

CONCLUSIONS

Young people are a fundamental asset of our economies and societies. Empowering young people by creating favorable conditions for them to develop their talents and to actively participate into the labour market is essential for economic and social development and for the sustainability of society. The integration of young people into the labour market poses great challenges to Member States at present as young people have been severely affected by the economic crisis. For most EU Member States, the low participation of young people in the labour market is not a new problem, but what is new is the current scale of this problem. In addition, in the context of this recession, youth unemployment has affected all young people, even the well-educated.

Traditional indicators of labour market participation were found to have limited relevance for young people, and so the concept of young people 'not in employment, education or training' (NEET) entered the policy arena. While NEETs, so defined, are very easy to capture from a statistical point of view, they represent a heterogeneous population that includes vulnerable and non-vulnerable subgroups, with different characteristics and needs. However, despite this heterogeneity, young people who are NEET share some common and fundamental characteristics. They are not accumulating human capital through the formal channels of education, training or employment, which might have a negative impact on future employment and earnings. As the risk factors that increase the chances of becoming NEET are often a combination of personal, economic and social factors, being NEET can in many cases be described as both an outcome and a defining characteristic of the disadvantaged young people who are at much greater risk of social exclusion.

Spending short and limited periods disengaged from the labour market and education system can be part of any normal transition from school to work. However, it is essential to understand that spending protracted periods in NEET status comes with a wide range of grave and interconnected negative short- and long-term consequences for the individual and society as a whole. Being NEET is not just a problem for the individual; it is also a problem for society and the economy.

The inclusion of NEETs (as well migrants, refugees and early school leavers) into the labour market has been the focus of the researches that the partners implemented during the first phase of the project. In fact, in order to achieve the first result of the project (Intellectual Output 1 - Contextualisation), the partners focused the research also on a selection of Best Practices for recognition of competences and inclusion of NEETs, refugees, migrants and early school leavers to the labour market from the regional/national context. In order to implement the activity, the partners started from the assumption that skills and competences are acquired not only through formal education but also through learning which takes place outside this formal framework. This involves the informal acquisition of a given competence during the course of an individual's life which is not linked to any formally recognized and validated qualifications. Such skills and competences may, for example, be acquired during the course of housework, workplace-based learning, help on a farm, caring for older people, the sick, children, etc.

Non-formal learning on the other hand refers to situations in which an individual learns and acquires skills through various types of activity where learning takes place but without certification or accreditation of such skills. Examples of such activities include seminars, training courses which are open to all and internships, as well as, for example, amateur sport or volunteer work for local communities. Non-formally and informally acquired skills may have both technical aspects (e.g. practical experience) and social aspects (e.g. language skills).

Thanks to the validation of non-formal and informal learning, individuals will not only receive certification that they have reached a certain level in a competence acquired outside the formal education system but, in certain cases, will also achieve transition to another level of education, subject to the appropriate accreditation framework.

The Best practices presented in this report by the project partners involve a wide range of different initiatives and represent an intervention at different points along the pathway to employment; a youngsters' journey towards inclusion into the labour market and employment. For many young people, this pathway from education to employment is not straight, and those who become NEET have gone astray somewhere along the way. Some of these best practices represent measures in order to help youngsters in NEET condition to enter the labour market and participate actively in society. The aim is to intervene in the early stages of the pathway and preventative interventions that keep young people from leaving their aspiration and motivation to enter the labour market.

The theoretical research – mainly based on a desktop analysis of each partner's regional/national context - has been supported by a practical research based on a survey made up by an amount of 600 interviews and questionnaires conducted by the partners in their respective regions.

The data obtained by the analysis and the comparison of the structured interviews conducted in each partners' country (discussed in Chapter 7), together with the data obtained by the analysis and comparison of the structured questionnaires (discussed in Chapter 9), have revealed an unexpected result, i.e. that there is a common trend for all partners' countries. It was an unexpected result because, regardless of region, economics, and other factors that affect the social sector and the labor market, the importance attributed to the key competences in the different questions, appears to have a similar chart pattern for each project partner.

By comparing the common questions of the interview with stakeholders and the questionnaire with youngsters 'In your opinion, which of the following competences should a youngster have in order to enter the labour market?' the partners noted a common trend among stakeholders and youngsters that the answers of both groups go in line for the different key competences on the one hand and a common trend of weighting the importance of the different key competences among the project countries on the other hand. All project countries show similar curve shapes for the results from youngsters. The same effect can be stated for the curve shape of stakeholders' results. In fact, both categories of respondents think that the main competence, which a young person should have in order to enter the labor market, is the Communication in the Mother Tongue. The top five competences are the same for both groups of respondents, however the ranking is slightly different for stakeholders (S) and young people (Y): Digital competence (S rank2/ Y rank5), Social and civic competences (S3/Y3), Learning to learn (S4,Y2) and Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship (S5/Y4). This ranking of competences will also be a good starting point for the development of next project activities in order to focus on the high ranked competences first when creating a methodology and a system for recognition of competences with the target group of NEETS, school dropouts and young migrants.

Instead, with regard to the competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning, (question number 3 of Interview 'In your opinion, to what extent can youngsters gain the following competences outside the formal learning at school?', and question number 7 of questionnaire 'In your opinion, which of the following competences do you learn outside a school?') there is a diversity of thought. Stakeholders, in fact, think that the competence that young people have acquired outside the formal learning paths is the digital competence, while young people believe that it is the social and civic competence, which they have acquired outside school. According to data, the respondent stakeholders believe that young people are in possession of high digital skills. In fact, to the question number 2 and number 3 of the interview, respectively 'In your opinion to what extent youngsters in our target group aiming at entering the labour market, have the following competences?', and 'In your opinion to what extent youngsters in our target group aiming at entering the labour market, have the following competences, but are not recognized by any diploma or certificate?', the majority of respondents consider the digital competence as the most in possession of the young people; competence even not recognized in a formal way. On the other hand, however, young people do not consider digital competence as the competence they have more. Young people consider Communication in the Mother tongue the competence they gained at school, and Social and Civic Competence the competence they gained outside the school environment. Thus, young people do not believe that digital competence is so strongly in their possession. It therefore appears that young people know little about the needs of the labor market and they have little awareness about the importance that digital competence plays nowadays.

With regard to the open questions of the interview and the questionnaire, just as open questions, the respondents have provided the most disparate answers for which it was not possible to reach a common response trend. The majority of young people surveyed declare they are motivated to work. Obviously, there are different reasons that influence this motivation: earning money might be the most urgent and important one, however the young people also state that they want to meet people/have social contacts, get a professional degree, want to get independent etc. The ones stating that they are not motivated to work in many cases give reasons like that they prefer to complete their school exams, prefer to study, etc.

To question n. 3 of the questionnaire 'Where did you acquire your competences?' The answers were 'school environment', 'work environment', 'family', 'recreational/leisure activities' for all countries, however for the Netherlands the ranking was different than in the other countries Spain, Italy and Germany: 'work environment' was the answer most frequent, followed by recreational, family and school. This result could either be influenced by a special background of the Dutch respondents (many school dropouts) or show that in the Netherlands the concept of acquiring competences not only in formal settings

is more spread and well-known. Similarly, to the open question n. 4 of the questionnaire 'How can you show your potential employer to be competent in a specific field or sector, without having a degree or certificate for it?' the target group responded differently. In many cases they think that a work placement or training period would be a good opportunity to show the competences for which they have no official certificates. The interview with the employers would also be a good occasion to explain competences and talk about acquired competences from leisure time or family.

With view to the further developments in the projects the survey for stakeholders was also designed to find out how competences gained outside the formal learning system could be valued and to identify possible institutions, which could certify in an official manner the competences of NEETs, potential dropouts, young refugees and migrants. There was a variety of answers how to value the competences, ranging from issuing badges to doing practical assessment which will be reflected in the next project steps. Moreover, the stakeholders suggested several institutions in their countries that could certify the competences, among others VET providers, local governments, adult education providers, NGO in the youth field, employers and chambers. The project partners will start to involve these potential users of the SHARE methodology and SHARE system at an early stage of the project in order to respect their feedback and needs and in this way guarantee the usability of the instruments.

These results of the research phase of the project will be reflected in the developments of next project outputs in order to provide tailor-made products for the group of NEETs, employers, education providers and other stakeholders in the transition process between school and labour market. These instruments will help to reduce the gap between the expectations of the labour market and the key competences that young people are able to have recognized – regardless of where the competences were achieved (formal, non-formal or informal context).