

In contemporary Croatia and Slovenia, the expectations placed upon young people by older generations and wider society are deeply embedded within shifting economic, cultural, and policy landscapes. These expectations encompass various life domains, including education, employment, housing, family formation, and intergenerational care. While aspirations among youth remain notably high, structural inequalities, labour market transformations, and changing cultural norms have significantly complicated the trajectories traditionally associated with the transition to adulthood. What was once perceived as a linear and predictable progression, from education to stable employment, followed by independent living and family formation, is increasingly fragmented and uncertain.

Educational expectations have become increasingly central to societal narratives surrounding youth success. In Croatia and Slovenia, we can observe a trend noted across Europe, with a significant increase in the normative assumption that young people will pursue higher education, regardless of parental education or socio-economic background (Brooks et al., 2022). This widespread emphasis on educational attainment reflects broader global trends linked to the expansion of tertiary education and the perceived necessity of credentials for labour market competitiveness (Reay et al., 2005). Despite this trend, the pathways to higher education are not equally accessible. Families with limited educational capital often lack the navigational knowledge to support their children's academic progress, leading to mismatches between aspirations and realistic educational trajectories (Ball et al., 2002). Furthermore, while parental expectations are typically high, especially among middle-class families, research indicates that in earlier cohorts these expectations may have exceeded those of their children, though this intergenerational discrepancy appears to be narrowing over time (Buchmann & Dalton, 2002). For working-class families, high aspirations may coexist with structural constraints that impede educational mobility, such as limited financial resources or poor institutional support (Devine, 2004).

Successful placement on the labour market, following the completion of formal education, remains a cornerstone of societal expectations regarding the transition to adulthood. However, the structural realities of contemporary labour markets often present obstacles to these ambitions. The post-socialist transition, globalisation, and neoliberal economic reforms have all contributed to labour market instability, with young people disproportionately affected by precarious employment,