLINE	Integrated N2 services OR Integrated N2 care OR Joined-up N2 services OR “New public governance” OR NPG OR “Post-new public management” OR “Post-NPM” OR “Whole-of-government” OR “Shared public services” OR “Inter-governmental relations” OR “Intergovernmental relations” OR “One-stop” OR “Inter-agency collaboration” OR “Inter-agency cooperation” OR “Government coordination” OR “Government integration” OR “Intersectoral collaboration” OR “Inter-sectoral collaboration” OR “Collaborative governance” OR “Co-governance” OR “Interorgani* collaboration” OR “Interorgani* cooperation” OR “Interorgani* relations*” OR “Interdisciplinary collaboration” OR “Interdisciplinary cooperation” OR “Multidisciplinary collaboration” OR “Multidisciplinary cooperation” OR “Interprofessional collaboration” OR “Interprofessional cooperation” OR “Interprofessional coordination” OR “Intersectoral coordination” OR “Intersectoral collaboration” OR “Intersectoral cooperation” OR Cross-sector coordination” OR “Cross-sector collaboration” OR “Cross-sector cooperation” OR Partnership* OR “Organi* network” OR “Inter-organi* network*” OR “Collaborative network*” OR “Collaborative public management” OR “Collaborative working” OR “Collaborative innovation*” OR “Innovation communit*” OR “Network management” OR “Network governance” OR ”Network forms of organi*” OR “Network organi*” OR “Governance network*” OR “Policy network*” OR “Boundary work*” OR “Boundary spann*” OR “Boundary-spann*” OR “Boundary role*” OR “Boundary organi*” OR “Boundary object*” OR “Brokerage” OR “Brokering”	Welfare OR Activation OR “Welfare-to-work” OR “Active labour market reform*” OR “Active labor market reform*” OR “Active labour market polic*” OR “Active labor market polic*” OR ALMP OR “Labour market participation” OR “Labour market inclusion” OR “Labor market participation” OR “Labor market inclusion” OR “Workforce inclusion” OR “Return-to-work” OR “Work integration” OR “Work re-integration” OR “Work inclusion” OR Employment

Table 2. Reviewed articles (n=48) and their characteristics grouped by research stream.

ID	Reference	Youth group	Type of study	Dimension of integration	Collaboration term	Research stream
1	Ankeny, E. M., & Lehmann, J. P. (2010). The transition lynchpin: The voices of individuals with disabilities who attended a community college transition program. <i>Community College Journal of Research and Practice</i> , 34(6), 477–496.	Severe illnesses or disabilities	Involved parties' perceptions/ experiences	Organisational Professional Clinical	Community college partnership	
2	Benz, M. and Lindstrom, L. & Latta T. (1999). Improving collaboration between schools and vocational rehabilitation: The youth transition program model. <i>Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation</i> , 13(1), 55.	Severe illnesses or disabilities	Case study	System, Org. Professional Clinical	Collaboration	
3	Bourke-Taylor, H. M., Cotter, C., Lalor, A., & Johnson, L. (2018). School success and participation for students with cerebral palsy: A qualitative study exploring multiple perspectives. <i>Disability and Rehabilitation</i> , 40(18), 2163–2171.	Severe illnesses or disabilities	Involved parties' perceptions/ experiences	Organisational Professional Clinical	Collaborative partnership	Stream 1
4	Brewer, D., Karpur, A., Pi, S., Erickson, W., Unger, D., & Malzer, V. (2011). Evaluation of a multi-site transition to adulthood program for youth with disabilities. <i>Journal of Rehabilitation</i> , 77(3), 3–13.	Severe illnesses or disabilities	Evaluation	Organisational	Partnership	'Enabling transition to adulthood for youth with disabilities or severe health problems'
5	Bumble, J. L., Carter, E. W., McMillan, E., Manikas, A. S., & Bethune, L. K. (2018). Community Conversations on Integrated Employment: Examining Individualization, Influential Factors, and Impact. <i>Journal of Disability Policy Studies</i> , 28(4), 229-243.	Severe illnesses or disabilities	Case study	Organisational	Community conversations	
6	Butterworth, J., Christensen, J., & Flippo, K. (2017). Partnerships in Employment: Building strong coalitions to facilitate systems change for youth and young adults. <i>Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation</i> , 47(3), 265-276.	Severe illnesses or disabilities	Case study	System	Collaboration partnership, consortium	
7	Carter, E. W., McMillan, E., & Willis, W. (2017). The TennesseeWorks Partnership: Elevating employment outcomes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. <i>Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation</i> , 47(3), 365–378.	Severe illnesses or disabilities	Case study	System	Partnership	
8	Christensen, J. J., Richardson, K., & Hetherington, S. (2017). New York State partnerships in employment. <i>Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation</i> , 47(3), 351–363.	Severe illnesses or disabilities	Case study	System	Integrated employment	
9	Fabian, E., Dong, S. L., Simonsen, M., Luecking, D. M., & Deschamps, A. (2016). Service system collaboration in transition: An empirical exploration of	Severe illnesses or disabilities	Evaluation	Organisational Professional	Inter-agency collaboration	

	its effects on rehabilitation outcomes for students with disabilities. <i>Journal of Rehabilitation</i> , 82(3), 3–10.				
10	Flippo, K., & Butterworth, J. (2018). Community conversations and transition systems change. <i>Journal of Disability Policy Studies</i> , 29(1), 7–11.	Severe illnesses or disabilities	Discussion paper	System	Community conversations
11	Haber, M. G., Karpur, A., Deschênes, N., & Clark, H. B. (2008). Predicting improvement of transitioning young people in the Partnerships for Youth Transition initiative: Findings from a multisite demonstration. <i>Journal of Behavioral Health Services & Research</i> , 35(4), 488–513.	Severe illnesses or disabilities	Evaluation	Clinical	Partnership/Service coordination
12	Hart, D., Zimbrich, K., & Ghiloni, C. (2001). Interagency partnerships and funding: Individual supports for youth with significant disabilities as they move into postsecondary education and employment options. <i>Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation</i> , 16(3/4), 145.	Severe illnesses or disabilities	Case study	Organisational Clinical	Inter-agency partnership, collaboration
13	Hughes Jr, C. (2017). Mississippi Partnerships for Employment: Collaborating for systems change. <i>Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation</i> , 47(3), 327–335.	Severe illnesses or disabilities	Case study	System Organisational	Partnership, consortium, collaboration
14	Kaehne, A. (2016). Project SEARCH UK - Evaluating Its Employment Outcomes. <i>Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities</i> , 29(6), 519-530.	Severe illnesses or disabilities	Evaluation	Organisational	Partnership
15	Kaehne, A., & Beyer, S. (2009a). Transition partnerships: the views of education professionals and staff in support services for young people with learning disabilities. <i>British Journal of Special Education</i> , 36(2), 112-119.	Severe illnesses or disabilities	Involved parties' perceptions/experiences	Organisational	Transition partnership
16	Kaehne, A., & Beyer, S. (2009b). 'Views of professionals on aims and outcomes of transition for young people with learning disabilities'. <i>British Journal of Learning Disabilities</i> , 37(2), 138-144.	Severe illnesses or disabilities	Involved parties' perceptions/experiences	Organisational	Transition partnership, interagency collaboration
17	Mlynaryk, C., Laberge, M., & Martin, M. (2017). School-to-work transition for youth with severe physical disabilities: Stakeholder perspectives. <i>Work-a Journal of Prevention Assessment & Rehabilitation</i> , 58(4), 427–438.	Severe illnesses or disabilities	Involved parties' perceptions/experiences	Organisational Clinical	Partnership, coordination
18	Muthumbi, J. W. (2008). Enhancing transition outcomes for youth with disabilities: The partnerships for youth initiative. <i>Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation</i> , 29(2), 93–103.	Severe illnesses or disabilities	Involved parties' perceptions/experiences	System Organisational	Partnership

19	Raynor, O., Hayward, K., & Rice, K. (2017). CECY: California's collaborative approach to increasing employment of youth and young adults with intellectual disabilities. <i>Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation</i> , 47(3), 307–316.	Severe illnesses or disabilities	Case study	System Organisational	Partnership, alliances
20	Raynor, O., Hayward, K., Semenza, G., & Stoffmacher, B. (2018). Community Conversations to Increase Employment Opportunities for Young Adults With Developmental Disabilities in California [Article]. <i>Journal of Disability Policy Studies</i> , 28(4), 203-215.	Severe illnesses or disabilities	Case study	Organisational	Community conversations
21	Skellern, J., & Astbury, G. (2014). Gaining employment: the experience of students at a further education college for individuals with learning disabilities. <i>British Journal of Learning Disabilities</i> , 42(1), 58-65.	Severe illnesses or disabilities	Involved parties' perceptions/ experiences	Organisational Clinical	Collaborative working
22	Sobowale, G., & Cockburn, L. (2009). George's journey: Developing a career path with supported employment. <i>Work-a Journal of Prevention Assessment & Rehabilitation</i> , 33(4), 395-400	Severe illnesses or disabilities	Case study	Clinical	Partnership
23	Taylor, B. J., McGilloway, S., & Donnelly, M. (2004). Preparing young adults with disability for employment. <i>Health & Social Care in the Community</i> , 12(2), 93–101.	Severe illnesses or disabilities	Evaluation	Organisational	Partnership work, inter- agency work
24	Tucker, K., Feng, H., Gruman, C., & Crossen, L. (2017). Improving competitive integrated employment for youth and young adults with disabilities: Findings from an evaluation of eight Partnerships in Employment Systems Change Projects. <i>Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation</i> , 47(3), 277–294.	Severe illnesses or disabilities	Evaluation	Organisational	Partnership
25	Wilson, P. G., Killam, S. G., Stazio, L. C., Ellis, R. B., Kiernan, N. M., & Ukachu, A. N. (2017). Post-secondary apprenticeships for youth: Creating opportunities for high demand employment. <i>Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation</i> , 46(3), 305–312.	Severe illnesses or disabilities	Case study	System	Partnership
26	Winsor, J. E., Butterworth, J., & Boone, J. (2011). Jobs by 21 Partnership Project: Impact of cross-system collaboration on employment outcomes of young adults with developmental disabilities. <i>Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities</i> , 49(4), 274–284.	Severe illnesses or disabilities	Evaluation	Organisational	Cross-system collaboration
27	Bilson, A., Price, J., & Stanley, N. (2011). Developing employment opportunities for care leavers. <i>Children & Society</i> , 25(5), 382–393.	Care leavers	Case study	System, Org. Clinical	Partnerships, inter-agency, coordination
28	Broadbent, R., & Cacciattolo, M. (2013). The role of school community partnerships in building successful transition pathways for young people: One school's approach. <i>Australian Educational Researcher</i> , 40(1), 109–123.	Students aged 9–12	Case study	Organisational	Community partnership

29	Brown, R., & Jeanneret, N. (2015). Re-engaging at-risk youth through art - The Evolution Program. <i>International Journal of Education and the Arts</i> , 16(14), 1–18.	NEETs	Case study	Clinical	Partnership	Stream 2
30	Canduela, J., Chandler, R., Elliott, I., Lindsay, C., Macpherson, S., McQuaid, R. W., & Raeside, R. (2010). Partnerships to support early school leavers: School-college transitions and 'winter leavers' in Scotland. <i>Journal of Education & Work</i> , 23(4), 339–362.	NEETs	Case study	Organisational	School-college collaboration / partnership work	'Preventing social exclusion of youth at risk'
31	Chuang, E., & Wells, R. (2010). The role of inter-agency collaboration in facilitating receipt of behavioral health services for youth involved with child welfare and juvenile justice. <i>Children and Youth Services Review</i> , 32(12), 1814–1822.	Youth at risk	Evaluation	Organisational	Inter-agency collaboration	
32	Crichton, R., & Hellier, C. (2009). Supporting action research by partners: Evaluating outcomes for vulnerable young people in negative post-school destinations. <i>Educational & Child Psychology</i> , 26(1), 76–83.	NEETs	Case study	Professional	Collaborative partnership	
33	Currie, R., & Goodall, L. (2009). Using collaborative action research to identify and support young people at risk of becoming NEET. <i>Educational & Child Psychology</i> , 26(1), 67–75.	NEETs	Case study	Organisational Professional	Partnership	
34	Ferguson, K. M. (2013). Using the Social Enterprise Intervention (SEI) and Individual Placement and Support (IPS) Models to Improve Employment and Clinical Outcomes of Homeless Youth With Mental Illness [Article]. <i>Social Work in Mental Health</i> , 11(5), 473-495.	Youth at risk	Evaluation	Organisational Clinical	University agency research partnership, integrating services	
35	Grace, M., Coventry, L., & Batterham, D. (2012). The role of interagency collaboration in “joined-up” case management. <i>Journal of Interprofessional Care</i> , 26(2), 141–149. doi:10.3109/13561820.2011.637646.	Youth at risk	Evaluation	Organisational	Joined-up services, inter-agency collaboration	
36	Grace, M., & Gill, P. R. (2014). Improving Outcomes for Unemployed and Homeless Young People: Findings of the YP Clinical Controlled Trial of Joined Up Case Management [Article]. <i>Australian Social Work</i> , 67(3), 419-437. https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2014.911926 .	Youth at risk	Evaluation	Organisational Clinical	Joined-up services / joined-up case management	
37	Haire, C. M., & Dodson-Pennington, L. S. (2002). Taking the road less traveled: A journey in collaborative resource development. <i>Community College Journal of Research and Practice</i> , 26(1), 61–75.	Students in community college	Case study	Organisational	Collaboration, partnership	

38	Kamp, A. (2009). Capitals and commitment: The case of a local learning and employment network. <i>Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education</i> , 30(4), 471–482.	young aged 15–19	Case study	System Organisational	Joining-up, whole-of government, partnership
39	Kamp, A. (2018). Assembling the actors: Exploring the challenges of ‘system leadership’ in education through actor-network theory. <i>Journal of Education Policy</i> , 33(6), 778-792.	Young aged 16–19	Discussion paper	System Organisational	Collaboration, partnership, network/networ king
40	Karabanow, J. (2004). Changing faces: The story of two Canadian street youth shelters. <i>International Journal of Social Welfare</i> , 13(4), 304–314.	Youth at risk	Case study	System, Org. Clinical	Partnership
41	Kuhlee, D. (2015). Federalism and corporatism: On the approaches of policy-making and governance in the dual apprenticeship system in Germany and their functioning today. <i>Research in Comparative and International Education</i> , 10(4), 476–492.	Youth (covered by three sub-systems)	Discussion paper	System	Partnership, cooperation
42	Macpherson, S. (2008). Reaching the top of the ladder? Locating the voices of excluded young people within the participation debate. <i>Policy and Politics</i> , 36(3), 361-379.	Young people (subject to policy interventions)	Case study	System Clinical	Social inclusion partnership (SIP)
43	Mendes, P. (2011). Towards a community development support model for young people transitioning from state out-of-home care: A case study of St Luke’s Anglicare in Victoria, Australia. <i>Practice</i> , 23(2), 69–81.	Care leavers	Case study	Organisational	Partnership
44	Mitchell, D. P., Betts, A., & Epling, M. (2002). Youth employment, mental health and substance misuse: A challenge to mental health services. <i>Journal of Psychiatric & Mental Health Nursing</i> , 9(2), 191–198.	Youth at risk	Discussion paper	Organisational	“Forge strong links”
45	Morgan, P. (2008). Policy considerations for moderating welfare dependency amongst rural youth. <i>Rural Society</i> , 18(1), 51–63.	Youth at risk	Discussion paper	System	Partnership
46	Nativel, C., Sunley, P., & Martin, R. (2002). Localising welfare-to-work? Territorial flexibility and the New Deal for Young People. <i>Environment & Planning C: Government & Policy</i> , 20(6), 911.	Youth at risk	Discussion paper	System	Partnership building, coordination
47	Tosun, J. (2017). Promoting youth employment through multi-organizational governance. <i>Public Money & Management</i> , 37(1), 39–46.	NEETs	Discussion paper	System Organisational	Partnership- based approaches
48	Zeller, M., Königeter, S., & Schroer, W. (2009). Traps in transition - a biographical approach to forms of collaboration between youth welfare services and employment promotion agencies. <i>Vulnerable Children & Youth Studies</i> , 4(2), 176–184.	Care leavers	Discussion paper	Organisational	Cooperation

Figure 1. Summary of literature search process.



