



Mutual Learning Programme
High Level Learning Exchange on
'Designing and implementing effective strategies to support the
integration and retention in the labour market of youth at risk'
18 – 19 February 2016, Stockholm (Sweden)

Executive Summary

The High Level Learning Exchange explored the policies that countries use to reach out and engage youth at risk and which strategies and approaches have proven most effective in activating this target group. The purpose of the meeting was to share experiences and effective practices from each country and build on earlier lessons concerning young people who have difficulty establishing themselves in the labour market.

The ministerial event hosted by the Swedish Ministry for Employment, brought together five European ministers responsible for labour market issues from Estonia, Denmark, Portugal and Hamburg (Germany)¹ as well as representatives from the European Commission and independent experts.

The key learning points from the event were as follows:

Identified challenges

- Despite different economic and labour market situations the participating countries face **similar challenges in relation to youth**.
- **NEETs (young people not in education, employment or training) are a highly heterogeneous group with different degrees and types of vulnerability.** Low-skilled, young people with disabilities, those with special health or family issues or from a migrant background face specific and often multiple barriers to re-engage or stay in education and training and/or access the labour market. They are at a higher risk of inactivity and long term unemployment, job insecurity, low pay and limited social protection rights as well as discouragement to continue education.
- High levels of unemployment, job insecurity and low wages have led some highly qualified youth to leave their countries in search of better opportunities, creating shortages of skills and representing a loss of investment ('**brain drain**').
- The Member States with better labour market situations also identified **skills mismatch as a challenge**, with many countries requiring skilled blue collar workers or having workers not well-matched with their current jobs/demands of the labour market.

Outreach

- The **approach to reaching out and engaging with NEETs varies across different Member States** according to the profile of their NEET population.
- Countries which have '**early warning systems**' in place have found that good results can be achieved when the system is accompanied by clear and timely support

¹ Jørn Neergaard Larsen, Minister for Employment Denmark, Jevgeni Ossinovski, Minister of Health and Labour Estonia, Melanie Leonhard, State Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Family and Integration Hamburg Germany, José António Vieira da Silva, Minister of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security Portugal, and Ylva Johansson, Minister for Employment Sweden.

for young people identified as being at risk of leaving school early. Engaging with parents/families was considered an important part of the process.

- Identifying young people can be problematic as they are often not registered with the Public Employment Services (PES) and are unknown to social services and youth services. Therefore countries should gather relevant information to **identify who they are**, where they are and what are their needs. The value of **'tracking services'** to contact young people before and after they have dropped out and/or became unemployed was highlighted. Depending on the national and regional context, this role is fulfilled by different stakeholders such as schools (or education authorities), PES (including specialised services), and/or different types of 'youth agencies' and other forms of youth oriented social work at the local level.
- Strong and 'formalised' **co-operation and information/data sharing between all stakeholders** is critical to ensure that young people are not lost in the system.
- 'One-stop-shop' centres/youth agencies offering integrated, multi-agency services to young people can serve as a focal point to facilitate the contact with NEETs.
- For many countries, building trust with young people is an issue that might help with 'getting them through the door'. 'Peer-to-peer support', 'word of mouth' recommendations and engaging with youth organisations are considered an important part of the process of **building trust** with young people.

Supporting smooth school to work transitions

- School plays an important role in providing students with the skills required to engage in **further learning and accessing the labour market**. Education should foster creativity and adaptation to change according to future labour demands (i.e. developing problem solving, non-routine thinking, self-confidence and interpersonal skills). There is a need to challenge the learning and teaching methods to meet the needs of the labour market and improve the performance of schools, for example, through changes in the way resources are allocated and improving gender balance among teachers.
- Schools also have a role in **reducing social inequalities**. Early childhood education improves the life chances of children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- In relation to identified shortages of skilled manual workers more needs to be done **to improve the attractiveness of Vocational Education and Training (VET)**, challenging perceptions as well as **facilitating pathways between VET and higher education**.
- Better **cooperation between education authorities and the world of work** remains a challenge.
- In some countries the **business structure (prevalence of SMEs) impacts on the level of engagement** of employers in the process of identifying skills needs and providing apprenticeship/traineeship places. Improved cooperation with social partners, financial incentives and conditionality could be used to secure engagement.

Supporting work to work transitions

- **Lifelong learning has a key role in supporting work to work transitions** particularly for those who need it the most (low skilled, unemployed or in jobs at risk). Establishing a system that guarantees sufficient funding for (non-workplace specific) training throughout the career is a challenge.
- For successful work to work transitions, consideration should be given to the importance of **retraining** and **changing careers** when required.
- **Social partners** play a **role in motivating employees** to upskill/return to education.

Activation of NEETs

- **Prevention and early intervention** in all stages of the transitions are key in successfully supporting young people.
- **Working in partnership** with **all** organisations that have a say in the lives of young people is a necessity in order to address complex needs and maximise resources.

- Effective approaches to improve employability of young people are those **combining guidance, training and work experience components in a real work environment**. Financial incentives and conditionality could be used creatively to secure the engagement of employers and employees to upskill (e.g. personal accounts).

Further information

Full report, presentations and background papers will be available at:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1073&eventsId=1089&furtherEvents=yes>