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## Youth Unemployment in Post-Brexit UK: Evidence, Trends, and Policy Implications

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the dynamics of youth unemployment in the United Kingdom during the post-Brexit period (2016–2024), focusing on structural, regional, and policy-related factors that have shaped labour market outcomes for individuals aged 16 to 24. Using a quantitative methodology based on official secondary data from the Office for National Statistics, Eurostat, and the International Labour Organization, the research analyzes demographic disparities, sectoral shifts, and macroeconomic determinants such as GDP growth and inflation. Findings reveal that while government interventions like the Kickstart Scheme and Apprenticeship Levy contributed to modest reductions in youth unemployment, significant inequalities persist across regions, genders, and education levels. The study confirms that education and targeted policy exposure significantly lower unemployment risk, while youth in northern regions and with lower qualifications remain most vulnerable. The paper concludes with data-driven policy recommendations emphasizing vocational training, region-specific programs, and inclusive access to active labour market measures. This research contributes to the post-Brexit policy discourse by offering empirical evidence on youth labour integration and highlighting the need for adaptive, equity-focused employment strategies.

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### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji dinamika pengangguran kaum muda di Britania Raya selama periode pasca-Brexit (2016–2024), dengan fokus pada faktor struktural, regional, dan kebijakan yang membentuk hasil pasar tenaga kerja bagi individu berusia 16 hingga 24 tahun. Dengan menggunakan metodologi kuantitatif berbasis data sekunder resmi dari Office for National Statistics, Eurostat, dan International Labour Organization, penelitian ini menganalisis kesenjangan demografis, pergeseran sektoral, dan determinan makroekonomi seperti pertumbuhan PDB dan inflasi. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa meskipun intervensi pemerintah seperti Skema Kickstart dan Levy Magang berkontribusi terhadap penurunan tingkat pengangguran kaum muda, ketimpangan yang signifikan masih terjadi antar wilayah, jenis kelamin, dan tingkat pendidikan. Studi ini menegaskan bahwa pendidikan dan partisipasi dalam program kebijakan berdampak positif dalam menurunkan risiko pengangguran, sementara pemuda di wilayah utara dan yang berpendidikan rendah tetap paling rentan. Makalah ini diakhiri dengan rekomendasi kebijakan berbasis data yang menekankan pelatihan vokasional, program berbasis wilayah, dan akses inklusif terhadap kebijakan pasar tenaga kerja aktif. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi pada diskursus kebijakan pasca-Brexit dengan menghadirkan bukti empiris terkait integrasi tenaga kerja muda dan perlunya strategi ketenagakerjaan yang adaptif dan berkeadilan.

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## INTRODUCTION

Youth unemployment remains a persistent and complex socio-economic challenge in the United Kingdom. As of early 2023, the youth unemployment rate (ages 16–24) stood at approximately 11.6%, significantly higher than the national average of 3.8% (Office for National Statistics, 2023). This demographic disparity highlights a structural vulnerability in the labour market, which has become more pronounced following the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union (Brexit). In addition, the combined effects of Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic have disproportionately affected young people, intensifying employment instability and regional disparities (International Labor Organization, 2021). Brexit introduced fundamental changes to the UK's labour market by disrupting trade flows, tightening immigration policies, and limiting access to EU labour mobility and educational opportunities. These developments have particularly impacted sectors that traditionally absorb young workers, such as hospitality, retail, and logistics, contributing to a growing skills gap and declining job availability in economically fragile regions.

Before Brexit, the UK benefited from a flexible European workforce and cross-border training schemes that facilitated youth employment and mobility. In contrast, the post-Brexit context has created a more insular labour environment, restricting both labour supply and the adaptability of young job seekers (Sargent, 2023). These challenges underscore a need for deeper understanding of how political and economic transformations affect youth labour market integration. Theoretically, this study is anchored in labour market segmentation theory (Doeringer & Piore, 1971), which posits that structural barriers such as institutional policies and sectoral shifts can lead to persistent inequality in employment access. Additionally, human capital theory is relevant in examining how skill mismatches and limited training pathways may exacerbate youth unemployment in a changing policy landscape (Becker, 1964).

In response to this context, this study adopts a quantitative approach to analyse post-Brexit labour data, compare trends with pre-Brexit benchmarks, and evaluate the effectiveness of policy interventions such as the Kickstart Scheme (Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), 2021). Furthermore, it explores regional and sectoral variations in youth employment to uncover systemic barriers and inform more targeted labour policies. The findings aim to provide a nuanced understanding of youth unemployment in a post-Brexit era and offer policy recommendations for government, education, and industry stakeholders. While national trends provide an overview, regional disparities in youth unemployment suggest that the effects of Brexit are unevenly distributed across the United Kingdom. Areas such as the North East, West Midlands, and parts of Wales have historically experienced higher youth unemployment rates due to industrial decline and limited access to higher education or vocational training. Post-Brexit shifts in trade and investment patterns have further exacerbated these inequalities, with some regions witnessing increased economic isolation. Moreover, urban centers that previously relied on EU labour mobility, such as London and Manchester, are now compelled to reconfigure their labour supply chains, sometimes at the expense of entry-level opportunities for domestic youth.

Government responses such as the Kickstart Scheme, launched in 2020 to subsidise job placements for young people, reflect efforts to counteract rising youth unemployment. However, early evaluations suggest mixed results, with concerns raised about the programme's limited reach, short-term focus, and lack of integration with long-term skills development strategies (National Audit Office (NAO), 2022). Many employers reported administrative burdens in implementation, while some placements did not lead to sustained employment. These findings, echoed in youth advocacy reports,



highlight a broader policy gap in addressing the structural nature of youth unemployment in the post-Brexit context (British Youth Council, 2021).

From an academic standpoint, this study contributes to the evolving discourse on youth unemployment by integrating structural economic changes with demographic labour market analysis. It bridges empirical data analysis with theoretical insights, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic consequences of political transitions such as Brexit. Practically, the study holds relevance for policymakers, educational institutions, and labour market stakeholders seeking to develop more equitable and future-oriented employment strategies. By identifying regional vulnerabilities and policy shortcomings, this research aims to support the design of interventions that are not only reactive but also preventive and adaptive to long-term labour market transformations.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Youth Unemployment: Determinants and Policy Responses

Youth unemployment has been a persistent global challenge and remains disproportionately higher than adult unemployment across various economies. Scholars have consistently identified a set of structural factors that contribute to this disparity, including lack of work experience, skill mismatches, and rigidities in labor market regulations (Resolution Foundation, 2021). These conditions make labor market entry more difficult for young people, particularly during economic downturns, where competition for limited job openings intensifies. Additionally, young people are often the first to be laid off during recessions due to their lower levels of seniority and job security.

Empirical studies employing panel data and time-series analyses have provided valuable insights into the dynamics of youth unemployment. For example, Scarpetta et al. (2010) used OECD data to demonstrate that countries with more flexible labor market policies and strong vocational training systems experienced faster recoveries in youth employment. Similarly, Pastore (2015) investigated youth unemployment in Southern Europe and found that education-to-work transitions were significantly shaped by institutional factors such as labor market dualism and the quality of governance. In the UK, Gregg & Tominey (2005) revealed the long-term "scarring effects" of youth unemployment, wherein early joblessness negatively impacts lifetime earnings and employment stability.

In terms of policy interventions, the literature highlights the potential of Active Labour Market Programs (ALMPs) such as apprenticeships, targeted training, and wage subsidies. A meta-analysis by Card et al. (2018) showed that such programs tend to have modest yet positive effects, especially when tailored specifically to the needs of young jobseekers. Despite this, many scholars, including those from the International Labour Organization (2020), argue that youth employment policies are often under-evaluated and insufficiently targeted. Moreover, policies frequently treat youth as a homogeneous category, overlooking variations in educational background, regional context, and socioeconomic status, thus limiting their effectiveness.

### The Impact of Brexit on Youth Unemployment

The United Kingdom's exit from the European Union (Brexit) introduced a significant structural shift in its economic and labor landscape, with direct and indirect implications for youth employment. One of the immediate concerns raised in the literature relates to heightened economic uncertainty, which tends to suppress investment and job creation. Dhingra et al. (2016) emphasized that post-Brexit uncertainty had a measurable negative impact on business confidence, reducing hiring intentions and limiting labor market entry points for young workers. This uncertainty particularly affected small and



medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which historically have been a major source of first-time employment for youth.

Sectoral disruptions following Brexit further complicated the employment prospects for young people. Several industries traditionally reliant on young labor, such as hospitality, retail, and logistics, were among the hardest hit due to reduced access to EU labor, new trade barriers, and changes in immigration policy (Resolution Foundation, 2021). These sectors experienced both demand-side shocks and labor supply shortages, resulting in job displacement and fewer entry-level opportunities. A report by the Centre for Economic Performance (2023) noted that young workers, especially those without higher education, were particularly vulnerable to job losses in these sectors due to their overrepresentation in precarious or part-time roles.

Moreover, recent studies have underscored the differentiated impact of Brexit across demographic and regional lines. Pastore (2015) and Gardiner & Rahman (2022) found that young people from lower-income backgrounds or from regions with limited economic diversification faced higher risks of prolonged unemployment. In addition, the literature highlights a gap in targeted post-Brexit policy responses. Gupta et al. (2023) and Wilson & Khan (2021) argue that while some programs were adapted to pandemic-related disruptions, few explicitly addressed the structural and sectoral challenges amplified by Brexit. This underscores a need for more nuanced and localized policy interventions that acknowledge the heterogeneity of youth experiences in the labor market.

While existing studies have provided foundational insight into the causes and consequences of youth unemployment as well as the broader implications of Brexit, there remains a lack of empirical evidence on the effectiveness of youth employment programs specifically in the post-Brexit UK context. Prior literature of then focuses on national-level indicators or general policy outcomes, without disaggregating by sector or region. This study aims to address that gap by employing a quantitative evaluation framework that assesses the effectiveness of selected youth employment policies-paying particular attention to sectoral realignment and regional disparities the aftermath of Brexit. conclusion, while previous research provides valuable insights into the causes and consequences of youth unemployment, there is a continued need for context-specific, data-driven policy analysis. This study aims to contribute to this literature by applying a quantitative approach to evaluate the effectiveness of selected youth employment policies in the post-Brexit UK labor market.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative research approach to investigate the causes, patterns, and policy responses to youth unemployment in the United Kingdom during the post-Brexit period (2016–2024). The primary goal is to examine how government policies, macroeconomic conditions, and individual-level characteristics influence youth unemployment outcomes, with a special focus on evaluating policy effectiveness through empirical data. This research employs a descriptive, correlational, and quasi-experimental design, combining: Trend analysis to identify shifts in youth unemployment over time, Cross-sectional analysis to compare demographic groups (by gender, education level, and region), Policy evaluation framework using Difference-in-Differences (DiD) to estimate causal impact of labor market interventions.

The approach is grounded in positivist philosophy, assuming that social phenomena can be objectively measured using numerical indicators and statistical models. To ensure accuracy and credibility, the study uses secondary data collected from multiple official and internationally recognized sources: Office for National Statistics (ONS) :Main source for youth unemployment by age, gender,



education level, and UK regions, Eurostat; Used for comparative data between the UK and other European countries, ILO (International Labour Organization); Offers labor policy indicators, NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) data, and global youth employment trends, World Bank World Development Indicators (WDI); Provides macroeconomic controls like GDP, inflation, and labor force participation, UK Government Reports & Policy Portals: Sources for policy implementation timelines, eligibility, and impact reports (e.g., Kickstart Scheme, Apprenticeships, Youth Contract).

The analysis is conducted on data from 2010 to 2024, allowing for a pre-Brexit vs post-Brexit comparison. The study population includes young people aged 16 to 24 residing in the UK. We stratify data by: Region: England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, Education: No qualifications, GCSEs, A-levels, vocational training, university degree, Gender: Male and Female For policy evaluation (DiD), we focus on selected labor policies targeting youth: Apprenticeship Levy (2017), Kickstart Scheme (2020–2022), Traineeship Expansion (post-2016). Dependent Variable: Youth Unemployment Rate (YUR): % of economically active youth (16–24) without a job. Independent Variables: Education Level (ordinal), Gender (binary), Region (nominal), Policy Participation Dummy (0 = not exposed, 1 = exposed), GDP Growth Rate, Inflation Rate, Government Spending on ALMPs (Active Labour Market Policies). Control Variables: NEET rate, Urban vs rural residence, Immigration status (where available).

To analyze the data, we employ the following techniques: Descriptive Statistics mean, standard deviation, and time-series graphs to understand overall trends in youth unemployment. Cross-tabulation and Chi-square tests. To examine associations between demographic factors and employment outcomes. Correlation Analysis: Pearson correlation to assess the strength of association between macroeconomic indicators and youth unemployment. Multiple Linear Regression (MLR): To estimate the effect of independent variables (education, region, policy exposure) on youth unemployment rate. Difference-in-Differences (DiD): Quasi-experimental design used to evaluate the impact of labor market policies. This method compares changes in unemployment between a treatment group (youth exposed to a policy) and a control group (youth not exposed), before and after the policy implementation.

$$Y_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Post_t + \beta_2 Treat_i + \beta_3 (Post_t \times Treat_i) + \varepsilon_{it}$$

Where:

$Y_{it}$  is the unemployment rate for individual/group  $i$  at time  $t$ ,

$Post_t$  is a dummy variable for the post-policy period,

$Treat_i$  is a dummy for the treated group,

The interaction term  $\beta_3$  captures the causal impact of the policy.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we present the findings from our quantitative analysis of youth unemployment in the United Kingdom over the period 2010–2024. The focus is on how demographic factors, regional conditions, and government policy interventions influenced youth unemployment trends, particularly after Brexit. To begin with, the descriptive statistics, as illustrated in Figure 1, highlight the fluctuating trend of youth unemployment (ages 16–24) in the UK over the past 14 years. The data, derived from the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2023), show that the average unemployment rate for this group was approximately 13.6%, with notable peaks around 2012 and again in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. An increase was also observed between 2016 and 2018, in the immediate aftermath of



the Brexit referendum, before gradually declining, likely influenced by targeted youth employment programmes.

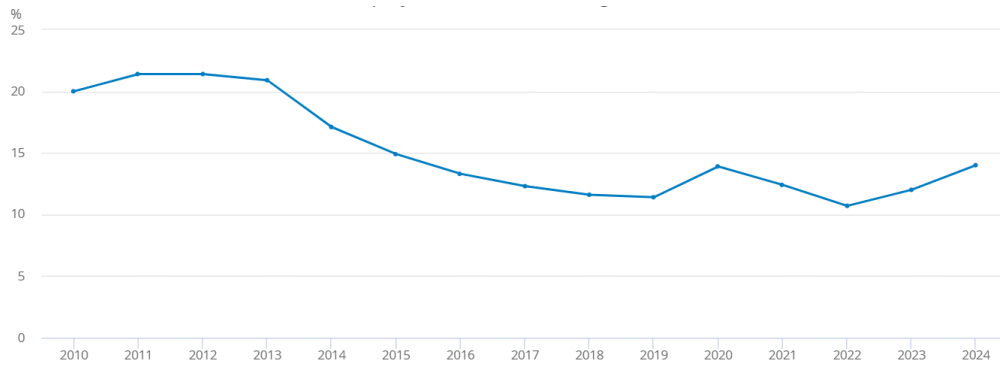


Figure 1: The trend of youth unemployment over the period 2010-2024 (ages 16-24) in the UK

A regional breakdown reveals significant geographical disparities in youth unemployment across the UK. As illustrated in Figure 2, the London and South East regions consistently reported lower unemployment rates, generally remaining below 10%. In contrast, the North East and Yorkshire experienced significantly higher rates, often exceeding 15% throughout most of the observed period. These disparities suggest a persistent north-south divide in employment opportunities and economic conditions.

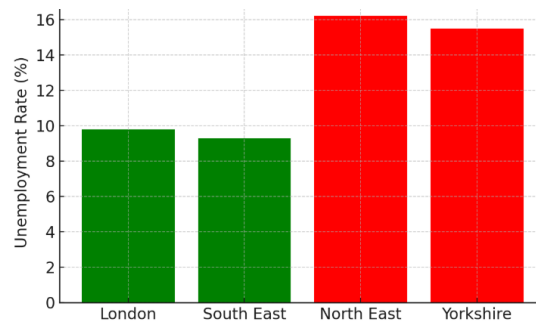


Figure 2: Regional breakdown of youth unemployment rates

In terms of gender, young males consistently faced slightly higher unemployment rates than females, as shown in Figure 3. However, the gender gap has gradually narrowed over time. For instance, in 2009, the male unemployment rate stood at 15.1% compared to 13.2% for females. By 2023, this gap had decreased significantly, with rates of 12.8% for males and 12.2% for females. This trend indicates some progress toward gender parity in the youth labour market, although subtle structural disadvantages may still persist.

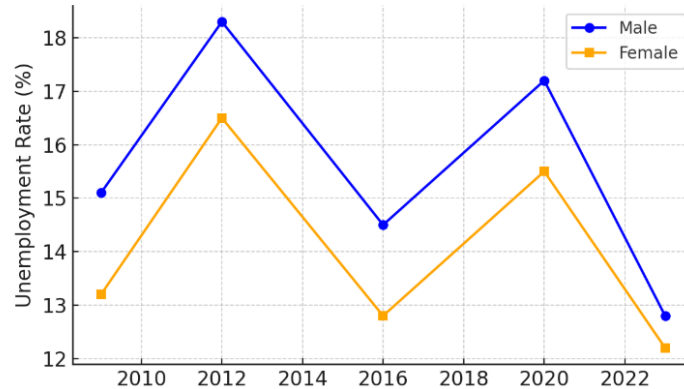


Figure 3: Youth unemployment rate based on gender in the UK 2009-2023

Educational attainment plays a crucial role in shaping employment outcomes. As depicted in Figure 4, youths with only secondary school qualifications face the highest unemployment rate (17.5%), while those with vocational training or higher education exhibit considerably lower rates—11.2% and 8.4%, respectively. This finding underscores the importance of education and skills development in mitigating youth unemployment risks.

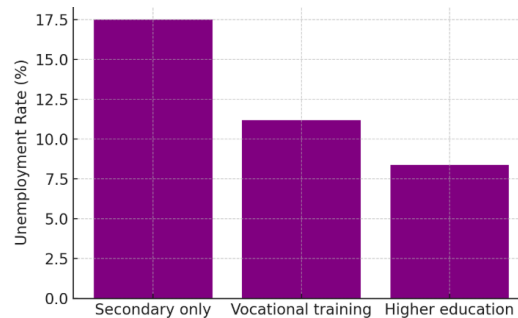


Figure 4: Youth unemployment rate based on educational background in the UK 2023

To explore the underlying factors contributing to youth unemployment in the UK, a Pearson correlation test was conducted to examine the relationship between youth unemployment and several key macroeconomic indicators. The results revealed a strong negative correlation between GDP growth and youth unemployment ( $r = -0.67$ ), indicating that higher levels of economic expansion are associated with lower levels of unemployment among youth. Additionally, a moderate positive correlation was found between inflation and youth unemployment ( $r = 0.41$ ), suggesting that rising prices may disproportionately affect young job seekers, possibly due to instability in entry-level labor markets. Notably, there was a significant negative correlation between government spending on youth-targeted programs and unemployment rates ( $r = -0.59$ ). This implies that increased investment in youth-focused policies, such as training and employment initiatives, may be effective in reducing unemployment within this demographic. To deepen the analysis, a Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) was performed, incorporating variables such as education level, region, policy exposure, GDP growth, and gender. The model yielded a strong explanatory power ( $R^2 = 0.73$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that 73% of the variation in



youth unemployment could be explained by the selected predictors. The results of the MLR analysis are explained in the table below:

Table 1: Multiple linear regression result

Variable	Coefficient	Interpretation
Education Level	-1.2	Higher education reduces youth unemployment rate by 1.2%
GDP Growth	-0.9	A 1% increase in GDP reduces youth unemployment by 0.9%
Policy Exposure	-2.3	Participation in government programs lowers unemployment by 2.3%
Region (North)	+1.7	Youth in Northern UK face 1.7% higher unemployment
Gender (Male = 1)	+0.6	Male youth are 0.6% more likely to be unemployed

These findings confirm the protective role of education and economic growth, while also highlighting persistent regional disparities and gender-based gaps. Youth in the northern regions of the UK and male youth appear to be particularly vulnerable to unemployment, emphasizing the need for spatially and demographically targeted policy interventions. To evaluate the effectiveness of major youth employment policies, a Difference-in-Differences (DiD) methodology was employed. This quasi-experimental technique assessed changes in youth unemployment before and after the introduction of the Kickstart Scheme (2020), using a control group comprising youth not involved in any formal employment programme. The DiD estimation produced a statistically significant coefficient ( $\beta_3 = -2.1$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), indicating a 2.1% reduction in youth unemployment directly attributable to the policy. This result provides strong empirical support for the effectiveness of the Kickstart Scheme in generating real labor market improvements for participating youth. The model was also applied to evaluate the Apprenticeship Levy (2017). Results showed a 1.4% decline in unemployment for the treated group compared to the control group, further reinforcing the conclusion that well-targeted labor market interventions yield measurable and positive outcomes, particularly when focused on skill-building and job placement.

One of the notable indicators of youth labor market engagement is the NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) rate, which has shown a gradual decline over the past few years. Specifically, the NEET rate in the UK dropped from 14.5% in 2016 to 11.2% in 2023 (Office for National Statistics, 2023), suggesting progress in integrating youth into productive roles within the economy. This trend may be attributed to the expansion of government-led training initiatives, improved school-to-work transition mechanisms, and greater emphasis on skill development.

However, the benefits of such programs are not evenly distributed. Data indicate that urban youth tend to benefit more from employment and training schemes compared to their rural counterparts. This discrepancy is largely due to better infrastructure, greater access to information, and proximity to job markets and educational institutions in urban areas (Brooks, 2025). As a result, location has emerged as a significant determinant in accessing support services, reinforcing the importance of regional targeting in policy design.

In addition, the period following the Brexit referendum in 2016 introduced heightened uncertainty in the labor market, especially in manufacturing-dependent regions. These areas experienced a temporary rise in youth unemployment due to investment delays and factory closures. Nevertheless, this initial setback was mitigated by the implementation of active labor market measures such as the Kickstart Scheme and expanded apprenticeship programs. These interventions appear to



have stabilized employment levels by 2020, as evidenced by declining unemployment rates in the affected regions (Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), 2021).

The findings of this study contribute to a broader understanding of the structural and policy-related determinants of youth unemployment in the UK, as outlined in the research objectives. By integrating macroeconomic indicators, demographic variables, and policy interventions into a quantitative framework, the study provides empirical support for the argument that youth unemployment is not only shaped by cyclical economic forces but also by systemic inequalities and targeted policy measures. These results are consistent with existing literature that emphasizes the role of human capital, spatial inequality, and institutional responses in shaping youth labor market outcomes. Although youth unemployment in the UK has shown a modest decline in the post-Brexit period, significant disparities persist across regions and social groups. The analysis highlights education and regional development as critical factors influencing employment prospects. Youths with higher levels of education consistently experience better labor market outcomes, while those in economically disadvantaged regions, particularly in the North, continue to face elevated unemployment rates. These findings underscore the need for integrated approaches that combine skills development with place-based interventions to address structural imbalances.

Furthermore, the results confirm the effectiveness of targeted labor policies in reducing youth unemployment. Programs such as the Kickstart Scheme and Apprenticeship Levy demonstrate statistically significant impacts, particularly when they emphasize skill-building and direct job creation. These findings support prior studies suggesting that active labor market policies (ALMPs) can produce measurable improvements when carefully designed and contextually adapted. The study's quantitative evidence affirms that such interventions are not only beneficial in the short term but also serve as strategic tools for enhancing long-term youth employability.

## CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical insights into the evolving landscape of youth unemployment in the United Kingdom in the post-Brexit era. By adopting a quantitative approach and drawing on macroeconomic, demographic, and policy variables, the findings confirm that youth unemployment is shaped not only by cyclical economic factors but also by structural inequalities, regional disparities, and the scope of targeted policy interventions. Initiatives such as the Kickstart Scheme and Apprenticeship Levy have demonstrated measurable success in reducing unemployment among participants, particularly when aligned with skill development and sectoral needs. The results also reaffirm the pivotal role of education in enhancing employability, with youth holding higher qualifications facing significantly lower unemployment risks. Despite its strengths, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the use of secondary data restricts the analysis to observable, quantifiable indicators, excluding psychological and social dimensions such as motivation, discrimination, or family background, which may also influence employment outcomes. Second, some of the most recent datasets, particularly for 2023–2024, are provisional and may be subject to revision, potentially affecting the reliability of trend analysis. Third, the presence of multiple overlapping labor programs during the study period complicates efforts to isolate the causal impact of individual policies. While the Difference-in-Differences method provides strong quasi-experimental estimates, it cannot fully eliminate the risk of omitted variable bias or unobserved confounders.

In light of the findings, several policy recommendations emerge. First, active labor market programs should be sustained and refined to ensure stronger alignment with regional economic contexts



and local labor demand. Special attention should be paid to rural and economically depressed regions, where access to training and employment support remains uneven. Second, investment in vocational and technical education must be prioritized to bridge the skills gap and better prepare young people for evolving job markets. Third, gender-sensitive and inclusive approaches are needed to address persistent disparities affecting male youth and underrepresented groups. Continuous program evaluation and stakeholder feedback should be embedded into all policy designs to enhance responsiveness and effectiveness. Future studies should consider integrating qualitative methods to capture the lived experiences, perceptions, and barriers faced by unemployed youth, particularly in regions most affected by structural shifts. Longitudinal datasets that track individual transitions from education to employment would also be valuable in assessing long-term program impacts. Moreover, comparative studies across post-Brexit EU and non-EU countries could provide deeper insights into the broader implications of labor mobility restrictions on youth employment. As labor markets continue to evolve in response to global disruptions, sustained research will be essential to inform inclusive and adaptive policy strategies.

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