Profiling Graduates at Risk: Evidence from the National Graduate Tracking Survey in Cyprus

Terpsa Constantinidou[1], Alexandra Petridou[1], Eva Tsouparopoulou[2], Maria Symeonaki[2]
[1]Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth
1434 Nicosia, Cyprus
t.constantinidou@moec.gov.cy; apetridou@moec.gov.cy
[2]Department of Social Policy/Panteion University of Social and Political Science
Syggrou 136, Athens, Greece
etsouparopoulou@panteion.gr; msymeon@panteion.gr

Extended Abstract

The transition from higher education to the workforce represents a critical point for graduates, marking the beginning of their professional journey. However, this transition involves challenges, and for some graduates, the "successful" path to meaningful employment may be fraught with obstacles. The first wave of the National Graduate Tracking Survey conducted in Cyprus as part of the Eurograduate 2022 survey provided a comprehensive examination of the experiences and outcomes of recent graduates, shedding light on the factors that may place them at risk during this transitional period.

One of the key objectives of the present paper is to profile graduates who are deemed to be at risk, based on various indicators and characteristics. Graduates deemed at risk are identified through the following classifications: unemployed, experiencing vertical mismatch, and facing double mismatch (both vertical and horizontal). Vertical mismatch and field of study mismatch (horizontal mismatch) represent two prevalent forms of misalignment between the education system and the labour market. Vertical mismatch occurs when the attained level of education differs from the level required for a specific job. Horizontal mismatch arises when the type or field of education is incongruent with the field necessary for effective job performance ([1], [2], [3], [4], [5], [6], [8] and [9]). More specifically we follow the definition used in [7] where graduates at risk are categorised as follows:

- In a *very weak position* as either being unemployed or being employed with a double mismatch. Hence, this indicates inability to use the competencies acquired in higher education in the labour market, or
- In a *weak position* as working in a job that is below one's own educational level, as this will restrict the level to which one can use the acquired higher education competencies.

Through rigorous statistical data analysis (multinomial regression and classification trees) concerning 1,438 graduates, the paper identifies patterns and trends that highlight the vulnerabilities faced by certain segments of the graduate population. These vulnerabilities may include difficulties in securing stable employment, encountering mismatches between their skills and the demands of the labour market, or facing barriers related to socioeconomic background or demographic characteristics. Among the factors that are examined are socio-demographic and educational characteristics such as gender, age, academic background, level of studies (Diploma, Master and Bachelor), fields of study and having an international experience of studying abroad. Furthermore, the paper explores a broader context in which these challenges arise, considering intergenerational matters and more specifically the parental educational attainment and its effect on increasing or decreasing the likelihood of being at risk.

The survey provides crucial insights into factors shaping graduate risk profiles, aiding policymakers, educators, and stakeholders in navigating the education-to-employment transition. Understanding challenges faced by at-risk graduates is vital for crafting tailored interventions and support systems. Proactive measures are advocated to mitigate risks during the

transition, laying a foundation for evidence-based policymaking and targeted interventions to promote successful outcomes for all graduates.

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