

DEVELOPING AND RECOGNISING SKILLS AND ABILITIES

The **Emprego Apoiado** (Supported Employment) DP piloted a Supported Employment Service in Portugal. This service used its proximity to its clients to develop strategies which responded to their needs, interests and competences. Its main goal was to provide them all with a chance to acquire, develop and recognise both their social and vocational skills.

This DP was based in a neighbourhood which comprises mostly migrants from Africa, mainly from Cabo Verde and many of its members of staff and its associates lived in the same area. In such a situation, young people could benefit from individualised assistance from a social/cultural mediator and support from their families and friends, as well as from their tutors and work colleagues. This operated at a variety of levels such as the partner organisations, enterprises and private or state agencies.

The young adults took part in a learning programme with continuing support from a social/cultural mediator. This programme was divided into the following different phases:

- The welcoming phase;
- The self-determination phase;
- The integration phase;
- The post-location phase.

The aim was to involve the young people in the construction, definition and implementation of their own Life Project, by helping them increase their participation and individual decision-making on a range of levels. These included defining the sector or skill for which they would be trained, applying for jobs, making contacts with companies and enterprises, assessing their needs and their resources and looking for ways to solve their personal, social or family problems and conflicts. Another important factor was that the actual training took place on the job and this was a great opportunity for the young people to establish relationships outside their neighbourhood that contributed to reducing prejudices and stereotyping. It also enlarged their social contacts and lessened their sense of segregation and exclusion. Perhaps more importantly, the young people found this type of hands-on, practical training much more attractive than the type of learning opportunities that they had been offered at school.

One aspect that proved to be very important in the all phases of the learning programme was the recognition of existing skills and competences. This helped the young people to compare and evaluate several vocational options according to their own characteristics, interests and wishes. Self determination was fundamental to the whole process and the recognition of their personal and professional competences - on both formal and informal levels - along with their self confidence, determined their commitment to the building, implementation and evaluation of their own perspectives for the future. The experience of the DP in these activities led to the production of a Manual of Recognition and Validation of Competences acquired both formally and informally throughout life. This innovative instrument was distributed in print, on CD-Rom and through the Internet and was also backed up by an Inventory of Transversal Competences.

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