



Disaffected Youth

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Disaffected Youth

Presentation for PL2

Policy context

At the European level, the European Commission adopted the EU Youth Strategy that promotes a dialog between youth and policy makers in order to increase citizenship, foster social integration and ensure social inclusion. For 2010-2018, the Strategy has two overall objectives:

- to provide more equal opportunities for young people in education and work,
- to encourage young people to actively participate in society.

The Strategy covers eight fields of action:

- education and training
- employment and entrepreneurship
- health and well being
- participation
- voluntary activities
- social inclusion
- youth and the world
- creativity and culture

In the area of education and training, the Strategy targets the current skills mismatch and the transition from education to employment. These objectives will be achieved through:

- equal access to high quality education and training
- develop youthwork and other forms of non-formal learning opportunities
- links between formal and non-formal education
- improving transition between education and training and the job market
- reducing early school leaving.

In the area of employment and entrepreneurship the EU and its members will act to:

- integrate concerns of the young people into employment strategies
- invest in providing skills employers are looking for
- develop career guidance and counselling services
- promote opportunities for youth to work and train abroad
- promote quality internships / apprenticeships
- improve childcare and shared parental responsibly
- encourage entrepreneurship in young people.

One of the EU initiatives that promotes concrete steps towards reducing the youth unemployment is the Youth Opportunities Initiative. This initiative includes pilot actions on a Youth Guarantee and 'Your First EURES' job

scheme. The Youth Guarantee ensures that all young people up to the age of 25 get a good quality, concrete offer within 4 months of them leaving the formal education or becoming unemployed. The offer should be for a job, apprenticeship, traineeship or continued education.

'Your First EURES' Job is a mobility scheme to help young Europeans find work in other EU countries. The scheme target young people between 18to 30 years old.

Other initiatives encourage access of youth to good quality training or apprenticeship.

1. DISAFFECTED YOUTH INCLUSION AND EMPOWERMENT

Findings from the Systematic Review

One of the main concerns when working with disadvantaged youth is how to engage with them and how to involve them into defining their problems, designing appropriate and adapted interventions, involving them in the decision making process and in the evaluation procedures. In other words, the main challenge is how to empower them to take control over their own destiny.

Research conducted under the EQUAL programme¹ but also in Italy (Villano and Bertocchi, 2014) or North of England (Simmons et al., 2013) demonstrate that there is progress in this area but more real investments should be made in order to recognise youth as real resources. Furthermore, states should provide effective and concrete mechanisms of communication with youth and institutions/organisations should change their organisational cultures and management styles to allow beneficiaries to have a say in the decision-making processes. As mentioned in Hartmann and Kwauk (2011) sport can be an effective way of engaging and motivating youth to take part in civic matters but only if complemented with education, mentorship, skills training and so on. In other words, sport should be combined with other non-sport programming and investments in order to reach some developmental goals. Research in the US also suggests that community and civic participation among youth can also be stimulated through the involvement of youth into volunteer work (Nenga, 2012) and art-based activities (Batsleer, 2011). Social media can also be helpful in developing social capital and in strengthening the civicness of youth (D'Amrosi and Massoli, 2012).

On the contrary, if state authorities employ exclusive policies and interventions such as aggressive anti-social behaviour policies, this can lead to an atmosphere of oppression and distrust. As noted by Deuchar (2010) if the state treats youngsters as 'second-class citizens' and keeps them under

¹¹ EQUAL Report available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal_consolidated/data/document/Lessons%20from%20Evaluation%20conference%202005.pdf

intense and unnecessary surveillance, youth tend to turn towards their own groups that give them access to dignity and positive identity.

However, as demonstrated in Morton and Montgomery (2013) there is only a handful of evidence (3 studies out of 8789 citations) that demonstrate the relationship between youth empowerment programmes and self-esteem, self-efficacy and other social emotional and behavioural outcomes.

But working with young people with a clear empowerment philosophy is not a straightforward endeavor. As suggested by Fitzsimons et al. (2011) facilitating quality youth work based on the empowerment model, requires a number of professional skills in the youth workers such as: reflection skills, facilitation skills and so on. Furthermore, organisations working with young people which intend to be consistent with empowerment need to adapt their leadership, the structure and the culture of the organisation, models of decision-making and management of staff. A key element in this respect is the value alignment between empowerment and the organisational culture. By using the example of The Warren, a young's people community, Fitzsimons et al. (2011) illustrate how difficult this cultural shift within one organisation is.

Findings from the Platform 1 event (PL 1 meeting)

After debates in the PL 1 meeting the following practices were selected:

1. Unga In Swedish Public Employment Head Office -Sweden
2. Supporting People Birmingham City Council - UK
3. Multiregional Operational Programme: Fight Against Discrimination "ACCEDER" Spanish Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs (MTAS) and regional administrations - Spain
4. Choices Programme/ ProgramaEscholhas Spanish Ministry of Education and Science - Portugal
5. Youth Advocate Programmes Ireland YAP Ireland - Rep. of Ireland

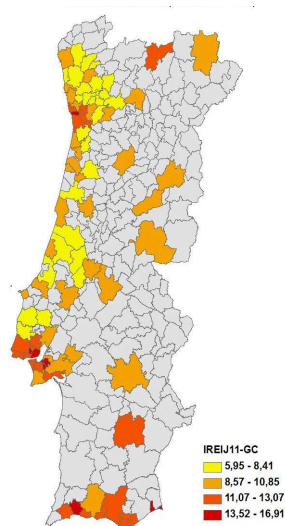
The following practices were selected as reserves:

1. AIM Integrated Outreach Support - UK
2. Youth Active - Germany
3. NEET Education in Oakwood Prison - UK

The main concern of these selected practices is how to engage and empower vulnerable people so that they can move closer or even join the labour market. Although some of them did not target exclusively youth they covered this age group as well in their interventions. When looking at how they engaged or get in contact with the disaffected population, we can see a wide variety of strategies. Most of them counted on the geographical proximity with the vulnerable group. Therefore, they were organized in schools or in the deprived neighbourhoods. An interesting example is offered by Unga In Swedish Public Employment Head Office – Sweden which employed Youth ambassadors – people with the same background as the target group. Another example comes from Germany – Youth Active project which uses

street workers and also the houses of youth to get in contact with those in need.

In some cases, before launching wide scale interventions a careful assessment and planning was conducted. For example, before launching the priorities for the Choices Programme – Portugal, the Council of Ministers took a close look at the Index of Children and Youth Exclusion Risk produced by DINAMIA'CET – an external academic research centre in Portugal. As illustrated in the next figure, this index reflects which areas are mostly affected by the risk factors:



Index of Children and Youth Exclusion Risk – Large Cities (2009)

The range of activities offered by these interventions is also very wide covering issues like: education, training, housing support, income support, mental health, fight against discrimination and so on. Just by way of illustration, here are the activities included in the Integrated Outreach Support - UK:

- 'Access to basic resources (Housing provider)
- Incentives to seek employment (intensive and holistic support for targeted individuals)
- A needs based approach (a tailored approach for individuals with complex needs)
- Enhanced employability (peer mentoring, motivational support, individual coaching)
- Link training and employment opportunities (use of social enterprise to provide work experience, enterprise coaching, training opportunities linked to a care farm programme)
- Links with potential employers (employment coach)
- Employment and training services (provision of accredited qualifications)
- Housing support and social housing (social housing provision)
- Childcare (made available for women's project)'

What is worth mentioning under this point is that these services are provided in a coordinated manner based on the 'whole person approach'. For instance, in spite of its name Supporting people: Housing Support Programme – UK does not cover only the housing needs of the target group but a much wider range of needs that can be associated with a greater risk of exclusion from the labour market. In order to provide these services, the developers work in close cooperation with agencies such as: Public Health team (funding drug and alcohol services) Adults and Communities; which includes housing

strategy, policy and homelessness; Children Young People and Families; Registered Social Landlords (RSLs); Jobcentre Plus; probation services; police; substance misuse services; antisocial behaviour teams; occupational therapy professionals; housing services; benefits services; Citizens Advice Bureau; Birmingham Tribunal Unit; council tax service; law courts; libraries; children's centres; doctors and hospitals. This long list of agencies is mentioned here only to illustrate how diverse and wide a multi-agency partnership should be in order to provide 'whole person approach' services.

Based on the surveys submitted to the PL 1 meeting, the group of experts concluded that the main learning points are:

- Thorough, evidence-based prior analysis of the problem, the target group needs (including protected characteristics and gender, as well as geographical location)
- From the beginning, projects should seek to embed sustainable governance and funding beyond the short term life of the pilot/ project, and to integrate learning from their pilot ('programme' approach vs 'project' approach)
- Equally, from the beginning, funders might favour projects with long-term potential, with a clear plan to reflect on and evaluate the pilot, and to integrate learning
- Partnership approach of active co-support towards shared objectives
- Genuine consultation and involvement of users and practitioners in the services design, evaluation and improvement
- Resilient, long term, meaningful relationships with one case manager/ advocate/ mentor etc. – more than 6 months, with optional access after the users individual needs have been met
- Structured consultation, collaboration and reflection between partners at different levels (for the most efficient approach to joint policy and practice)
- Transferring proven good practice from one situation to another (e.g. using a young persons' education course inside a young offenders prison)
- Projects should aim to promote wider awareness of young people's issues, showcasing the value of civil engagement, CSR and volunteering
- Co-location of services or one-stop-shop approach

- Early intervention – projects reach young people at risk, not just in trouble
- Use of digital technology, tools and social media to reach out to young people, to connect their individual needs plans and to connect the different organisations efficiently
- Local initiatives respond to local needs: micro credit and start-up guidance from regional NGOs can hone project objectives on local outcomes promoting positive communities
- Importance of role modelling – showing new communities, relationships or employment options which 'break the mould' and could have a positive impact

When discussing about the innovation, the experts agreed that innovation is most often about 'doing things differently':

1. Different ways of breaking down institutional barriers for a more effective, holistic path through the services required for diverse needs.
2. Creative ways of involving and motivating private sector partners, blending inclusion work into their regular structure.
3. Approaching organisational learning differently: integrating structured reflective (evaluation from inside the organisation) practice so that the project has the opportunity to learn simultaneously from every failure and every success. External evaluation should be a second step.
4. Using new technologies to improve established practice.
5. Different ways to reach the young people in the project's target group (and the right rhythm for the relationship – elements of successful contact might be consistency, resilience, user led and answering a need for the user).

Findings from the Interviews

The two experts interviewed for this theme focused their description of the 'best practice' they met in their past as a combination of different factors that place the vulnerable person in the middle of a social network and the decision making process. For instance, one of the experts described family conferencing as an effective way to solve any sort of conflict or social problem. He approached the family conferencing as a multi-level system of intervention, with different circles: circle one- the family and the relevant ones ('the natural system'), circle two – the professionals and so on. An important observation he made was that when dealing with an obstacle, the principle of subsidiarity should be enforced. For example, the first circle that should be called upon to solve a problem should be the person and his/her own informal social network. If this network cannot deal with the issue effectively then the second circle should be asked to contribute. By doing so, the vulnerable person is given back the problem and the responsibility to deal with it. It is

only when the person's personal or informal capacity is overwhelmed then the professionals and the community should step in. In this case, professionals should be well trained, aware of what is considered evidence based practice and able to build up positive relationships with the vulnerable people. Moreover, the several experts suggested that the professionals should be aware of the values base of their interventions. As one of the experts stated: *'when baby when I cried I received a bottle of milk. Maybe other babies when they cried they received a kick or something...'* (expert from Netherlands). Therefore people come from different walks of life with different expectations and different values. Professionals should be aware of this diversity and behave according to it.

Another good example of how to empower youth is the council of youth that can be involved in the decision-making about priorities, funding and evaluating projects addressing youth issues. Further more, youth can be encouraged to design their own projects and can be involved in fundraising for their own project ideas. By doing so, they show a real commitment to the ideas and the cause they fight for. Evaluation, prioritisation, planning, designing, implementing and again evaluating the impact of projects was defined by the experts as a 'virtuous cycle' that can be employed everywhere. Self-reflection and continuous adaptation to the new needs and challenges seem to be essential competencies for an intervention to survive in time. But empowerment does not mean to leave the other stakeholders completely outside the picture. On the contrary, the experts emphasised that local authorities, state institutions, NGOs should also be involved in planning, designing and implementing interventions for youth. Based on the empowerment philosophy, the role and the place of these actors are re-defined in order to allow youth to have a stronger and more responsible voice.

When it comes to dreaming, the experts mentioned the need for a greater integration or 'connectivity' between services. In many EU countries services to support youth in becoming economically active are available but they seem to lack a proper integration and communication between housing, education, income support and health services.

Another direction for the future would be to encourage the European Commission to think harder about evaluation and how the lessons learnt could be better disseminated and used in new projects. As one of the experts rightly emphasised: *'they should stop to overlap their administrative time schedule with the evaluation time schedule'* (expert from Italy). There should be a time for implementation and another time for evaluation. In order to evaluate the impact of an intervention (especially when talking about empowerment!) one should wait one or more years until making a proper evaluation of the impact. The quality of the evaluation design is another dimension where the expert would like to see some progress in the future. Counting services or people does not tell us the whole story.

Conclusions on 'empowerment' and possible future

From the research and debates described above, it seems that empowering young people to participate in the civic life of community and come closer to the labour market is a promising practice. Involving youth in national and local

debates (via councils or other systematic events) could enhance their confidence and self-efficacy. However, this involvement should be genuine and supported with real investment in structures and opportunities that encourage direct youth participation. National and local level should work together based on the empowerment philosophy if negative experiences are to be avoided. Although strong research evidence is not there yet due to the lack of robust studies, there are good indications that youth involvement in defining, managing, implementing and monitoring social initiatives can generate positive personal and social outcomes, some of them directly related to employment.

There is still room for experimenting new ways of engaging with youth using social media and other modern technologies. Games can also be employed to engage with youth and debate about the most relevant issues for the youth. Maybe providing youth more opportunities to innovate and deploy their own ways of getting in contact with others can be an important way to the future. In the end, empowerment is about allowing and encouraging vulnerable people to express their views. Another useful thought is to think more creatively about evaluation and its meaning and consequences. How good examples could be identified and then better disseminated across Europe (e.g. showcases, self reflection etc.) is another important question for the future.

2. DISAFFECTED YOUTH EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Findings from the Systematic Review

Social and policy context

According to the European Commission, by 2020, 16 million more jobs in Europe will require high qualifications while the demand for low-skilled jobs will drop by 12 million (European Commission, 2010). In the UK, for instance, these structural changes impacted on the number of available jobs in different sectors of economy. The largest increase in employee jobs has been in banking, finances and insurance industry (from 2.7 million in June 1981 to 5.4 million in June 2006). Significant increases were also in education, health, public administration, distribution, hotels and restaurants. In contrast, the extraction and production industries (agriculture, fishing, energy, water, construction and manufacturing) showed a combined fall of 43% in the same period of time (Office for National Statistics, 2007).

This dramatic decline of manual jobs and the rise of knowledge-based jobs led to an increased demand of graduate-level skills (or equivalent) (Farrall et al., 2010).

In the OECD countries, 16% of 15-29 years olds are not employed or in education. This proportion increased considerably in 2009 and 2010 compared with the pre-crisis levels. As anticipated above, in 2011 around 5.5 million young people were unemployed in EU countries, which means a rate of about 21.4%. In 2012, the youth unemployment rate was already 22% and rising due to the economical recession (Howley et al., 2013).

This structural context defines those with no proper education as 'unemployable'. If this under-education is combined with other vulnerabilities

such as criminal history or mental health problems, the prospects of employment are rather slim. Furthermore, low levels of education correlates with numerous health related issues and risk behaviours, such as: drug use, crime and so on (Eiberg et al. 2014).

The European Commission has responded to these challenges through the Europe 2020 flagship initiative called Youth on the Move and the 2012-2013 Youth Opportunities Initiative. Both these documents aim at unleashing the potential of young people and call for a more concentrated action from the states authorities, social partners, employers etc. to tackle the youth unemployment.

Special provisions of these documents refer to pathways back to education and training and also to a better contact between education and employment. Other relevant documents of the EU on youth employment and education:

1. Youth Employment Initiative (YEI)
2. Council Recommendation on establishing the Youth Guarantee – 2013/C 120/01.
3. European Alliance for Apprenticeships

In order to monitor the youth situation in Europe and allow for European comparison, the European Commission has introduced new statistical indicators such as NEET rate.

In order to tackle this challenge European countries undertook a significant number of measures. Some of them played a more preventative role (such as measures to prevent early school leave) while others had more of a reintegration value (measures to remove barriers, incentives for employers etc.).

In a recent report, Howley et al. (2013) evaluated the effectiveness of these measures in terms of outputs, outcomes and impact in nine European countries. One of the most important conclusions of this report was that due to the poor design and the lack of rigorous evaluations it is difficult to assess at the national or European level the impact of these measures on the youth unemployment rates. This difficulty is augmented by the influences of other factors such as the macroeconomic context.

Nevertheless, combining evidence from different evaluations, policy documents, interviews and so on, the authors concluded that youth employment measures were relatively successful.

Moreover, they formulated a comprehensive list of 'policy pointers' that seem useful in our evaluation:

1. Successful policy measures specify their target group and find innovative ways to reach them, for example by establishing a good reputation or creating a positive 'brand' for the measure or working with relevant community groups for hard-to-reach groups.
2. It is important to note that young people vary in their level of labour market readiness and policies have to cater for a range of minor to complex needs.
3. Policy delivery relies on appropriate personnel, who need to be trained and supported.

4. Young people should be set up on a long-term sustainable pathway, for example by providing them with necessary skills and stable employment, rather than low-quality quick fixes.
5. Successful policies offer good quality career advice and comprehensive holistic guidance.
6. Youth employment measures should focus on the client, not the provider, for example by setting up one-stop-shops for young people or by offering tailored, personalised advice by mentors.
7. Inter-agency collaboration and involvement of all stakeholders can be a cost-effective way to implement policies, when the specific roles and responsibilities of different actors are specified.
8. Measures that aim to increase the employability of young people should focus on labour market needs and ensure a buy-in of employers and their representatives.
9. Youth unemployment requires flexible responses, which have to be adapted to economic cycles, whereas social exclusion is a structural issue and has to be addressed consistently.
10. Robust monitoring and evaluation should be used to inform policymaking and development. (Howley et al., 2013: 2-3)

Looking at different national policies and local or regional initiatives, the authors identified 25 measures divided into different categories:

1. Measures to prevent early school leave (address the risk factors):
 - Avoiding the accumulation of disadvantaged students in specific schools,
 - Providing additional support for schools in specific geographical areas ('area-based policies') – schools receiving 10-15% more financial support for recruiting more teachers, more teachers assistants, less children in one class etc.
 - Alternative pedagogies – such as Learning Communities (Spain) where schools engage with the communities in promoting high expectations among young people together with university students, staff from local NGOs, parents etc.
 - Transition support programme – for those who have dropped out of school or did not gain a place in an upper secondary school. The aim of this programme is to provide young people with alternative career path, vocational training, employment options, 'trying out' different courses etc.
2. Measures to reintegrate early school leavers (back into school, training or employment):
 - Alternative learning environment, job shadowing,
 - Practical and professional oriented courses,
 - 'Whole person' approach – vocational training, short work placements, psychological support, counselling, apprenticeship, and other support needed to prevent the 'yo-yo' effect.
3. Measures to facilitate the transition from school to work (to ease the move to the first post-education job).
 - 'Youth Guarantee' (or 'job guarantee' in Sweden) – personalised needs assessment, employment plan and other activation measures (e.g. training, information, guidance etc.) offered by public employment

services (PES) within a very short period of time after registering.

- 'One-stop-shop' services – to ensure a more coordinated approach to the school-to-work progression pathways. The principle of this approach is that all needs are covered in one location.
- 'Integration into society contract' (France) – personalised follow-up with an adviser, training activities, work placements, internship etc. offered on a contractual basis.
- Creating networks of training centres strongly committed to effectiveness and labour market demands.
- Improving self-employment opportunities – Spain, for instance, allows young people to receive 80% of their total unemployment benefit entitlement in one single payment in order to start a new business.
- Exceptions from social security contributions are offered to self-employed and companies that hire young or long-term unemployed people.

4. Measures to foster employability among young people (to promote skills, attitudes and qualities that enable youth to get a job, stay in that job and progress further in work).

- apprenticeship contracts – receiving 'hand-on', practical experience while in education.
- work-based training schemes.
- bonuses for the companies that take apprentices and sanctions for the large companies that do not train a number of apprentices that is proportional to the size of their workforce.
- combination between on and off-job training with formal training – development of the occupational soft skills such as: self discipline, ability to concentrate and complete tasks etc.
- 'supra-company apprenticeship' – available for those who are not able to find an apprenticeship on their own. Accredited providers offer apprenticeships together with training and counselling.

5. Measures to remove barriers to employment (especially for those with disability, learning difficulties, language issues etc.).

- alternative training, work-based training.
- incentives for employers to recruit from 'hard-to-help' groups (e.g. 'Chances Card' - Finland).
- direct wage subsidies to employers, reduced social security contributions or tax payments.

As the authors emphasised several times, the early school leaver population is both diverse and dynamic and therefore 'individualised, tailor-made pathways back into education and training are at the heart of most reintegration policies' (15). It is only after they are prepared and equipped with the necessary skills and qualifications when they can move towards an active and productive adulthood and employment.

Some of these measures were measured in different countries using different methodologies.

The **Youth Guarantee** scheme was evaluated by Eurofound (2012) in Finland and Sweden. In Sweden the Youth Guarantee (En jobbgarantiförordning) was introduced in 2007 while in Finland (NuortenYhteiskuntatuki) the scheme

was introduced in 2005 and revised in 2010. Although the schemes are not identical, they share the same aim: to reduce the time young people spend in unemployment and inactivity. In Sweden, the service is provided by the public employment service (PES) that provides the young person with a personalised needs assessment and an employment plan, followed by a guarantee. This guarantee can be with a job or a study opportunity or some other activation measures. In both states, the program obliges PES to provide these services within three months from registration. Independent evaluations found this service very successful even during the crisis years. In Finland, for instance, during the crisis the workload of many PES become almost unimaginable with the number of customers per adviser increased to 700. With the help of a budget increase in 2010 the situation improved and PESs in Finland were able to recruit more staff and create more training and other support services for young jobseekers. However, it seems that youth guarantee is more effective for young people who are work-ready and therefore tend to focus more on the new entrants on the job market than on the long-term unemployed. The authors also record as weaknesses of the scheme: it is focused on short-term solutions and is not addressing the structural problems of young people and the success is too dependent of other institutions and the labour market situation. However, as mentioned above the scheme seemed to work very well in these two countries even in the crisis time.

Using an experimental design, the Institute for Labour Market Policy Evaluation (2011) evaluated the **job guarantee** (as youth guarantee is called in Sweden) in Sweden and concluded that 24 year olds participating in the scheme found a job quicker than a comparable group registered with regular services. However, the results did not sustain for a long time. The probability of participants to be unemployed within one year proved to be the same for both groups. It can be concluded that this measure acts as a quick fix solution and does not address the structural concerns of the young people (e.g. lack of skills, lack of qualification etc.).

Most of **the school dropout** interventions fall into one or more of the following categories: school or class restructuring (e.g. creating smaller classrooms, lower student/teacher ratio, individualised programme etc.), vocational training (e.g. work-related counselling, career exploration internship, paid employment for students), supplemental academic services (e.g. tutoring, homework assistance, remedial education etc.) or teenage pregnancy and parenthood. The last sort of services may include beside day care centers interventions like welfare payment, incentives and so on aiming at supporting young mothers to stay engaged with education.

These services were assessed in the US by Wilson et al. (2011) in a very comprehensive systematic review (based on 548 studies that use quasi-experimental or experimental design). The authors conclusions were that:

'Overall, results indicated that most school- and community-based programs were effective in decreasing school dropout. Given the minimal variation in effects across program types, the main conclusion from this review is that dropout

*prevention and intervention programs, regardless of type, will likely be effective **if they are implemented well and are appropriate for the local environment.** We recommend that policy makers and practitioners choosing dropout prevention programs consider the cost-effectiveness of programs, and choose those that **fit best with local needs** as well as **implementer abilities and resources.**' (10)*

In 2012, Ecorys was commissioned by the European Commission to undertake a study on the lessons learnt from second chance education. There is no one second chance education model but a number of possibilities that are used creatively in different countries based on principles such as: small groups of learners, flexible timetable, diverse activities (sport, cultural and life skills etc.), flexible curriculum and so on.

The methodology of the study was a complex one combining: quantitative data analysis, literature review, interviews, fact-finding visits and workshops with practitioners and high-level experts.

The conclusion of the authors was that this measure of reducing early school leaving is effective if a number of conditions are met:

- the second chance schemes emphasise the distinctiveness from the mainstream school – avoiding the negative associations with the initial education but ensuring in the same time the learning opportunities in a credible way (e.g. gaining a formal qualification),
- identify and engage with those who left the school system via local community and social networks – use of 'softy' approach for contacting the young people (via friends, family members, telephone etc.)
- place an obligation on the local authorities to ensure that young people are engaged in education or training.
- persistence and building up trust are valued as essential qualities².

Using an ad-hoc survey of the beneficiaries, ISFOL (2011) evaluated the impact of apprenticeship scheme in Italy. It found that 70.9% of the apprentices were still employed with the same company within two years after the completion of the training programme and 21% were employed elsewhere. Stakeholders also reported a high level of satisfaction and confidence regarding its impact on employment.

The 'Supra-Company apprenticeship' was evaluated in Austria (Bergmann and Schelepa, 2011) and found quite effective: 58% of those completing the programme in 2010 were working after three months and 63% after 12 months. However, the evaluation identified also a relatively high percentage of dropout – 23%. Some of them leave for employment or regular company-based apprenticeships but others had no alternative destination. For them the prospects were quite negative: 2/3 of them were still unemployed after 12 months. Although these results may seem only partially positive, we should not forget that this scheme was available for the hard-to-reach people.

² Report available at: http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/2014/20140410-study-second-chance-education_en.htm

'Chances Card' was evaluated in Finland during the economic crisis and found effective (Pitkanen et al., 2012; Terava, 2011). About 22% of the recipients were able to get a job with the Chances Card. However, not all young people were using the card when looking for a job. 36% of those who used the card were successful at finding a job. The card was evaluated also against the national wage subsidy scheme and found it more effective. Only 21% of the beneficiaries of the national wage subsidy scheme were still in employment 12 month after completing the placement.

Although it was not always possible to evaluate the outcomes or the impact of all these measures, in general evidence suggests that they are successful. However, it is important to note that not all the measures are effective with all the young people. Some measures seem to be more effective with those with low levels of qualifications. Some others seem to work better with those with high levels of qualifications, with skills and motivation.

Findings from the Platform 1 meeting

On the basis of the Platform 1 discussions, the following practices have been selected:

1. Toolkit for Life - UK
2. Missing Link – an comprehensive guidance for hard to reach young people - Belgium
3. Experimentation in the field of Social Farming– Italy
4. Stepping Stones Programme for Educationally and Economically Disadvantaged Youth - SPEED Youth Programme – Northern Ireland
5. Job in sight - Sweden

The following ones have been selected as reserves:

1. Vocational integration/ increase employability through individual coaching and group training - Germany
2. Youth Employment Agency – Germany
3. Choices Programme - Portugal

The practices selected could be described as having a very complex structure, combining different interventions in order to respond to the multiple needs of the disadvantaged youth, including income support, subsidised employment and so on.

Most of the interventions take 'the whole person approach' as a guiding principle. Missing link – Belgium goes one step further and looks at the person within the context – family or the community. When working with youth, an important actor of the intervention seems to be the family. For instance, Missing link – Belgium and Stepping stone programme – Northern Ireland mention family as one the most important critical elements of success.

Depending on their main target group, each intervention strives to establish contact as early as possible. For instance, in Toolkit for life – UK intervention with youth starts while in prison by motivating, nurturing talent and providing training to young people.

In order to be able to respond to the multitude and complex needs of the vulnerable group, interventions are based on a strong partnership structure. Most of the interventions mention the importance of the private – public sector cooperation. For example, Toolkit for Life – UK count on ‘around 100 committed construction industry employers’. The Missing Link – Belgium works with a ‘network of partners’. Sometimes, in order to enhance the cooperation with services, developers work closely with one organisation that acts as a mediator (see Coldiretti Turin for the Experimentation in the field of social farming - Italy).

Some of the interventions seem to be designed for special groups of underprivileged youth but most of them can work with a wide variety of youth (e.g. women, disabled, offenders, drug users etc.).

The activities provided in each intervention are coordinated by a case manager or a network manager.

At least four interventions out of eight focused on the school to employment transition (*‘unbroken chain from school to working life’*) and the support of the young people into employment. For example, Job in sight – Sweden provides company based training, support for young people but also for employers, problem solving meetings and so on.

Based on all surveys submitted under the NEET section, experts participating in the Platform 1 meeting concluded that the most important learning points are:

1. The importance of being person centred
2. The importance of starting early
3. The importance of cost effectiveness and evidence of return on investment
4. The importance of environment in which young people are comfortable
5. Large scale projects can be difficult to compare to smaller scale projects
6. Important to involve the target group - participants should be involved with and work with the project on a regular basis
7. Important to survey the local community / environment to assess the needs and demands
8. A systematic approach making an action plan with all of the actions that have to take place and who is doing what at the moment, with a lot of responsibility for the young people
9. Involving and capturing young people’s creativity

As in other cases, innovation was considered mainly as ‘a way of doing things differently’ or at the principle level. The following ideas were considered useful to be further explored:

1. Cooperation between companies, particularly cooperation between the public and private sector
2. Use of financial tools to empower young people
3. Improving status of part time education (through flexibility and work/family balance)

4. Using IT and Gaming tools to collect information and communicate with young people
5. Concept of social farming/agriculture – the ability to multi-target young people; ability to solve more than one problem at one time and being able to do more with less resource; working in a sector that is declining but has lots of potential

Findings from the Interviews

When asked about the best practice in the field of NEET, the interviewed expert described a project that would combine in a very flexible manner the following elements:

- early intervention – identify the risk situations and work to prevent or diminish the risks,
- provide interventions that would mix education/training with concrete work experience,
- involve the youth in planning and decision making,
- provide counselling and training not only on employment skills but also on the social and personal skills associated to employment (e.g. self confidence, job-seeking skills etc.),
- create a large network of employers willing to cooperate,
- good project management,
- use social partners, informal organisations, NGOs to reach the youth,

As it can be noted, most of the findings from the systematic review are echoed in the opinion of the experts.

When it comes to what can be improved, the expert emphasised the need for more motivational work with youth. It is well known that long term investments (like education) require patience and motivation. Both types of motivation – to engage with the program and to stay engaged – seem to be essential for a successful programme. Another point raised by the expert is the need to enlarge the range of industries involved in the network. The jobs available for work placements should go well beyond the stereotype or gender associated jobs: construction for men and the textile industry for women. This diversity would first provide more room for exercising the decision making and secondly would enhance the motivation of youth to work in a field close to their interest or aspirations.

An ideal model of intervention with NEET, is, according to the expert, an intervention that would combine all these elements with a strong family participation. It seems that family can act as an important environment for motivating, stimulating and supporting youth to become more economically active.

Conclusions on 'NEET' and possible future

Research and practice is already replete with evidence on what works and what does not in working with NEET. An important number of lessons can be learnt from the past experiences and previous studies. It is not the time or the place to repeat all of them here. Howley et al. (2013) can serve as a good summary of these positive interventions.

However, a few points seem to be of crucial importance for almost all categories of NEET:

1. start interventions as early as possible,

2. focus on school to work transition and on supporting youth and employers to work together,
3. use social media or other informal/non-formal ways of contacting youth,
4. initiate and implement interventions in a place considered comfortable by the young people,
5. involve young people in defining the problem, designing the intervention and decision making processes,
6. design complex interventions able to respond to complex needs,
7. prepare to be flexible and approach youth in a personalised manner,
8. create wide and diversified networks of potential employers,
9. involve local and national networks in delivering 'whole person' services,
10. involve the family in the network created to motivate and support NEET,
11. use gaming, IT etc. to collect information and evaluate constantly the intervention.

According to the participants at the PL1 meeting the following directions could be pursued in the future projects or research:

1. Mentoring youth in schools linked to developing vocational skills
2. How to support failures with spotlight projects
3. How to implement complex and multi-partner interventions
4. How to organize and deliver training within different contexts
5. How to be realistic and also ambitious when working with NEET