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Is there any hope for Britain's jobless youth?

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In the summer of 2011, the world saw two very different sides of Britain: the fairy-tale romance of a royal wedding, and the uncorked rage of rioters setting London ablaze. And while the traditional, picture-perfect image of Britain continues to draw the international spotlight, the situation far from the charmed circle is only getting worse. Almost 1 million (1 in 5) of 18- to 24-year-olds are out of work, and many of them have been for a long time.

Countries across Europe are suffering similarly devastating levels of youth unemployment, but in Britain, the issue has particular urgency. Studies show that no European country's young people are as prone to drink, drugs and crime as Britain's, and no country has experienced the same violent rioting that swept England. Government figures show that those who took part in the riots were poorer, younger and less educated than average. Some 90% were male; half were under age 20. With firms closing down around them, what does the future hold for Britain's alienated youth?

Gary Kelling, 21, lives in a social housing block north of London, just outside Tottenham, the epicenter of the August riots. He spends much of his time with his friends engaging in the urban acrobatics of parkour, or free running. Kelling survives by "signing on" - collecting \$86 from the government each week. He says he wants to "earn a lot of money" but predicts that in a year's time, he'll still be hanging around Block 55.

Kelling, like many other NEETs (not in education, employment or training), isn't even looking for work. For him, signing on is a way of life. Paul Brown of the British youth charity Prince's Trust says Kelling's story is a common one: "We make contact literally every day with young people who think they'll never work."

For now, Kelling and his friends still have one foot in boyhood. They're not in gangs. But they're vulnerable, and being jobless doesn't help. Unemployment robs individuals of "a status in modern societies," says Brendan Burchell, a lecturer in sociology at the University of Cambridge. A recent UNICEF study found that in the U.K. "status brands tended to be more important to children from less affluent backgrounds, presumably as a means of masking financial and social insecurities and bolstering self-esteem." This may explain why young rioters left a trail of empty Nike shoeboxes and designer-clothes hangers in their wake.

Britain's coalition government has recently announced a new Work Programme that will offer training as well as eight-week internships to unemployed 18- to 21-year-olds. Yet Prime Minister David Cameron has also come under fire for sweeping cuts that have forced the closures of charities and youth centers in Britain's most vulnerable areas.

While some traced the riots to local shutdowns, ultimately it may be the cuts' effect on the wider economy that has the greatest impact on Britain's unemployed youth. Without a turnaround in the economy, it's hard to envision a path out of unemployment for the young men living in Block 55.

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