



Youth Unemployment and Community Disengagement: Examining Social Patterns, Institutional Trust and Policy Interventions

Alvin O. Cayogyog

Agusan del Sur State University, Philippines, ORCID: 0000-0002-8448-0851, Email: acayogyog@adssu.edu.ph.

Abstract

Youth unemployment is a recurring global problem that not only affects economies but has several wider implications for society and institutions. While restricting the access to jobs, youth unemployment is also associated with social exclusion, lower civic engagement, community participation, and lack of confidence in governmental institutions. This review focuses on the connection between youth unemployment and community disengagement through exploring recent academic research devoted to the social dynamics, institutions, and policies related to youth unemployment. Specifically, the review analyzes the impact of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, such as gender, education, location, and socioeconomic background on the level of community involvement of young people who are unemployed. The review also addresses the significance of trust in institutions for engaging in society. Based on the analysis conducted, it is clear that youth unemployment is a multi-dimensional problem that demands coordinated efforts that go beyond creating jobs. Such efforts must take an approach that brings together labor market policies, skills training, community programs, and institutional changes that increase chances of good employment opportunities and social inclusion. Gaps in research have been revealed through this review, especially concerning longitudinal studies, comparative analysis, and inter-disciplinary approaches that focus on the interaction of unemployment, institutional trust, and community participation.

Keywords: Youth unemployment; Community disengagement; Institutional trust; Social inclusion; Policy interventions

1. Introduction

Youth unemployment is one of the most pervasive socioeconomic problems of the twenty first century, independent of the level of economic development in developed and developing countries. Globalization, technological progress and increased educational access have revolutionised today's labour market, but there are still millions of young people who are out of work, in the wrong job, or not participating in education, employment, and training (NEET). This situation is not only one of labour market exclusion, but it can also have profound implications for economic growth, social cohesion and sustainable development. Long-term youth unemployment has been shown to negatively impact social stability, by exacerbating economic inequality, reducing social mobility and creating significant employment barriers for youth in the long run, both nationally and cross-nationally (Rao, 2025). Similarly, a worldwide scan of the NEET population highlights that the issue of youth disconnection from education and employment has grown to be a global concern with far-reaching implications for individuals, communities and national economies (Gunnes et al., 2025).

Youth unemployment is not just unemployment, but is multidimensional and has many dimensions. The financial insecurity and delayed transitions to adulthood are common experiences of unemployed youth, which is associated with fewer career opportunities and opportunities for personal and professional growth. The challenges frequently result in social isolation and issues with identity, deepening the psychological wellbeing challenges and perpetuating a vicious circle of disadvantage that can persist throughout adulthood (Tariq, 2026). Structural economic conditions, labor market inefficiencies, skills mismatches and poor quality jobs further compound these challenges and create difficulties in low and middle income countries where institutional support systems are weak (Khan, 2025). Youth unemployment has thus become a central policy issue as it has significant long-term consequences for economic productivity, human capital and inclusive growth.

Beyond its economic consequences, unemployment among young people has also been associated with a reduction in civic involvement, which includes a decrease in civic activities (e.g., voting, volunteering, talking about civic issues, and socializing with neighbors). In addition to the economic effects, youth unemployment has been correlated with a decrease in civic engagement, which is represented by a loss of civic involvement in voting, volunteering, talking with others about civic issues, and feeling connected to the community. Those who drop out of the education and labor market are less likely to participate in civic associations, volunteer activities, and community development activities and so are less likely to have social capital and collective efficacy (Loprest et al., 2019). This general disaffection not only has a negative impact on the health of every person, it also has a negative impact on the ability of communities to be resilient and cohesive. It has also been noted that long-term unemployment leads to social disintegration, social marginalisation and weakens the social and economic involvement of the community, which consequently affects inclusive social and economic development (Attah & Oche, 2024). The results demonstrate that the issue of youth unemployment cannot be solely seen from the economic perspective, but is also a significant problem that has social consequences and a broad impact on communities.

The institutional trust is another critical aspect of this relationship. Trust in governments, educational institutions, labor market systems and public organizations has a profound impact on youth engagement in civic, political and community life. Governments, educational institutions, labor market systems and public organizations play a significant role in young people's confidence in them and their willingness to participate in civic, political and community life. However, this trust can be undermined by prolonged unemployment, which can lead to feelings of inequality, exclusion and poor governance, and may decrease participation in formal and informal community-based organizations (Nugin & Unt, 2025). The engagement and disengagement of youth are influenced by and mediated through the interactions between families, educational institutions, communities and public systems, and, consequently, coordinated institutional and policy responses to youth unemployment are needed, not just labor market interventions (Lawson & Lawson, 2020).

Even though there is growing literature on youth unemployment, community engagement, institutional trust and policy responses, the themes have not been explored together. Current research focuses on either the labor market outcomes of unemployment or the social ramifications of unemployment, and there is relative under-research on the social aspects of community disengagement and institutional trust in the context of unemployment. Furthermore, existing evidence on effectiveness of policy interventions is fragmented both between countries and institutional settings. Hence, a comprehensive review is needed that combines these interrelated aspects, thus providing a holistic view of the connection between youth unemployment and community disengagement. This review seeks to summarise and critically analyse the current literature on youth unemployment and community disengagement, and discuss the social patterns that are emerging, the importance of institutional trust and the impacts of policy interventions. The review aims to provide a synthesis and enhance the understanding of this complex relationship, but also to highlight significant new avenues for research and policy development from a variety of disciplines and geographical contexts. The objectives of this review are:

1. To critically examine the relationship between youth unemployment and community disengagement across different social, economic, and geographical contexts.

2. To analyze how social patterns and institutional trust influence the experiences and consequences of youth unemployment among young people.
3. To synthesize existing evidence on policy interventions aimed at reducing youth unemployment and strengthening community engagement while identifying priorities for future research.

2. Review Methodology

Relevant literature was identified through a comprehensive search of major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, Wiley Online Library, JSTOR, and Google Scholar. These databases were selected because they provide extensive coverage of research in sociology, economics, public policy, political science, education, and development studies. The search was conducted using combinations of keywords and Boolean operators (AND/OR), including "youth unemployment," "young adults," "NEET," "community disengagement," "community engagement," "social exclusion," "institutional trust," "political trust," "social cohesion," "youth participation," "employment policy," and "youth policy." Additional relevant studies were identified by examining the reference lists of selected articles.

Predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria were used when searching for articles to ensure that the literature selected was relevant. The studies were included if published in English, in peer-reviewed journals, and focused on aspects of youth unemployment, community disengagement, institutional trust, social patterns, or policy interventions (Table 1). All different types of studies were accepted: quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods, theoretical and review studies, because all types of studies were essential for providing a full picture of the topic. Published conference papers, editorials, book reviews, dissertations, duplicate studies, and articles that did not discuss issues of youth unemployment were not reviewed.

The literature was reviewed to determine the common themes, trends, and connections to the aims of the review. The results were presented by five key themes: understanding youth unemployment, community disengagement of the youth not in employment, social patterns between youth unemployment and community disengagement, institutional trust and youth unemployment, and policy interventions. Each study in each theme was compared critically to find commonalities, dissenting views, new trends and any holes in the literature and draw an overall picture of the current knowledge.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Peer-reviewed journal articles	Conference papers, editorials, book reviews, dissertations
Published in English	Non-English publications
Studies focusing on youth unemployment, community disengagement, institutional trust, social patterns, or policy interventions	Studies focusing solely on general unemployment without a youth perspective
Quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods, theoretical, and review studies	Duplicate publications and unpublished manuscripts
Full-text articles available	Articles with insufficient relevance to the review objectives

3. Understanding Youth Unemployment

Youth unemployment is a condition where young people who are able and willing to work are not able to find an appropriate job. The definition of youth varies from country to country and institution to institution, but typically refers to people moving from education to the labour market. Youth unemployment is however not just a lack of employment, and encompasses underemployment, precarious employment, informal employment, and a new cohort of youth not engaged in education, employment or training (NEET). These conditions make it clear that labour market exclusion of youth is a multi-faceted phenomenon, and they are not only facing not finding jobs, but also not finding stable, productive and meaningful jobs (Bhattacharya et al., 2021). Unemployment among the youth has emerged as a global problem in the last few decades, both in the developed and developing countries. The developed countries' labor market problems of late entry, temporary employment contracts and skills mismatch are also present in the developing countries, but an additional disadvantage is that of rapid population growth, inadequate industrialization, poor economic diversification and extensive informal employment sector. All this can lead to very different employment outcomes among young people in different countries. However, a large young population is a large population to feed into the labour market, which is a problem in many countries. The macroeconomic environment, such as economic growth, investments, demand for labour, and employment policy, also have a large impact on the

employment prospects of youth, affecting their likelihood of extended unemployment (Khan, 2025). Youth unemployment is complex and interlinked. A lack of fit between job requirements and the outcomes of education is one of the most common found issues. A large number of young graduates may have academic qualifications but are lacking in the technical skills and/or digital skills that are desired by the employer. Meanwhile, inexperience in the job market can mean that younger people are less attractive to employers in a job market, than older and more experienced workers. Structural economic constraints such as slow industrialization, lack of investment in the private sector, technological development and job creation also narrow the job opportunities. Socio-economic inequalities, geographical disparities, gender discrimination, political instability and unequal access to professional networks also play a role in creating unequal employment opportunities for different groups of young people. The political economy of unemployment also offers valuable lessons on the durability of youth unemployment. Labor market interventions are often less effective and opportunities for sustainable jobs are restricted due to weak governance, inconsistent economic policies, inefficiencies in the institutional environment and unequal resource distribution. Data from Nigeria indicates that while youth unemployment is a personal problem, it is also a product of underlying economic and institutional conditions that jeopardize youth's livelihoods and future development opportunities (Usman et al., 2026). Likewise, the socio-economic impact of unemployment in South Africa highlights the strong correlation between poor employment prospects and poverty, dependency and diminished social mobility, which clearly perpetuates disadvantageous trends among youth (Motsepe, 2026). Youth unemployment has many negative impacts beyond financial. On the individual level, unemployment can delay key life events such as transition to financial independence, family formation, career development, etc. (Table 2). The repeated unsuccessful attempts at securing work may lead to a loss of self-confidence, motivation, and future goals, as well as an increased risk for psychological distress, anxiety, and depression. The effects can be lasting even after a person has found work, and can be "scarring" in the sense that it can lead to lower income and advancement prospects over the long run.

Table 2. Synthesis of Major Dimensions of Youth Unemployment and Community Disengagement

Dimension	Key Characteristics	Implications for Community Engagement	Representative Literature
Youth unemployment	Prolonged joblessness, underemployment, NEET status, unstable labor, market transition	Financial insecurity, reduced social participation, delayed adulthood	Bhattacharya et al. (2021)
Community disengagement	Reduced civic participation, social isolation, declining volunteerism and political involvement	Weak social cohesion, diminished social capital, lower civic responsibility	Ahmed (2026)
Social inequalities	Gender disparities, educational disadvantage, poverty, rural–urban differences	Unequal opportunities for employment and community participation	Assmann & Broschinski (2021)
Institutional trust	Confidence in governments, educational institutions, labor market agencies, welfare systems	Higher institutional trust promotes civic participation and community engagement	Broka (2026)
Policy interventions	Employment promotion, skills development, community initiatives, institutional reforms	Improved employability, stronger social inclusion, enhanced institutional confidence	Parvez et al. (2026)

The broader social consequences are equally significant. The longer that youth are out of the labor market, the more likely they will be socially excluded, have a diminished social network, and not participate in civic and community involvement. Unemployment can also affect household financial difficulties and lead to migration, as well as aggravate already existing socioeconomic inequalities. These negative effects add up, and the rate of youth unemployment makes them more susceptible to being pushed to the margins and to less opportunities for them to be socially integrated. Thus, youth unemployment is a multifaceted social and economic issue that can lead to various impacts on the lives of youth, from affecting their physical health and mental well-being to their families' livelihoods, communities, and the economy of the country. This extended knowledge base creates the basis for discussing how unemployment is linked to social disengagement, the social pattern, the trust in institutions, and for discussing comprehensive policy interventions.

4. Community Disengagement Among Unemployed Youth

Community disengagement describes the gradual cessation of the participation of a person or group in social, civic, political and community activities that support social engagement, belonging and collective well-being. For the youth not in the labor force, community disengagement can manifest as a decrease in involvement in community groups, less interaction with community networks, less involvement in voluntary activities, and

less attachment with social institutions. Community disengagement is a multi-faceted experience, and not one size fits all. It is not just a lack of access to jobs, but a lack of connection to relationships and institutions that help develop a person and contribute to a sense of belonging to their community. Young people who are not engaged in education or work miss out on opportunities to develop social capital, leadership, and opportunities for strengthening community bonds (Lawson & Lawson, 2020). Social isolation is one of the most immediate impacts of being unemployed. There are aspects of employment besides the financial gain, such as interaction, collaboration and positive relationships. Unemployment among young people for long periods reduces their social engagement, says the daily life in society, and consequently raises the risk of loneliness and exclusion from community life. Youth who are disconnected often have smaller social circles, fewer opportunities to connect with mentors, and fewer opportunities to engage in recreational and community activities. These experiences erode their sense of belonging and diminish their social and professional networks which are important to gaining future employment. Evidence of disengaged young adults suggests that extended periods of disengagement from education and work will likely restrict the ability of young people to participate in valued social activities and place them at risk for long-term disenfranchisement (Loprest et al., 2019). Likewise, limited community engagement is shown to diminish the capacity of youth to participate in decision-making and to strengthen their capacity for community resilience in South Africa's rural context (Majee et al., 2019). Community disengagement is reflected in civic and political involvement, too. Being employed can generate a stronger bond with society because being involved in civic organizations, volunteering, local government and political processes. On the other hand, long-term unemployment could cause the loss of trust in public institutions and less desire to engage in democratic activities (Figure 1). If opportunities for economic progress seem limited to young people, they can become apathetic politically because their involvement is of little consequence to policy makers or institutional performance. Lack of political involvement can take the form of lower voter turnout, diminished involvement with community organizations, and diminished engagement in public discourse. Research on youth political engagement shows that socio-economic conditions greatly influence youth participation in civic and political life, with unemployment being an important determinant to maintaining engagement (Thelma & Chitondo, 2024). Community resources are also important for maintaining civic engagement; activities in supportive communities help to keep youth engaged, even in the face of socioeconomic disadvantage (Majee et al., 2020).

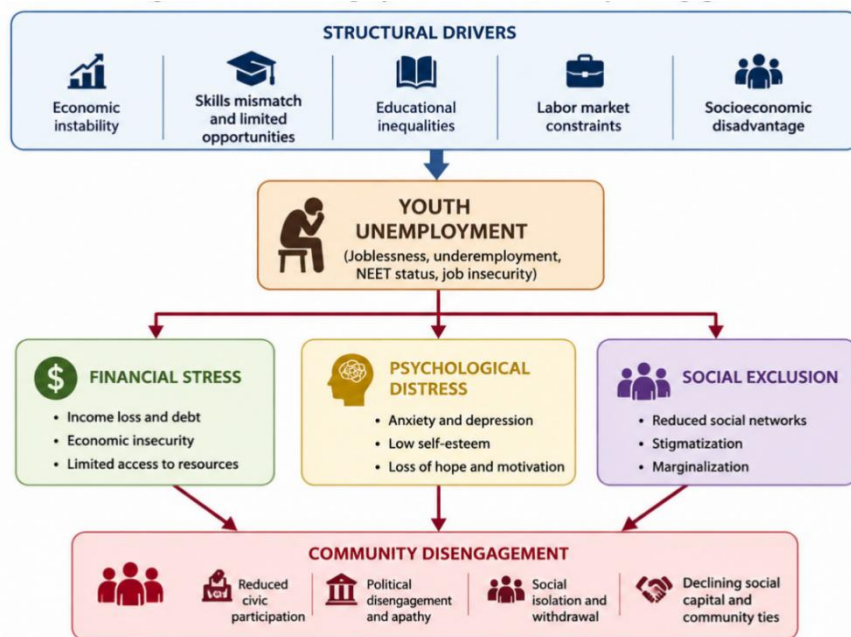


Figure 1. Youth Unemployment and Community Disengagement

Unemployment has negative social and civic effects, but also psychological and behavioural effects which can further drive community disengagement. Long-term unemployment can foster a sense of helplessness, hopelessness, anxiety and a loss of self-esteem. Not getting to a financial independent or not being able to perform a socially expected role can have a negative impact on identity formation during transition to adulthood. Those psychological challenges often make it less likely that people will sustain community engagement and have decreased confidence in future opportunities. The evidence from Ethiopia confirms that long-term unemployment among youth poses greater risks to their future aspirations and overall development, as their unemployment calls into question their personal development and sustainable livelihoods (Erkie et al., 2026). Similarly, research on disengaged youth shows that daily living becomes more inactive, with reduced social interaction, which further sustains a disengagement from community (Wallace, 2022). Unemployment

can also create behavioral outcomes when it is chronic and social exclusion and institutional support are also continuing. While the majority of youth who are not working do not engage in antisocial behavior, some might be at higher risk for substance abuse, delinquency, violent extremism and other high-risk activities when they are chronically marginalized. Unemployment is not always the only factor that affects these outcomes, but they are likely to be shaped by wider social and economic factors. The digital environment can contribute to radicalization if young people suffer from extended frustration, exclusion and diminished social integration as evidenced in Bangladesh, where there is a need to address both early risk and community-based support mechanisms (Ahmed, 2026). The results highlight the need to interpret community disengagement as a process that is influenced by multiple components of the relationship between unemployment, social relationships, psychological well-being, and institutional contexts. Community disengagement among the youth who are not in the labor force is a multifaceted and multifold phenomenon, which goes beyond community participation. It includes social isolation, drop in civic and political participation, diminished sense of community, negative psychology and behavioral effects that ultimately inhibit personal growth and social unity. It is important to comprehend the interconnected dimensions to grasp the impact of unemployment on social participation and to plan interventions that facilitate inclusion, resilience, and social engagement among youth.

5. Social Patterns Linking Youth Unemployment and Community Disengagement

There are social, economic and demographic factors that impact on the link between youth unemployment and community disengagement. The situation of unemployment is not the same for all young people; there are gender differences, differences based on educational level, place of residence, socioeconomic status, and national context. These variations affect employment prospects, as well as civic involvement, social integration and community involvement. The unemployment experiences of men and women are significant to be considered. Gender discrimination, traditional gender norms, and caregiving responsibilities are among the factors that hinder the access of young women, while increased social pressure on young men to secure economic independence is a major challenge. As a result, there is a gendered disparity in the impact of unemployment on participation in the community, as women's social norms may push them out of the public sphere, while the men who lose their jobs may be more likely to feel socially isolated and politically disengaged. Employment opportunities and participation in the community are also impacted by educational qualifications (Nhlenyama & Adewumi, 2026). A lack of education, school disaffection, and skills mismatches are among the risk factors related to unemployment and to long-term non-employment. The educational involvement of community and family environments is important (Gossner et al., 2025). Furthermore, graduate unemployment due to poor school-to-work transitions and fewer employment opportunities leads to the NEET status and social disengagement for extended periods (Lozano-Reina et al., 2026; Tayfur et al., 2022). Geographical variations also have an impact on youth employment. In general, rural areas offer less access to education and employment opportunities and are associated with weaker infrastructures, while urban areas offer better access to education and employment opportunities, but with high competition (Hed, 2026) (Table 3). Local resources and institutional support also play a role in community participation. This is supported by the Ethiopian evidence, which indicates that education, employment and access to community organisations play a significant role in improving young people's involvement in local development activities (Jekamo et al., 2025). Unemployment and disengagement are exacerbated by socioeconomic disadvantage. Youth from low-income communities experience a restricted access to quality education, financial resources and networks of professionals, which limits their job opportunities and civic engagement. Social exclusion is a problem for marginalized and immigrant youth (Agyare, 2025). Similarly, disparities in education and income impact political involvement, with more socially advantaged youth reporting higher levels of civic involvement than their less socially privileged peers (Wray-Lake & Abrams, 2020).

Table 3. Social Patterns Influencing Youth Unemployment and Community Disengagement

Social Pattern	Influence on Employment Outcomes	Consequences for Community Engagement	Evidence from Literature
Gender	Women face structural barriers; men experience stronger economic expectations	Different forms of civic withdrawal and social isolation	Nhlenyama & Adewumi (2026); Gossner et al. (2025)
Educational attainment	Lower education and skills mismatch increase unemployment risk	Reduced civic participation and greater likelihood of NEET status	Tayfur et al. (2022)
Urban–rural location	Rural youth experience limited labor markets and migration pressures	Unequal access to community organizations and development opportunities	Jekamo et al. (2025)

Socioeconomic background	Poverty limits access to education, networks, and employment	Greater social exclusion and lower political participation	Agyare (2025)
Institutional context	Welfare systems and labor market institutions shape employment transitions	Strong institutions encourage civic engagement and social integration	Attah & Oche (2024)

There are clear cross-country indications that institutional and economic environments strongly influence the relationship between young people and employment and participation in the community. Youth disengagement is typically lower in countries that have better welfare systems and school-to-work transition policies. Generally, youth disengagement is low in countries with more effective school-to-work transition policies and welfare support (Assmann & Broschinski, 2021). Persistent unemployment, poor labor markets and lack of social protection exacerbate low participation and social cohesion in many developing countries. Youth unemployment and community disengagement is socially patterned, rather than uniform. There is variation across gender, education, geography, socioeconomic status and institutional setting in the impact of unemployment on the participation of young people in the life of the community, and this requires specific and inclusive policy action.

6. Institutional Trust and Youth Unemployment

Institutional trust is a sense of trust in governments, education systems, labour market organizations and other public institutions that offer opportunities and social support for young people. Trust is built when institutions are seen as fair, transparent, and effective; however, when people have been out of work for an extended period of time, feel they lack opportunities, or are frustrated by the lack of effective public services, trust can erode, and they grow frustrated, alienated by the political process, and less engaged in the community. Opinion of employment and the effectiveness of public policies is highly correlated with trust in government. Lack of work after education which leads to low confidence in political institutions (Figure 2), can create a situation where young people will feel governments are not capable of dealing with the labour market, thus decreasing government confidence. Economic uncertainty and jobs scarcity contribute to political dissent, too (Aliakbar Hadaya, 2026). Likewise, low institutional credibility and the lack of citizen engagement in public programs are due to weak governance, corruption, and poor policy implementation (Kenku et al., 2026).

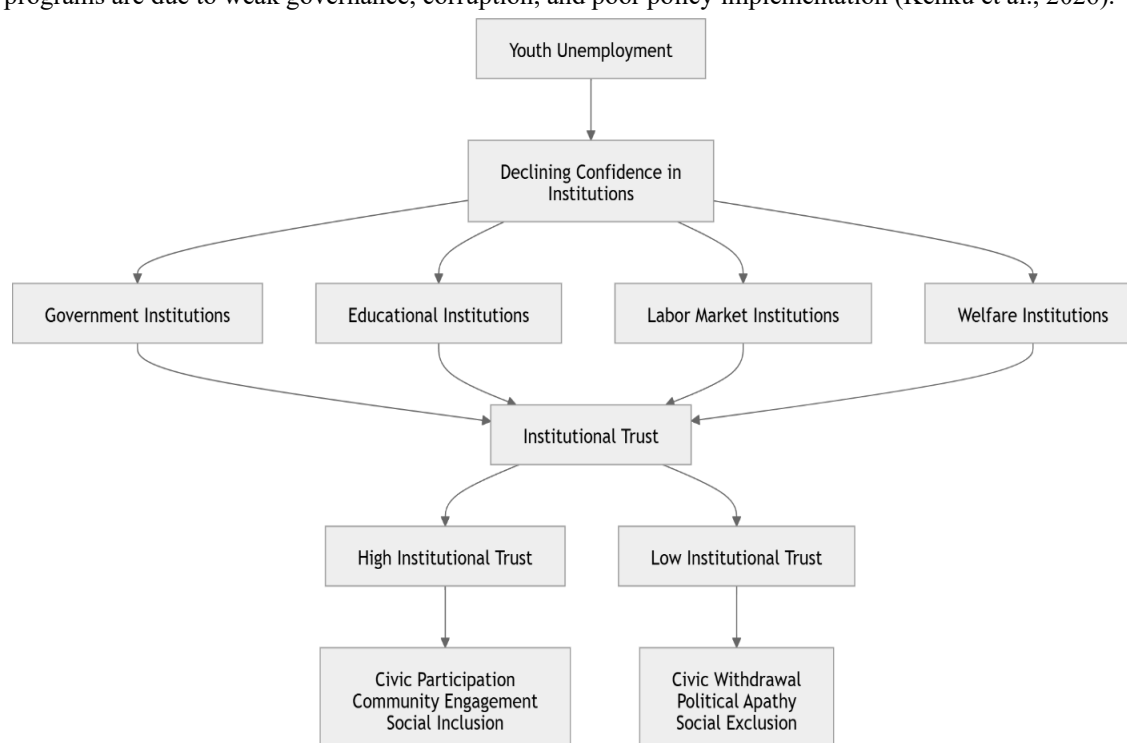


Figure 2. Institutional Trust as a Mediating Mechanism

Institutional trust can also be influenced by educational and labour market institutions. Though it is expected of schools and universities to equip youth with the skills needed for the workforce, they are failing to do so, with many young people leaving school without jobs, lacking the skills they need, and with limited career guidance. Similarly, trust in the labour market institutions is rooted in fair recruitment, good employment services and access to decent work. A lack of trust and confidence in democratic institutions can be caused by

experiences of insecure employment, discrimination and multiple job rejections (Cairns et al., 2020). These impacts can be mitigated by the presence of an active labor market policy and strong welfare system, which can provide employment support to individuals and help keep them confident in public institutions (Broka, 2026). Community engagement is also affected by institutional trust. Young people who have faith in public institutions are more likely to volunteer, belong to a community organization and feel involved in politics; those who do not feel the same way about public institutions are less likely to volunteer, belong to a community organization, and feel involved in politics (Table 4). Youth's perception of institutional responsiveness has a significant impact on their participation in public life (Claessens, 2025), and institutional credibility and governance quality also play a role in determining political participation (Mensah & Boateng, 2026).

Table 4. Institutional Trust and Its Relationship with Youth Employment and Community Engagement

Institution	Primary Function	Impact of Weak Institutional Trust	Potential Policy Response
Government	Employment policies, economic governance, social protection	Political dissatisfaction, declining civic participation	Transparent governance and youth-inclusive policymaking
Educational institutions	Human capital development and career preparation	Reduced confidence in education and graduate frustration	Curriculum reform, career guidance, stronger industry partnerships
Labor market institutions	Recruitment, job matching, vocational training	Perceived unfair recruitment, insecure employment, labor market exclusion	Merit-based recruitment and active labor market programs
Welfare institutions	Income support and employment assistance	Feelings of exclusion and declining confidence in public institutions	Expanded social protection and targeted youth support

Table 4. Institutional Trust and Its Relationship with Youth Employment and Community Engagement
Overall, institutional trust serves as a key link between youth unemployment and community engagement. Beyond creating employment opportunities, governments should strengthen transparency, accountability, education, and labor market institutions to rebuild trust and encourage young people's active participation in society.

7. Policy Interventions

Youth unemployment and community disengagement cannot be addressed with a single policy, and must be tackled through integrated policies that address issues of employment creation, skills development, community participation, and institutional strengthening. Young people's unemployment is driven by several economic and social issues and actions need to be taken to promote both labour market integration and social inclusion. Employment and labor market policies should help facilitate the transition from education to employment via apprenticeships, internships, wage subsidies, support for entrepreneurship and quality public employment services. This includes things that help to improve employability and to promote sustainable jobs. Entrepreneurship can also contribute to socioeconomic inclusion, especially in setting where there are fewer formal job opportunities available (Parvez et al., 2026). Furthermore, employment services need to be personalized, as young people not in employment have different needs and employment obstacles to overcome (Ellena et al., 2025). Education and skills development is also critical to improved employment outcomes. Improving vocational education, digital skills, apprenticeships and industry–education cooperation can minimise the skills gap and help prepare young people for new demands on the labour market. Transferable skills, e.g., communication, problem-solving, adaptability, should also be stressed, in addition to the technical skills (Table 5). Community based programs foster social inclusion through volunteerism, mentorship, leadership development and youth engagement in community programs. These programs play a role in decreasing social isolation, building community bonds and improving civic involvement. Community cohesion and youth participation can be further enhanced by involving local organisations with public policy

(Goldschmidt & Rad, 2026).

Table 5. Comparative Assessment of Policy Interventions for Addressing Youth Unemployment

Policy Intervention	Primary Objective	Expected Outcomes	Supporting Evidence
Active labor market policies	Improve school-to-work transition	Increased youth employment and employability	Ellena et al. (2025)
Entrepreneurship promotion	Encourage self-employment and enterprise development	Job creation, economic inclusion, community resilience	Parvez et al. (2026)
Education and skills development	Reduce skills mismatch	Improved workforce readiness and long-term employability	Ellena et al. (2025)
Community-based initiatives	Promote social inclusion and civic participation	Stronger social networks and reduced disengagement	Goldschmidt & Rad (2026)

The government and institutional reforms must prioritize transparent governance, coordinated employment strategies, and meaningful involvement of the youth in policy-making. Furthermore, global evidence indicates that the most effective strategies involve working together with the employer as well as employment support, education and social protection (Figure 3). Effective policy responses will need coordinated, inclusive strategies, capable of generating employment opportunities and developing skills, institutional support, and community engagement that will increase economic participation and long-term social inclusion for young people.

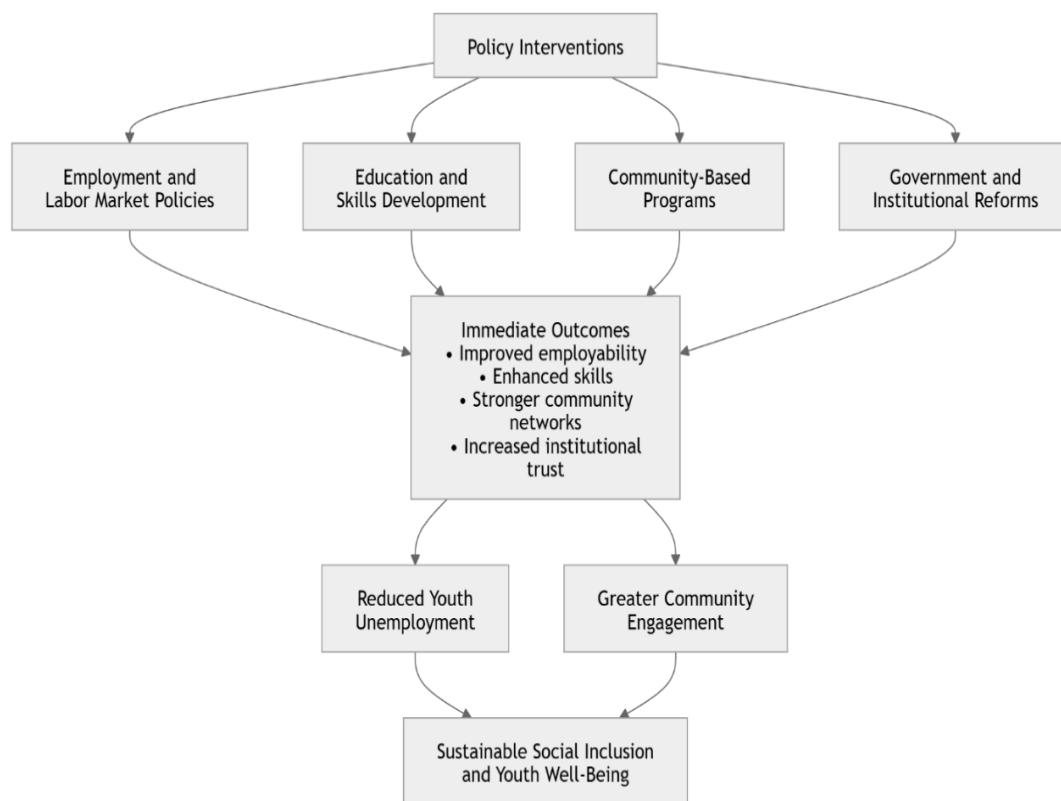


Figure 3. Integrated Policy Framework

8. Research Gaps and Future Directions

Youth unemployment has been the subject of considerable scholarly interest, but there are important gaps in the research surrounding the relationship between youth unemployment and community disengagement and institutional trust. The literature that is available focuses mainly on unemployment as an economic issue and the social, civic and psychological impacts are discussed separately. This disintegration hampers the ability to understand over time the effects of unemployment, diminished trust, and decreased community engagement.

Another weakness is the lack of longitudinal and comparative studies. The majority of studies use cross-sectional data, thus making it difficult to conclude that unemployment leads to disengagement or that socially disengaged young people are more likely to be unemployed. Additional longitudinal studies are required to follow employment and institutional trust, mental health, and civic engagement from various points during the youth transition process.

Previous studies also often take young people as an undifferentiated population. More consideration needs to be paid to differences in gender, education, socioeconomic status, disability, migration status and urban versus rural location. Further research is needed to explore the interplay of these factors and the experiences of unemployment and disengagement. Further research is also required in other settings, such as developing countries where informal employment, social protection measures and institutional capacity are less developed, and may result in different outcomes compared to high-income countries. New research areas are related to the impact of digital platforms, digital work, artificial intelligence and gig economy on youth employment and social participation. While digital spaces can offer new opportunities to work and participate in civic life, they can also help to foster insecurity, exclusion, and misinformation. There is therefore a need for future research to evaluate the pros and cons of digital labour markets and online forms of community participation.

More research is needed to assess the sustainability of skills-based and employment programs and community-based interventions. Research must go beyond simply measuring job placement to measuring outcomes like job quality, trust in institutions, social inclusion, civic participation, and psychological well-being. Mixed method and participatory research with young people in the research process would also give a better understanding of their lived experiences. In general, future studies must be interdisciplinary, comparative and longitudinal. There is a need to pay more attention to marginalized youth, institutional mechanisms, job quality and the economic and social impacts of policy interventions overall. This would give a more solid base for policies tackling unemployment and community disengagement.

9. Conclusion

Youth unemployment is more than just the lack of job opportunities, it is a multi-faceted phenomenon that has social, economic and institutional implications. The review shows how chronic unemployment can lead to community disengagement, evidenced by lower civic involvement, less social engagement and trust in institutions. The evidence also shows that these outcomes do not occur equally and that a range of factors, including gender, education, socioeconomic status, geographic location and the national institutional context, may affect these outcomes. All these elements contribute to the opportunities of youth for employment, social inclusion and active citizenship. An additional finding of the review is the role of institutional trust in the link between unemployment and community involvement. The trust in governments, education systems and labour market institutions can shape whether young people continue to participate in society, or their involvement in social and political life grows more marginalised. Similarly, policy measures are most likely to be effective if they encompass employment generation, skill upgrading, community-based strategies and institutional reforms aimed at enhancing transparency and accountability and access to opportunities. An integrated and inclusive approach is thus more likely to foster sustainable employment and enhance social cohesion and community involvement. While the study of youth unemployment has increased over the last decade, there are significant gaps in the knowledge of the long-term social impacts of youth unemployment and the pathway between unemployment, institutional trust and community disengagement. Longitudinal, comparative and interdisciplinary studies and increased attention to marginalized youth and different socio-economic environments are needed in future research. This evidence will help inform the creation of more responsive and equitable policies. To conclude, there is a need to address the challenge of youth unemployment beyond mere expansion of employment opportunities. Sustainable solutions should also build institutional trust, increase community involvement and decrease structural inequalities that prevent young people from accessing the economic and social life. Combining economic, educational and social policies offers governments and other stakeholders a way to better support the transition of youth into productive employment and active citizenship to strengthen the capacity of societies to be more inclusive and resilient.

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