

COVID generation faces 'dark age' of low social mobility—young Britons at risk of long-term damage to future life

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The unprecedented economic and educational shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic could inflict long-term damage to young people's prospects in

life, a new study finds.

According to academics from the University of Exeter and the LSE, the 'COVID generation' – young Britons currently under the age of 25—face declining [social mobility](#) unless bold moves are made to create a fairer [society](#)—including a job guarantee scheme for those facing long-term unemployment and catch-up tutoring for disadvantaged children.

The new report—COVID-19 and Social Mobility—points out that before the crisis, [younger generations](#) were already facing declining 'absolute mobility': falling real wages, fewer opportunities and stagnant or declining living standards.

Now that the crisis has drastically worsened economic and education inequality, [young people](#) are even less likely to fare better than past generations, less likely to climb the income ladder and less likely to fulfil their potential regardless of their background. There is a genuine concern that these inequalities could become entrenched for some time.

But, the authors say, rebuilding after the pandemic also offers an opportunity to give serious consideration to radical policies that will create a more mobile society and a better functioning economy.

The report, published by the LSE's Centre for Economic Performance (CEP), calls for:

- The introduction of job guarantees for people who are unemployed for more than six or 12 months.
- A one-off progressive wealth tax on the net worth of the top 1% of richest individuals.
- Living wages for key workers.
- A national tutoring service, with undergraduates and graduates helping children to catch up during the next school year.

- A dual approach to upper secondary schools, with a credible vocational stream alongside current academic routes.
- Random allocation for school and university admissions, where candidates have met a threshold of selection criteria.

Professor Lee Elliot Major, from the University of Exeter, co-author of the report, said: "There are serious concerns that the pandemic will plunge the COVID-19 generation into a dark age of declining social mobility because of rising economic and educational inequalities. The effects of the crisis and lockdown vary across age groups: while the coronavirus health shock has particularly affected the over-60s, the longer-term economic and social damage is likely to hit young people disproportionately, especially the under-25s.

"The growing divides in our society were apparent before the crisis. But, as social movements following the Second World War demonstrate, it is possible that fairer and more collective societies can emerge from hard times."

CEP's director Professor Stephen Machin, co-author of the report, said: "We need to develop bold policies for now and the longer term to ensure the [economic recovery](#) also creates a more socially mobile society that is fairer for all.

"We owe it to our young people to ensure that our post-COVID-19 economy is more local, sustainable, inclusive and productive. There is scope and, we believe, demand and appetite to do it."

More information: COVID-19 and social mobility—CEP (LSE): cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/cepcovid-19-004.pdf

Provided by University of Exeter

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