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**PROVYP - Professional
Orientation of Vulnerable
Young People**

Education, Vocational Training and Employment policies for Young Vulnerable Groups

Comparative Report



June 2016



Introduction

Young people are considered as the world's greatest asset for present and future. However, they represent a group that are more likely to suffer from unemployment, low payments and job insecurity. Youth unemployment rate is more than twice higher than the adult one – 21.2 % against 9.8 % in Jan 2015. In 2013 there were 7,5 million young people across EU neither in employment nor in education or training (NEETs). There are significant skills mismatches on Europe's labour market. It can be argued that existing career counselling measures are not meeting the needs. Many adults, in particular, disadvantaged, do not know how to process of selecting the proper job according to their skills and qualifications. Furthermore, recruiting individuals to fill particular posts within a business is one of the activities that impact most critically on the performance of an organisation; the job market becomes increasingly competitive and the available skills grow more diverse.

Education and training systems are changing to a skills-centred approach. Rather than describe qualifications with input factors (such as how long it takes to get a degree), they now focus on specific outputs: knowledge, skills and competences obtained. This is reflected in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

In line with the Europe 2020 Strategy and the European Agenda for Adult Learning, the '**Professional Orientation of Vulnerable Young People (PROVYP)**' project seeks to promote re-skilling and up-skilling across 8 Member States, providing vulnerable young people with e-career guidance and improving the orientation measures offered by the adult education providers in the field.

Taking under consideration the above arguments, the project aims to reduce the number of low-skilled adults by providing career guidance using Open Educational Resources and offering tailored learning opportunities with particular emphasis to vulnerable young learners on the basis of transnational comparison and cooperation.

In an awareness of the seriousness of the foregoing questions and consequences that ensue, the present report aims to depict some valuable insights into the

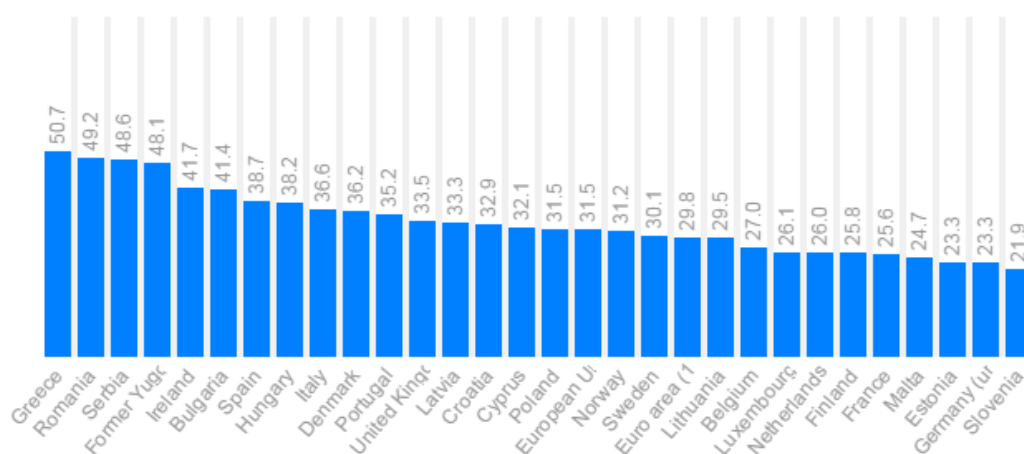


situation that currently exists in the participative countries of PROVYP project. It attempts to illustrate similarities and differences that currently exist towards the construction of common suggestions, as a result of challenges and opportunities the member states consider at national level.

Finally, and before starting to read this report, it is critical to note that all the project partners did their best to include accurate, corroborated, transparent, and up-to-date information, but make no warrants as to its accuracy or completeness. The information contained has been gathered from reliable sources along to the utilization of a referencing system. However, any information contained herein is subject to change without notice. Readers shall therefore cross-check the accuracy of the information provided in this package with the relevant competent authorities and used sources. The European Commission, the Spanish Erasmus+ National Agency, the project partners, and the contracting authority shall not be held liable for any inaccuracy contained in the report, or for any direct or indirect damage resulting from this information.

Vulnerable young people /groups of interest

At risk of poverty or social exclusion refers to the situation which individuals and/or groups either phase the risk of poverty, or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. A significant subgroup of interest is that of the young people; their rare has become an important indicator to monitor within the framework of EU 2020 Strategy poverty target. The European statistics over the years (Eurostat, 2016) illustrate that young people face significantly higher unemployment rates than the wider working-age population alongside the risks of social exclusion.



Graph 1: Young people at risk of poverty or exclusion in EU

It is worth to highlight from the above graph, the performance of the countries which participate to the PROVYP project. Bulgaria has highest number of young people who are at risk of poverty (41.4%) followed by Spain (38.2%), Italy (36,6%), Portugal (35.2%), UK (33.5%), Cyprus (32.1%), Lithuania (29,5%) and Germany (23,3%). These statistics illustrate a critical mass of next generation to be in the edges of social security and social cohesion. It is, therefore, important a number of policies to be designed and introduced along with ‘fresh’ ideas and supportive tools, aiming at reducing the high percentage.

Although of partners’ geographical diaspora and the different internal and external conditions which may influence the participative countries, nowadays, more probably due to European directives, there is a common understanding as well as similarities in the social excluded young people. All partners identified the same categories of vulnerable young groups. Those categories are consisted of young people with:

- Learning difficulties,
- Mental Health issues,
- Disabilities



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- Involvement in crime
- Alcohol or substance misuse,
- Severe Family Dysfunctional environment,
- Homelessness and
- Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET).

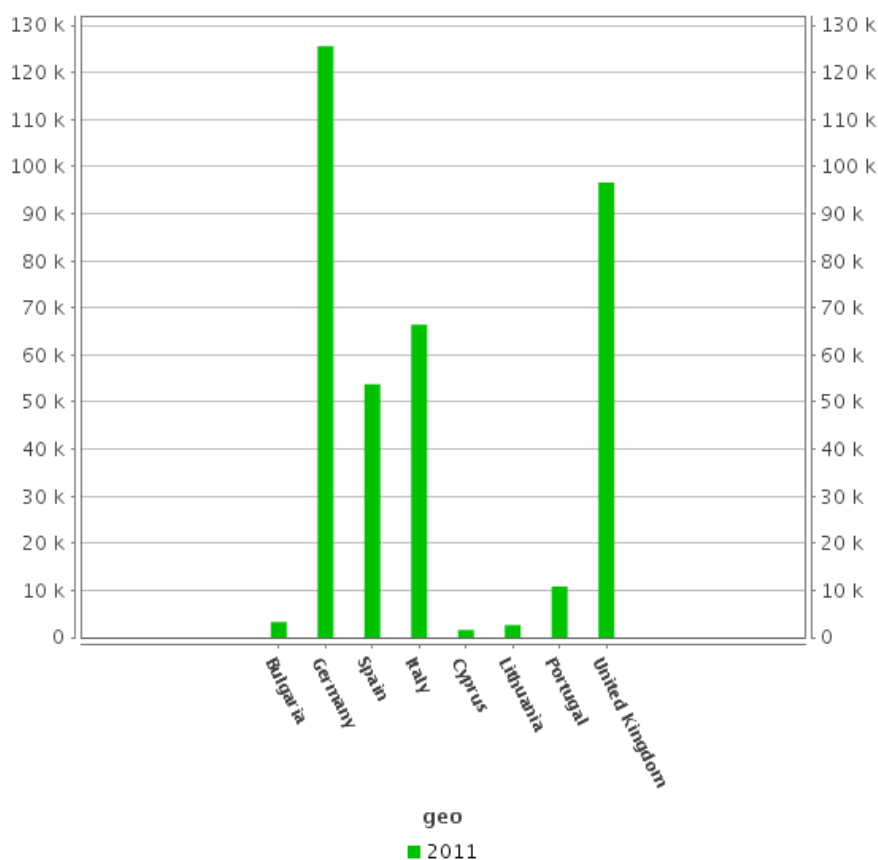
Educational System

In all partner countries the state or local governments as in the case of Germany (*Land* and the federal government) are responsible for educational policy and development of their own local schools and is accountable for the development of educational policy. A rather unified educational system is followed in the participative countries which are divided into three main levels: Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Education.

However, differences among the partner countries are met in the public expenditure on education (Graph 2). The schema below illustrates that 4 out of 8 countries invested more than double money in education, compared to the rest of participants.



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Graph 2: Total public expenditure on education-Millions

For the reader to understand the total expenditure in education needs to take under consideration both the direct expenses of educational institutions and any other supporting funds, such as scholarships and public loans and public subsidies for educational activities to private firms or non-profit organisations. According to the data provided from the Eurostat statistics it is clearly visible that there is a great difference in the public expenditure on education among the partner countries. The above graph indicates that countries with economic growth such as Germany and the UK have invested in education more than the rest of the countries.

Those major differences observed can be related to the onset of the recent economic crisis which affected the value of education. While education matters more than ever, the economic recession puts pressure on public budgets. This pressure is mostly felt in primary and secondary education because at these levels,



public funding accounts on average for 92% of all funds (OECD, 2013). However, some countries initially continued to increase public spending on educational institutions, either in an effort to offset the effects of the recession or because they had already decided their budgets before the beginning of recession (OECD, 2013).

Another important element, relatively to the educational systems is the rate of school dropouts. The following table depicts the dropout rates for the secondary level of education, during the last three years (Table 1). Please note that secondary education is included in compulsory education in all participative countries.

Countries	2013	2014	2015
EU (28 countries)	11,9	11,2	11
Bulgaria	12,5	12,9	13,4
Germany	9,8	9,5	10,1
Spain	23,6	21,9	20
Italy	16,8	15	14,7
Cyprus	9,1	6,8	5,3
Lithuania	6,3	5,9	5,5
Portugal	18,9	17,4	13,7
United Kingdom	12,3	11,8	10,8

Table 1: Early leavers from education and training

Based on the above data, a noteworthy point is that the investment in education is not relatively connected to proportional reduction in early drop out rates. For example, even though Spain spent more than 50 millions to strengthen the educational system the early dropout rates remain high, while the European 2020 strategy has set 10%.as an average point. On the contrary, Lithuania, even though it spent less than 10 millions, the dropout rates are below the EU28 average point. It can then be argued that additional measures and/or policies have to introduced, which will encourage as well as promote the successful completion of secondary educational level.



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To the above statistics, it is also critical to be aware, for all countries, the 'hidden dropout'. It is the phenomenon where students are disengaged from school but do not show up in official dropout statistics because they are still officially enrolled. Only one country referred to this phenomenon; however it is estimated that a notable percentage may also exist in the rest of the participative countries. The lack of access to free early childhood education services results to the decision of families to deprive their children from educational services. Bulgaria has raised concerns for this issue among the the poorest families, low paid earners and single parent families, due to the need of parents to cover educational expenses(Commission Staff Working Document: Country Report Bulgaria, 2015).

The next section intends to provide evidence about the role and effectiveness of vocational education in helping the transition from education to work

Education and Labour market

The recent financial recession in EU resulted to the rising number of NEET youth people who are struggling to make the initial transition from education into sustained work. While this in part reflects the impact of the recession, the number of NEETs was before this; the recession simply exacerbated the problem. They have a difficult labour market to navigate, with high unemployment amongst the wider population alongside reduced opportunities for young people.



Participation rate of young people in education and training and labour status (incl. NEET rates)			
GEO/TIME	2013	2014	2015
Bulgaria	17,1	17,1	16,2
Germany	20,3	19,7	19,0
Spain	11,4	11,3	12,3
Italy	14,0	13,2	13,3
Cyprus	18,6	20,4	19,8
Lithuania	16,3	18,6	19,5
Portugal	16,6	17,3	17,3

The above figures illustrate a source of major concern. In countries such as Spain and Italy only 11, 4% and 14% managed to enter the labour market. On the contrary Germany and Cyprus seem to score better compared to the rest, however, the numbers are significant low. It can, then, be argued that this prolonged period of high youth unemployment and under-employment could have substantial negative long-term repercussions for growth and social cohesion. As the larger percentages of young people leave school and experience early and prolonged spells of unemployment or underemployment, it may have negative results to the later phase of their life. They may face a permanent disadvantage in the labour market which also results negatively in their personal, social and economic life. It may also lead to the increase of antisocial behaviors, higher levels of criminality, lower trust in others and in the society, and a lack of civic engagement (Carcillo *et al.*, 2015).

Krzaklewska (2013) identified a number of common characteristics of youth unemployment in the EU member States:

- Youth unemployment affects young people with low education attainment, but also those with higher education, but without previous employment experience;
- The length of remaining unemployed tends to protract for young people;



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- Youth unemployment tends to remain higher than of the overall adult population;
- Unemployed young women have higher qualifications and still, face higher risks of long term unemployment;
- The labour market seems to undergo a divide between a segment that provides stable, indeterminate contracts and a more precarious section, characterized by temporary contracts, little advancement perspectives and poor social benefits. Whilst in many European countries, short term contracts fall 5 years after graduation, in some others, young people continue to be trapped in temporary jobs longer (in Poland, 66% of young people 15-24 and 90% of those 15-19 work on temporary contracts, cf. Krzaklewska, 2013);

The most important phenomenon, inextricably connected to the financial crisis, is the growing trend towards underemployment (e.g. young people occupying part-time jobs despite desiring full-time work, or being overqualified for the requirements of the job);

OECD (2015) suggests the tackling of high youth unemployment is related to the overall economic growth, giving emphasis to the match of education, technological changes, and the skills demands to become able to access employment opportunities. It continues by arguing that not all young people manage to acquire the skills required by employers either because they dropped out of school early or because they did not learn the right skills at school. Therefore, a number of additional measures need to be anticipated, not only to improve the quality of education, but also to increase educational choice through a strengthened system of vocational education and training.

The VET system is discussed on the following section.



VET System

Youth unemployment among young people, in European Union, has significantly increased (Eurostat, 2015). However, countries with strong dual VET system that combines work-based and school based, the unemployment rates remained low. The partner countries identified VET as a crucial aspect and a contributing factor for labor enhancement as well as productivity. Countries such as Germany and the UK have designed and implemented strong VET policies in order to strengthen the overall system.

In particular Germany implemented an effective apprenticeship system, the Dual System, for new skills acquire. The two key features of that system are (a) firm-based training programs accompanied by a school-based component (of one to two days per week), in which apprentices acquire upper secondary general education in core subjects (like math and German) and theoretical knowledge in their training occupation. This duality of practical and theoretical knowledge acquired at the workplace and at vocational schools is (b) accompanied by the private-public duality in the governance structure (i.e., public governance of the vocational schools, provide governance of the firm-based training).

However, the German VET system has faced significant pressures over the past decade. The main symptom has been a chronic shortage of training places in industry, but more fundamental questions are being asked about the foundations of vocational training in Germany. Questions have been asked about the flexibility of its skills formation system and the suitability of channeling up to 60% of young people into an occupational and craft-based vocational training pathway at a relatively early age (Keating *et al.*, 2002).

Vocational training in the UK has been subject to sustained internal criticism for over two decades. Over this period there has been numerous and frequent state intervention, but the 'system' continues to be based upon a principle of voluntarism. Recent improvements in the UK economy appear to have been accompanied by



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higher industry commitment to training. On the other hand questions remain about the overall approach to skills formation and the relationship between VET and the general education system (Keating *et al.*, 2002).

The current system of Technical and Vocational Education in Cyprus is based upon an instructional approach that aims to prepare school graduates to face new situations and new opportunities progressively. As today's school-leavers complete their courses of study, they are released into the job market with an adequate knowledge foundation to compete with other European graduates on an equal-opportunity basis. Given the requisite educational grounding, they ought to be in a position to proceed successfully either in their chosen profession or in their desired field of further study.

In Italy, there are two main types of vocational training, school-based vocational education and professional apprenticeships. In both programmes youths typically spend some time in educational institutions and in firms, but the intensity of on-the-job training is very low. School-based vocational training is mainly provided in technical and professional institutes, which are high schools attended by pupils in Italy between the ages of 14 and 19. Almost 10% of students chose in scholastic year 2015/2016 to enroll in a VET course rather than attend a high school.

Moreover Spain is making an effort to increase the flexibility of the curricula of medium-level VET programmes to better adapt young people's skills to labour market needs, and to further increase the attractiveness and acceptance of VET programmes. In 2014/15, the new dual modality of VET programmes was run in all autonomous communities. The number of educational institutions (728) and companies (4.878) offering dual VET has risen considerably since the beginning of its implementation, and the number of students enrolled in dual VET (16199) has quadrupled since 2012. However, it still remains low compared with the overall participation in VET programmes. In 2014, the government offered new financial incentives to enterprises to support participation in dual training.



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In Lithuania advisory institutions play an important role in designing and implementing VET policy and the qualifications system. Most important are the VET council and the central professional committee with its sectoral professional committees. The main priority for VET is to become an attractive and highly valued part of education and lifelong learning. VET programmes are designed for learners of different ages and educational backgrounds. Initial VET (IVET) offers learners over 14 opportunities to acquire a first qualification. Continuing VET (CVET) is designed for learners who want to improve a qualification they have, acquire a new one or gain a competence needed to do specific jobs (perform functions) as specified in regulations. IVET is offered at lower secondary (ISCED 2), upper secondary (ISCED 3) and post-secondary education (ISCED 4) levels, leading to European qualifications framework (EQF) levels 2 to 4.

Finally in Bulgaria the main VET providers are VET schools (VET secondary schools, art schools, sports schools), VET colleges and licensed private and public continuing vocational training (CVT) centres. Framework programmes regulate acquisition of VET qualifications by setting age and entry level requirements and specifying content and duration. There are six framework programmes and the most prominent feature of the Bulgarian VET system is equality of VET provision for students and adults. It is based on common framework programmes and national educational standards that regulate vocational qualifications, and opportunities given to VET schools to extend their capacity and facilities for their main function of training young people to training adults.

Related to the success of VET systems are the abilities and young people opportunities to make career choices for their lives. It is therefore critical career counseling systems to be existed and career counselors to assist people to explore, pursue and attain their career goals. Those issues are explored in the following section.



Counseling and Careers Education

In European Union career guidance takes place mostly in the context of the school, in post compulsory education settings and increasingly in universities. By far the greatest provision is made at the secondary school level. As it has been acknowledged the main goal of the Guidance policies is to assist students and other young people through counselling so as to pave the way and create the necessary employment prospects and opportunities.

Reflecting on the data provided in the national reports it is illustrated that all partner countries place special emphasis on helping the students equip themselves with the necessary skills so as to make effective personal, educational, and career choices. In addition, another main characteristic of the Career guidance and counselling services among EU countries is the establishment of lifelong guidance in their local educational framework.

Nevertheless some minor differences can be acknowledged among the partner countries. The first one is the degree of economic development each country has achieved. Low-income countries face more challenges with the career guidance services. It is only after economic activity becomes more diversified and resourceful such services will start to grow. In general the middle and low-income countries tend to have less well developed career guidance systems compared to those with high-income countries, and in particular more limited career information to support such systems. This may be partly because of low levels of public resources, partly because the range of choices for many individuals is more restricted, and partly because more people are preoccupied with economic survival rather than with development and growth (Watts and Sultana, 2004). Those results lead to a more general argument that guidance services, context, range and quality, reflect the economic, political, social, cultural, educational and labour market contexts – as well as the professional and organisational structures – in which they operate (Watts, 1996).



Moreover, an additional important difference among the partner countries is the relationship of career guidance system to the market economy. As it was described above, due to the different economic and societal challenges each country faces, differences in concentration, priorities and targets have been set accordingly, on an effort to match the labour needs and demands.

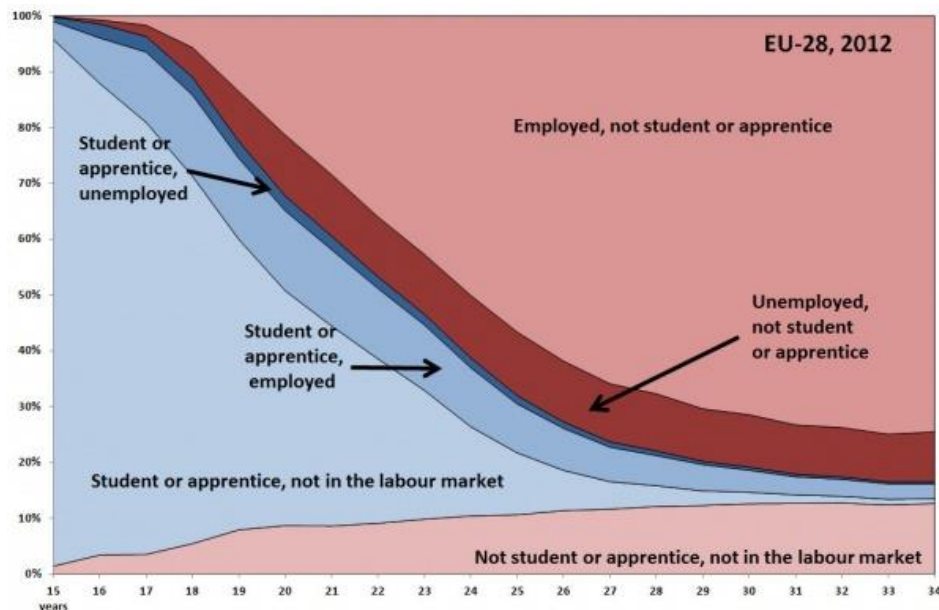
That explains both the similarities and differences that are met in the national policies which have been adopted by the participative countries.

Policies for young unemployed persons

In all national reports it was highlighted a rapid increase on youth unemployment as a result of the recent economic recession. All the discussions from the national reports bring to the surface a number of contributing factors for the appearance and preservation of youth unemployment. Characteristically, it was mentioned the inflexibility of education and vocational and educational training systems to transform their context to serve effectively the new challenges. In an attempt to group the existed policies and interpret their establishment, it is argued that youth unemployment in all participative countries has become a quasi-structural phenomenon. This argument became more apparent discussing with the partners during the transnational meeting, as there was a general agreement that nowadays, young people tend to be employed to insecure jobs, making them more vulnerable to rapid economic political and societal changes. In addition to that it was discussed that it is observed a labour market segmentation which prevent youth to be actively and leads to a polarisation, with high turnover and less-skilled jobs.



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The above diagram provided by the Eurostat (2015) shows the proportion of young people in education and/or on the labour market at each year of age (data for EU-28, 2012). It can be understood that young people enter into the market at different time frame, however there is a steep rise in labour market participation, from some 5 % at age 15 to some 80 % at 24. This steep increase explains the difference between the youth unemployment rates and youth unemployment ratios.

Nevertheless, a number of policies, usually following European directives and guidance, have been incorporated into national level of each partner country.

A major commonality that is found among the partner countries is the Investing in the Youth Guarantee Employment scheme which aims to make a good-quality offer to all young people up to age 25 of a job, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship. It can be argued that this common policy is a result of the Youth Guarantee Recommendation which was formally agreed by Member States in April 2013. It includes guidelines for setting up such schemes, covering in particular the need for stronger partnerships between all concerned public authorities (education and employment institutions), early intervention and activation, and making full use of EU funding. However, the degree of success differs to each country because it requires major structural reform measures and processes in order to facilitate young



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people's sustainable integration into the labor market. The governments of all partner countries have submitted YG plans in 2014 (YG, 2015).

Programmes to help young people, such as the EURES (Your first Eures job abroad), have also been initiated to bridge the gap between training and jobs; the European Vacancy Monitor, with information on recent developments in the European job market; and financial support under the European Progress Microfinance Facility, to help young entrepreneurs set up or develop their businesses.

In a parallel vein, European Commission (2013) launched the European Alliance for Apprenticeships. It is a multi-stakeholder initiative to improve the quality and supply of apprenticeships across the EU and change mind-sets towards apprenticeship-type learning. The principle of this effort is to improve, by the adoption of a number of different measurements, the quality of apprenticeships and traineeships. In the partner country reports, it is revealed, through critical discussions, the different level of reformation in apprenticeships and traineeships along to suggestions for improvements.

Both the European statistics and national reports discuss about the youth working poor groups who earn lower salaries, scarce social protection and have precarious working conditions. In some countries, like UK and Cyprus, policies have introduced for the engagement of youth in the labour market, by accepting significantly lower youth minimum wage. However it is argued that such measures may further entrench youth poverty, not to say that is also a form of discrimination against young people.



Description of main obstacles, for vulnerable young persons, to access career guidance programs

The reports identified several obstacles to the current delivery of career guidance services. It was apparent to all reports the first obstacle; it derives from the current economic recession, which may limit the resources available for improving the career guidance service.

The second is the risk of career education and guidance in schools being marginalised within a broad concept of guidance. Many countries have guidance counsellors with a holistic role covering personal and social as well as educational and vocational guidance. In such schools, there is consistent evidence that career guidance tends to be marginalised, in two respects: the pressing nature of the personal and behavioural problems of a minority of pupils mean that guidance counsellors spend much of their time on these problems, at the expense of the help needed by all pupils in relation to their educational and vocational choices; and guidance on such choices tends to focus mainly on educational decisions viewed as ends in themselves, rather than on their vocational implications and on longer-term career planning (Sultana, 2006).

Thirdly there is evidence of ineffective management of resources within the service. Insufficient use appears to be made of the professionalism of the counselors in schools to develop resources and innovative practices that might be of benefit to the service as a whole. Limited use has been made of the potential of new technologies to enhance access to services and the quality of services (Sultana, 2006).

Finally, it is appeared that in some EU countries career guidance services in tertiary education are inadequate or non-existent. Ironically, guidance roles within education tend to be least strongly professionalised in higher education, which is the sector responsible for much of the professional training in the field as a whole. In some countries such guidance as is available is confined largely to choice of studies: the



assumption seems to be that students can manage their own transitions into the labour market without any support (Sultana, 2006).

Suggestions/improvements are needed to vulnerable young persons, to access career guidance programs

At this point it is important to highlight that all partner countries stated that supporting young people into education, employment or training is not straightforward. There is no one-size-fits-all approach and intervention is needed at many different levels. It is clear that, within the current economic climate, there needs to be some level of national and local-level cost-effective incentive to increase the support of youth employment and good quality work-based learning opportunities in order to tackle the structural obstacles faced by many young people. National governments need to do their part to incentivize employers to provide this opportunity, while local authorities and local employers need to work closely together to plan local-level economic strategy, and to boost the role and representation of the business community within education. At the same time, there needs to be a coordinated, local-level response to the issue, to ensure that it is everyone's business.

Evidence also points to the importance of coordinated responses to the challenges surrounding young people's integration into the labour market through a thorough needs assessment, a joint local strategy, effective data sharing and multi-agency working through a holistic model, where possible. Provide a youth-friendly environment for career guidance activities: An accessible, safe and comfortable space for youth to take part in trainings and one-on-one coaching sessions is a crucial component for successful career guidance programs. Program staff must create an environment where young people feel free to express themselves in order to encourage participation and attendance.



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Integrate psychosocial support into training: Providing psychosocial support through group and individual therapy sessions is of the utmost importance to allow youth at risk to participate fully in the training. Although it may be challenging to overcome participants' initial resistance to therapy and manage constraints that prevent them from meeting with counselors, it is a crucial program component. Integrating a group therapy approach in addition to one-on-one sessions allows participants to process issues such as emotion/anger management in a collective setting. Many youth believe they are alone in having experienced certain situations such as abuse, when in fact some of their peers have experienced the same thing. Working through these issues in a safe group setting can help them to feel less alone.

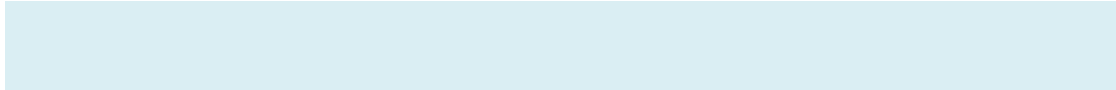
Establish a multi-disciplinary team: Having a team of skilled and motivated program staff with complementary knowledge and experiences, including career coaching, educational development, psychosocial support, guidance counseling, and program management, is crucial to providing an integrated package of services to youth. Another key factor is to seek out staff who have a passion for working with vulnerable youth and are willing to go the extra mile to assist them. Whenever possible, staff members who are able to share their own life experiences and struggles attaining education and employment can provide inspiration to participants.

Build alliances across sectors: Organizations seeking to integrate career guidance services must build alliances with many stakeholders. The public sector, particularly ministries or government agencies related to education or workforce development, should be involved in program implementation. This may include provision of training spaces and staff by the government. Program planners must work from the start to obtain the buy-in of government leadership. They set the tone and provide an environment conducive to the work of counselors and staff directly involved in the program, as well as engage the private sector, another key stakeholder. Additionally, organizations must build linkages with other education and training entities to create opportunities for youth who have completed the career guidance



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program, so that they can take the necessary next steps to implement the career plans they have created.





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