

skillset AND MATCH

CEDEFOP'S MAGAZINE
PROMOTING
LEARNING FOR WORK

 CEDEFOP

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MAIN STORY:
**VOCATIONAL TRAINING FOR
THE LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYED**

INTERVIEWS:
TOMÁŠ ZDECHOVSKÝ, THODORIS
ZAGORAKIS, MARTINE REICHERTS,
JOHN P. MARTIN

FEATURE:
HOW TO STOP EARLY LEAVERS
FROM EDUCATION AND TRAINING

MEMBER STATES: **ESTONIA**

**CEDEFOP**

The **European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training** (Cedefop) is the European Union's reference centre for vocational education and training.

We provide information on and analyses of vocational education and training systems, policies, research and practice.

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researchers practitioners

must
meet

(and vice-versa)

JAMES CALLEJA

CEDEFOP DIRECTOR



To accomplish the agency's real mandate, one ought to be tough on priorities and on the use of resources dedicated to creating a common platform for researchers and practitioners

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Cedefop operates at the interface between the world of education and training and the world of work. Our evidence-based research, the events organised and the tools created online (Europass in 2005, Skills Panorama in 2015, mobility scoreboard in 2016 and the early leavers portal in 2017, as well as a new Cedefop web portal in 2015), illustrate that, as an agency, we are fulfilling our mandate.

But is this enough to accomplish our purpose? Over time, repetitive tasks can create comfort zones, leading to complacency over an agency's actual responsibilities.

A joint Cedefop activity with UNEVOC/UNESCO and World Youth Skills Day in Bonn in July brought together vocational education and training (VET) researchers and practitioners to challenge each other's world. Our research findings are often destined to be bookshelved unless applied at VET schools, colleges and learning/workplace environments. Practitioners risk fossilisation if they do not keep up to date with developments in the labour market, fresh data, good practices and innovation.

Managing and transforming resources in an agency such as Cedefop is about taking risks to add social value; this is the underlying mandate of any organisation. Cedefop's main concern in an age of automation and digitalisation is to create policy conditions among stakeholders that support the unemployed, the early leavers, the low-skilled, long-term unemployed and sidelined citizens: these groups amount to over 70 million Europeans. The purpose of education and training is to add value to people's lives, and Cedefop's key challenge is to ensure that its resources are used for this specific purpose.

To accomplish the agency's real mandate, one ought to be tough on priorities and on the use of resources dedicated to creating a common platform for researchers and practitioners. Our goal is to ensure a positive reply to the question: Would I be prepared to pay, to get the services Cedefop offers? ■

World Youth Skills Day
– Researchers meet practitioners



Erasmus @30:

new opportunities for learners




MARTINE REICHERTS

DIRECTOR GENERAL, DG EDUCATION AND CULTURE,
EUROPEAN COMMISSION

“

Mobile VET students have a higher employment rate three years after the end of their stay abroad; they also find their first jobs more quickly and earn significantly higher salaries than their peers

A report in 2014 that 1 million babies may have been born as a result of Erasmus participants meeting their long-term partner while studying abroad, made the headlines around Europe. Welcome as this matchmaking may be, the European Union's most famous programme, which turned 30 this year, was established more with an exchange of knowledge and experience in mind. European Commission's **Martine Reicherts** gives *Skillset and match* the low-down on the project.

Erasmus has been widely hailed as one of the European Union's greatest achievements.

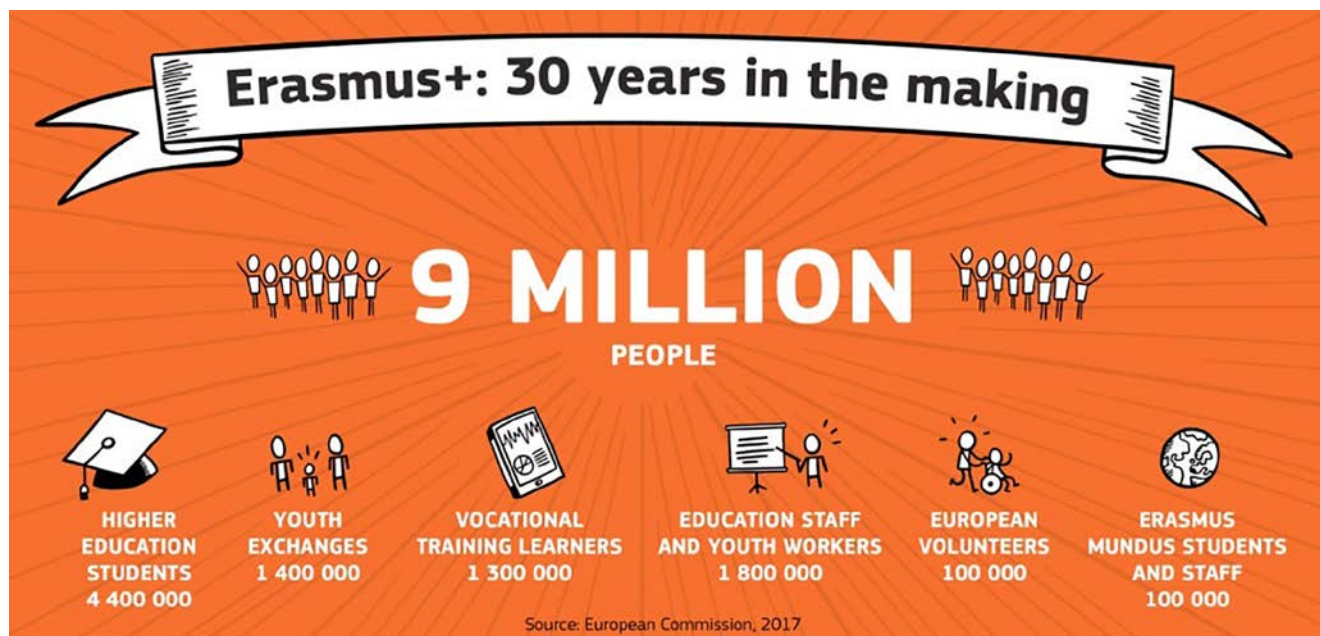
How is that backed up by numbers and how does it contribute to the establishment of a pan-European identity?

Since its launch in 1987, Erasmus and its successor programmes have given 9 million people a chance to study, train, volunteer or gain professional experience abroad. In 2015, Erasmus+ supported more participants than ever – 678 000 – in spending a learning period abroad: students, apprentices, vocational trainees, adult learners, teachers, youth workers and young people participated in exchanges. In 2015, it also reached beyond the EU's borders, enabling European universities and colleges to send and receive more than 28 000 students and staff to and from countries outside the EU. Erasmus+ also funds a wide variety of cross-border projects (nearly 20 000 in 2015, involving

some 70 000 organisations) promoting innovation and exchange of good practice in education, training and youth. These projects have a sustainable impact on organisations and individuals as well as on education and youth policies. They also promote strong links between the education and training sectors and the labour market. We know that Erasmus+ brings people together – for instance, 83% of participants in higher education mobility claim that they feel more European after their Erasmus+ experience.

What are the programme's origins and how has it evolved over the past 30 years from Erasmus to Erasmus+?

The Erasmus programme was named after the philosopher, theologian and humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam



(1466–1536), an opponent of dogmatism, who worked in several parts of Europe in quest of knowledge, experiences and insights which only contact with other countries could bring. Leaving his fortune to the University of Basel can be seen as a precursor of mobility grants. Building on the ‘Joint Study Programme Scheme’ for cooperation between university departments, which ran from 1976 to 1986, Erasmus was adopted in June 1987. In its first year, the programme involved 11 countries, with 3 244 students travelling abroad to study. At the outset, the programme targeted higher education students, but has since grown to offer opportunities in vocational education and training (VET), school education, adult education, youth, and sport. In 2014, the Erasmus+ programme was launched. The + indicates the integration of all initiatives and programmes in the fields of education, training, youth and sport, into a single, unified EU framework. Today, 33 European countries are part of Erasmus+: all 28 EU Member States plus Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. Between 2014 and 2020,

Erasmus+ will have provided mobility opportunities for more than 4 million Europeans.

Some countries feel that there is not enough funding to accommodate all interested VET learners. Is the European Commission looking to increase funding for VET participants?

VET learners and staff may spend a period abroad and VET organisations can cooperate with other partner organisations, including companies, for exchanges of good practice or innovative projects. Over the current period of the programme, EUR 1.7 billion will be allocated to the mobility of around 700 000 VET learners. As for the overall budget of Erasmus+, it is in fact expected to increase until the end of the current programme cycle: a 14% increase for VET is already planned for 2018 compared to 2017.

Commissioner for Education and Culture Tibor Navracsics said that Erasmus+ ‘increases the possibilities for young people to enter the labour market.’ How much is this also true for VET learners?

Along with promoting social inclusion and boosting active participation in society, this

is one of the main objectives of the ‘mobility of individuals’ strand of Erasmus+. In the case of VET learners, the importance and positive impact of learning mobility (including apprenticeships) for employability, career prospects, skills and personal development are already recognised. Mobile VET students have a higher employment rate three years after the end of their stay abroad; they also find their first jobs more quickly and earn significantly higher salaries than their peers. This impact will be even stronger from 2018, when the Commission will reinforce long-duration mobility with ErasmusPro, a new activity fostering VET mobility for more than three months under Erasmus+. Through mobility, VET learners also improve their motivation, self-confidence, and adaptability. They develop other soft skills increasingly vital for the labour market, such as language and communication skills and intercultural awareness. For many trainees, often from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, the Erasmus+ experience is their first time outside their home country, and an excellent opportunity to increase their social and civic competences in a multicultural context. ■

VET

prospects for a

gender-inclusive

labour market

“

Vocational education and training programmes constitute an optimal vehicle for supporting female economic empowerment

For all the social advancements accomplished over the past 60 years in the European Union (EU), gender bias continues to be a concern. Equality between women and men was enshrined in the Treaty of Rome's Charter of Fundamental Rights. From then on, the European Commission has implemented various directives to ensure that both sexes have access to equal opportunities in all areas.

The recently unveiled European pillar of social rights addresses gender inequality by introducing policies to tackle gaps in pay and pensions, and reinforce work-life balance arrangements. Still, gender segregation is ever-present in the labour market, deeply rooted in social norms, role model structures and unequal power relations, manifesting both in employment and education.

Gender equality is essential for workforce development, which, in turn, is not attainable without the full involvement and engagement of women. Eurostat data confirm that today women in Europe are often trapped in low-paid jobs below their skill level and are overrepresented in fixed-term contracts. Figures further suggest that female professionals represent a significant untapped source for the European labour market, with businesswomen making up only one third of EU entrepreneurs.

BUILDING SKILLS

Vocational education and training (VET) programmes constitute an optimal vehicle for supporting female economic empowerment, as they help women build

a wide set of marketable job skills and develop their technical competences. Cedefop expert Marco Serafini notes that 'the gender dimension has always been considered a crucial variable in VET analyses.' He adds: 'The fact that VET serves as an entry point for both tertiary education and the labour market means that it represents a fitting option for women of all ages who seek to acquire, update and develop job-specific skills, much needed for employability and further learning.'

In March, Mr Serafini presented Cedefop's insights on gender segregation in education, training and the labour market at a conference organised by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). He said that gender differences in adult training participation become smaller when accounting for characteristics such as age, educational attainment, unemployment status, and, for the employed, the type of job performed, its part-time nature, the sector, and the size of the workplace, suggesting that these have a considerable influence on women's access to training.

Based on Cedefop's European skills and jobs survey, Mr Serafini also observed that women perceive themselves as less competent than their male counterparts at the start of a job, but report, compared to men, higher levels in developing job-related skills over time. Further, women tend to pay for learning opportunities using their own financial assets more than men do, while men rely on employer-funded programmes more than women.



Georgia Karvouniari, VET student in electrical wiring and networking

PUTTING LABELS

EIGE expert Zuzana Madarova addresses the underestimation of women's competences, pointing out that 'studies of job evaluation systems have revealed bias in privileging the value of skills found in occupations considered masculine in contrast to jobs taken up predominantly by women.' She attributes the issue to 'the persistent labelling of study areas and work sectors as either feminine or masculine.'

VET programmes can present women with choices that counterbalance the prevalent gender norms, offering them new prospects of attaining satisfying careers. Georgia Karvouniari is studying electrical wiring and networking at the Oraikastro vocational school in Greece. She describes her vocational journey as 'complex', explaining that after finishing high school she had initially enrolled in pedagogy courses: 'I soon realised that my love for children wasn't something I wanted to turn into a career, and I began thinking about where my talents lie, eventually recognising that I have always been good with sorting out home installations.' Her schoolmate, Athanasia Dedousi, is top of her class in carpentry. 'I grew up watching my father carve different types of wood into amazing objects that we used at home and I knew that I wanted to learn the trade myself,' she says.

Thanks to VET programmes, women like Georgia and Athanasia can become familiar with skills that

are applicable in various science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines. Increased demand for STEM-related occupations, as found by Cedefop's skill supply and demand forecasts, gives these women – and others like them – a competitive advantage in the labour market.

Equal access to all labour market sectors requires the integration of flexible and reliable policies. To that end, Ms Madarova underlines a need for 'comprehensive lifelong learning to ensure the adaptability of all workers to new working conditions and potential career shifts.' She adds that 'increasing the qualifications and employability of the most vulnerable population is a shared responsibility of employees and employers, as well as the public sector.' VET emerges as a fitting approach towards gender equality, with Mr Serafini stressing that 'it can help women of all ages engage in education, command a variety of skills, and employ them in a professional context.' ■

Gender equality and
work-life balance – European
pillar of social rights



Eurostat data
on gender pay gap



Cedefop skill supply
and demand forecast



training for skills

— just like in **football!**

Two enthusiastic supporters of the European Union (EU) agencies' work visited Cedefop in July. MEPs Tomáš Zdechovský and Thodoris Zagorakis were briefed on Cedefop's activities by Director James Calleja, heads of department and other staff.

Speaking to *Skillset and match*, the two parliamentarians, from the Czech Republic and Greece respectively, praised Cedefop's contribution to European vocational education and training development and promised to support it in Brussels and beyond.

Mr Zdechovský, who, as a member of the European Parliament's Budgetary Control Committee, had visited 17 of the over 40 EU agencies before coming to Cedefop, says that he wants to see first-hand the practical issues agencies face, adding that they are 'the best promoters of the EU in the Member States they are located in.'

Budget cuts in recent years mean that these decentralised organisations often struggle to fulfil their mandate. According to Mr Zdechovský, 'it's not possible that all agencies should have a combined budget of less than 1% of the total EU budget.' He hopes that 'after 2020 we will have concrete proposals on how to increase the agencies' budget because we need the work of experts; we cannot go to other



Tomáš Zdechovský MEP (left) and Thodoris Zagorakis MEP at Cedefop

institutions or to private industry for expertise.'

Mr Zagorakis, captain of the Greece team that won the European football championship in 2004 against all odds, comes from Thessaloniki, Cedefop's host city, and is familiar with the agency's 'important work'. He notes: 'I believe in skill development, in personal improvement through continuous training; just as it happens in football. This should be the case in every field. Cedefop is the main data generator when it comes to professional skills in Europe. It is the source of information we use to take initiatives and it was really useful to speak with the people behind the data and research.'

A member of the Culture and Education Committee and a substitute member of the Employment and Social Affairs

Committee, Mr Zagorakis states: 'Our aim is to find solutions to citizens' problems. For me as a Greek, supporting Cedefop is a duty and an obligation. In Thessaloniki, I see the impact of the crisis on employment every day. Through sport, I meet young people all the time. If we bring together youth and sport, education and training we can inform people about Cedefop's work which can offer useful education and training tools.'

For Mr Zdechovský, 'many of the 28 EU Member States have issues with skills. In Europe, we have to think how to inspire every single country. I've been a promoter of the dual system, where you have half of education in school and half in a company, and this is why I was so interested in Cedefop's work. This system prepares people very well for the labour market.' ■

Vocational training for the long-term UNEMPLOYED



Almost 4 million more European citizens were out of work for over a year in 2015, compared to 2007. Although employment growth has recently somewhat improved, in 2015 nearly half of the jobless in the EU, almost 11 million people, were long-term unemployed. Close to two-thirds of them (6.8 million) had been out of work for over two years. Unemployment rates vary greatly among countries and, during periods of crisis, people with low skills are at greater risk of being without a job long-term, according to Cedefop's European skills and jobs survey. The survey also found that the long-term unemployed are more likely to go back to low-skill work. Ideas and plans that will support Cedefop's policy work on vocational training for the long-term unemployed were devised, presented and discussed at a policy learning forum in June – the culmination of the agency's research on skill mismatch since 2008. An online database of upskilling and matching policies is being prepared and will be live in 2018.

Time for people to take control of their skills!



JOHN P. MARTIN

UCD INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

“

One of the important things to bear in mind looking to the future is that individuals have to take more responsibility themselves looking after their skills and upgrading them

Former OECD Director for Employment and renowned labour market expert **John P. Martin** has studied and compared labour market strategies worldwide. He told Cedefop's policy learning forum that these have worked in countries such as Australia, Japan, Norway, Switzerland and the UK, but failed in Finland, Ireland and Slovenia, while in Spain, Portugal and Greece only lip service has been paid to activation. *Skillset and match* asked him why there is such a mixed picture.

It seems clear that job search advice and counselling works very well for people who are relatively close to the labour market and quite job-ready. Labour market training programmes can work, particularly from a long-term perspective, so long as they are tied to the needs of the local employers. Public sector job creation schemes, which are very popular in many countries, do not generally provide good results in terms of increasing the probability of finding a regular job in the labour market, though they may well have some social and private benefits. Many of the evaluations also suggest that the programmes work better for

adult women than they do for adult men. The most depressing part of the story is the long-term unemployed young people who are very disadvantaged. There are few programmes that seem to work for this particular group and this is a real worry.

People with low skills are the most disadvantaged and need training to have a chance of landing a job. But what about those with medium or high skills who still can't get a job because there are too many competitors with a similar profile?

This is difficult, I think. In many cases people who have high skills in a labour market where there is a very high level of unemployment

JOB AGENCY



may well find themselves forced to accept jobs for which they are overqualified; or even perhaps not be able to get those jobs. Though, generally speaking, they will do much better than those people with low or mid-level skills. The hope is that after they find employment and after the employer observes just what their true level of skills is, there will be the possibility of progressing with the same employer or, alternatively, moving to another employer whose job will match their skills and abilities better.

What should those who have a job but are at risk of losing it do?

There are a number of things. You should always pay attention to your skills profile and how that is being adapted to the labour market needs. And if you need to upgrade your skills, then by all means try to find the best training opportunities either with your own employer or elsewhere. That can sometimes be assisted by help from the public purse, either in the form of training allowances or training vouchers or even subsidies to an employer. One

of the important things to bear in mind looking to the future is that individuals have to take more responsibility themselves looking after their skills and upgrading them. They can't always just assume that the employer will look after them or that the State will look after them.

You've discussed subsidies for people to find full-time work, but employers seem to favour part-time work. How do we deal with that?

A few years ago I was very negative towards the idea of offering hiring subsidies for full-time jobs, on the argument that it was more important to get somebody into a job, even if it was part-time. However, many people who are hired in part-time jobs often leave those jobs or go back into unemployment simply because they do not get career progression opportunities or because the earnings they get from those jobs are not sufficiently attractive compared to what they can get on benefits. That's one of the reasons why I'm thinking it may be more important, or at least it may be

something that public authorities need to pay more attention, to try and encourage employers to offer more full-time jobs; because full-time jobs offer a better possibility for people to lift themselves and their families out of poverty.

Given today's changing labour market, automation and crises, it seems you are saying that we need to keep looking at policies, be flexible and prepared to change as things progress.

I think that's essential. Of course, it is not easy for the public authorities or public employment services to match quickly what is happening in the labour market because the needs of employers can vary very rapidly. But they must pay attention to what's happening out there in the labour market, what the evolving needs in the 21st century are with the Fourth Industrial Revolution. But also, individuals themselves need to pay attention to those issues and not always rely on the State to step in. ■

Watch the full interview
with John P. Martin



13

national
initiatives

for the

long-term

unemployed

“

Incentives to learn (and earn); validating existing skills; skill matching with employers; and broader economic approaches that will increase employment as an effect



The common – and expected – focus of measures to address long-term unemployment is actions to help individuals get back into productive work, often referred to as active labour market policies. However, the 13 case studies from across Europe presented in Cedefop’s policy learning forum on vocational training for the long-term unemployed (LTU), show scope for variation in how the issue is tackled: incentives to learn (and earn); validating existing skills; skill matching with employers; and broader economic approaches that will increase employment as an effect. Many cover several of these aspects but all work with the general message that unemployment is undesirable and can be reduced.

SUBSIDISED TRAINING

Direct action with individuals is typified by the Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus (HRDA) with its job placement for the LTU under the age of 60. This offers four-month practical in-company training for qualifying candidates: those registered with public employment services (PES)



for over a six-month continuous period who have less than eight months of work experience relevant to the job they will be trained for.

The trainees benefit from acquiring work experience and specialised additional skills and knowledge, supporting return to the labour market. At the same time, businesses can develop their human resources by employing individuals who have the potential to bring benefit. The HRDA subsidises the employer, who must pay trainees a specified minimum wage. Employers who take on trainees must continue the contract for two months after the initial period without government subsidy.

Similar support to the long-term unemployed is delivered in the UK by public, private and voluntary sector organisations, under contract to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Providers receive job outcome payments when a participant has been in work for either three or six months, and sustainment payments for each subsequent continuous four-week period the participant spends in employment up to a maximum of two years.

Finance for training for the unemployed in Latvia takes the form of vouchers issued directly to the training organisation, with options for formal and non-formal training: improving or updating skills or for Latvian language, foreign language and IT training. The target group goes beyond the LTU to cover the registered unemployed and jobseekers, including the disadvantaged unemployed with disabilities, and those aged 50 and over.

FOCUS ON THE CONTENT

The key characteristic of programmes for the long-term unemployed may be the content rather than the method of financing. Training and certification for the unemployed in Greece, organised by the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity, includes theoretical issues relating to employment (job search, health and safety, labour law) plus ICT skills and work-based training in dynamic sectors selected by local authorities.

MUNICIPALITY OF AMSTERDAM INTERNSHIP TYPES



EXTERNAL INTERNSHIP

learning/working at a regular employer
(max. 6 months, 16-32 hours a week). May 2017:

500 CANDIDATES,
on average **43** YEARS OLD

INTERNAL INTERNSHIP

learning/working at a municipal employer
(max. 6 months, 16-32 hours a week) for
candidates who lack basic 'employee skills'
(coping with colleagues, rules, a boss,
arriving at work on time, etc.). May 2017:

400 CANDIDATES,
on average **38** YEARS OLD

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL INTERNSHIP

for candidates with occupational disabilities
(but ability to work) such as mental (low IQ,
autism), psychiatric or physical disabilities.

Ireland, similarly, focuses in its *Momentum* project on those sectors where there is growth: ICT, digital media, healthcare and social services, the green economy, food processing, and sales and marketing. Some projects are based around opportunities in a specific area, such as the Municipality of Amsterdam internship initiative, which offers a choice of learning/working at a municipal employer for candidates who lack basic 'employee skills' or an 'external internship' at a regular employer.

SUPPORTING REGIONS

Other projects take a broader approach to geography, aims and potential benefits. The Slovak Republic's action plans for 'lagging regions' responds to the fact that the country is not territorially balanced: most of those at risk of poverty or social exclusion – 1 million people, over 20% of the population – are in central and eastern Slovakia regions. Many of the long-term unemployed have no, or minimal, qualifications and there are not enough opportunities for them.

There is a perceived need to raise citizens' skills to current labour market requirements and the broad action plans reflect this need. They cover developing the regions' transport infrastructure and accessibility, improving labour mobility, matching the needs of current and potential employers with local labour supply, improving education quality, supporting vocational education and training, and providing consulting services to entrepreneurs, small businesses or municipalities. They also aim to establish regional centres for education in crafts and services. Supporting the development of such skills and working habits should enable the LTU to move into the labour market.

SKILLS MATTER, SO MATCH THEM

Several of the case study projects take skills matching/mismatch as their starting point, with a focus not just on training but on helping businesses and employers by developing the skills they require. Competence-based training and matching in Flanders (Belgium) is not shaped around long-term unemployed jobseekers but covers this group in dealing with general skill gaps and skill obsolescence. Using a single database for all labour market services (training, career guidance and placement) allows training curricula to be adapted to occupational competence profiles, with specific attention to digital competences needed for occupations. Automatic processes then match skills on offer with demand.

Workplace training in Croatia offers up to 170 hours per month on the job for the unemployed, with the aim of providing a better match to the needs of specific employers. Two workplace training options are offered: acquiring an employer's certificate or acquiring a competence certificate. In both cases, employers and the public employment service work together, developing specific curricula and selecting trainees. Employers are required to employ a number of participants after completion of training if they wish to apply for this measure again.

Two countries, Luxembourg and Greece, have skills matching projects structured around specific employment goals. The FIT4 training portfolio in Luxembourg has a series of programmes that include green jobs, IT coding, entrepreneurship, career relaunch and financial markets; together they cover a potential skill range from low education to high.

PROFESSIONAL GUIDANCE

FIT4 entrepreneurship offers coaching and training for jobseekers with entrepreneurial potential; it aims to provide them with the tools and support needed to create a company. After initial selection, candidates follow a training course enabling them to identify their entrepreneurial profile and their motivation. The initiative supports them in devising a business idea and shows them how to draft a business plan; an experienced coach then supports their progress. Finally, candidates defend their idea in front of a jury that challenges aspects such as project viability. There is further professional guidance for participants who decide not to pursue their entrepreneurial project.

The other strands of the portfolio offer differentiated training – at levels appropriate to participants, delivered by various suppliers with relevant credentials – plus tailored support in moving into employment. Career relaunch includes mentorship, while the financial markets strand includes employers as part of the process of selecting candidates for training.

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The Greek initiative *Be a producer* also takes an entrepreneurial approach: it helps public and private local actors to form partnerships to develop tailor-made action plans for social inclusion and employability, mainly through business creation and social entrepreneurship. The process includes SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis of the existing structure of farms in

The Issue

- Development of Slovakia - not territorially balanced;
- Most of low-income and socially excluded people - in lagging regions in central and eastern Slovakia;
- 1,1 million people (cca 20,5 percent of the population) - at risk of poverty or social exclusion;
- Long-term unemployed workers that have no or minimal qualification,
- Not enough opportunities - need for systematic approach to entrepreneurship providing citizens' skills up to current labour market requirements.



Supporting regions in Slovakia presentation

the selected region, and development of an action plan proposing the production and promotion of agricultural products (selected fruits, vegetables and herbs) through an integrated and sustainable management system. It is seen as a key solution to sustainable (social) entrepreneurship and business creation that helps the LTU start an agricultural business or social cooperative, gain the qualifications to benefit from other investment programmes, or acquire skills that will meet identified needs of local businesses that will hire them.

OLD SKILLS, NEW RECOGNITION

In some cases, it is not training in skills but recognition of existing skills that makes the difference. Validation of non-formally and informally acquired skills and competences in Romania aims to help the LTU and other disadvantaged groups on the labour market (such as rural workers) move towards more permanent employment and/or more complete vocational training. It focuses on those with no, or incomplete, schooling but with skills acquired via work experience, offering assessment and formal validation of those skills. All validation costs are covered by the unemployment insurance fund. However, following

'TO BE A PRODUCER' PROJECT IN GREECE HELPS THE LTU:



- start an agricultural business or social cooperative;
- gain qualifications to benefit from other investment programmes;
- acquire skills that will meet identified needs of local businesses that will hire them.

RESULTS INCLUDE:

46 BENEFICIARIES created *Gi Thessalis* social cooperative enterprise (awarded the Green Social Enterprise 2014 prize in the Social Business Excellence Awards);

7 BENEFICIARIES started their own farm;

29 BUSINESS PLANS
28 for private agricultural business,
1 for a social cooperative.



validation of non-formally or informally acquired skills, beneficiaries are obliged to accept a suitable offer from the public employment service. Unjustified refusal entitles the PES to recover the money spent on the validation/assessment process.

PRACTICAL DEMONSTRATION

The Qualifica centres in Portugal are installed in public vocational training centres and employment centres as part of a policy that sees qualification of adults as a strategic national priority: they aim to ensure that the labour force, either employed or unemployed, can see their competences/skills formally recognised to support career progression, European mobility, and continuing studies. While the measure does not specifically target the long-term unemployed, its methodology allows assessing different competences for beneficiaries with different profiles; it has proven value for unemployed experienced professionals trying to avoid long-term unemployment and long and unnecessary vocational training.

Candidates carry out a practical skills demonstration before a jury. Certification can be total, allowing the award of a diploma, or partial; in the case of partial certification, only the validated competences are certified and additional training is needed to develop the missing competences and obtain the final diploma. Partial certification is accepted by many employers for access to the job market. There is no difference between a diploma obtained within this programme and one obtained within the mainstream vocational training system; the programme is already available for about 150 national standards. Having partial certification combined with vocational training makes it possible to focus the training on essential elements, rather than these being included in a more extensive programme. ■

Read more on the inspiring practices presented at Cedefop's forum





Vocational education and training (VET) has always played a strong role in Estonia's success story in education. In the past 10 years, the country has had outstanding progress in lifelong learning – starting from 7% in 2007 and reaching 15.7% in 2016.

Estonia is committed to do even more and develop innovative ways to attract both young people and adults to VET. Some of the initiatives in the framework of the current Estonian EU Presidency show just that:



Opening up VET:

ESTONIA'S efforts to attract learners

- 2017 has been declared the year of skills. It aims at developing a mindset where craftsmanship and skills are appreciated in society and the labour market. Through events all over Estonia, young people and adults are encouraged to use a wide range of opportunities to learn and improve their skills. Several national events are being organised, such as the national skills competition 'young master' and the video competition 'I can do it'. There are also many regional and local events. Schools, employers and other partners organise open days, skills competitions, intern and career days, workshops, seminars, information events, fairs and campaigns.
- Estonia's first mobile workshops were put on wheels in spring 2017. The workshops, equipped with modern technology and tools, are intended for young people aged 10 to 15, offering them fascinating activities and directing them towards more informed career choices. The focus of the first workshops is on professions in the metal and timber industry sectors, and the main idea is to provide hands-on experience of the state-of-the-art technologies. Local timber and metal industry entrepreneurs are showcasing career possibilities in their sectors and presenting success stories. Over the course of two years, the mobile workshops will visit every county at least four times, stopping at youth centres, youth camps, information fairs and other places popular among young people.
- Estonian VET schools are launching virtual tours of their facilities. Potential learners can take a peek at what goes on in different workshops, labs and classrooms and see what processes, tools and technologies one can work with at VET schools. ■



by REFERNET ESTONIA
www.innove.ee/refernet

how to stop early leavers

If, as Paul Simon sang, there are *50 ways to leave your lover*, it would be interesting to hear his view on how many ways there are to stop an early leaver from education and training. Anyone looking for inspiration on this, songwriters and educators alike, would have found much information to consider at Cedefop's policy learning forum on vocational education and training (VET) as a solution to leaving education early. At the forum, 26 posters with policies and programmes from across Europe were presented by their coordinators and discussed in working groups.

CATCHING EARLY LEAVERS EARLY

One group of participants reported on projects that emphasise identifying those at risk of early leaving or catching them as they walk away from education before the appointed time. Some work with the learners themselves, trying to establish who is at risk so that relevant parties can step in, while others provide background information and examples of successful actions.

The *CroCoos* project is based around an early warning scheme for early leaving. Each school has an early warning team that devises and manages its strategy, looking for distress signals and identifying individual learners at risk of dropping out. Once an individual is identified, intervention follows, usually in the shape of a personal development plan. The team can draw on guidelines developed and supplied by *CroCoos*, along with a toolkit and resource pool: they can also link to other early warning teams to share ideas and experience.

The project is the result of international cooperation under the EU-funded lifelong learning programme. The partners carried out research to provide the content for the early warning teams and also piloted the resources to ensure they delivered the desired results. Project mentors help build the school teams and establish a culture that supports monitoring and intervention. Support is also given to national and international cooperation so that successes and lessons can be shared.

External liaison to ensure cross-sectoral cooperation is a feature of *CroCoos* and many of the other projects. Social security, health

CROCOOS PROJECT

WHAT → HOW

- setting up early warning system (EWS) team in each school
- establishing EWS strategy in the school
- improving partnerships inside and outside the school
- improving school's data gathering and processing capacity
- setting up system to monitor distress signals
- identifying students at risk of dropout
- planning adequate intervention
- intervention based on personal development plan



Poster exhibition – Cedefop’s policy learning forum on VET as a solution to early leaving

and mental health services, law enforcement, and labour market aspects (including input from employers) are often used to assist efforts from parents/guardians and educators. *PACA (VET portal)* in Portugal is a digital platform that records key information – such as attendance, absence, competences and evaluation – in an online learner profile accessible to outside interests who can help improve prospects for the individual, as well as teachers and parents or guardians.

The Dutch project *Invest in talent* takes this further. Its integrated content approach believes that the causes of early school leaving often lie outside the education institution and can involve a combination of factors, such as an unsettled domestic situation, stress, drug use, debts, lack of social and employment skills, and a lack of, or a poorly functioning, social network. Tackling the project in this way requires a stakeholder base with a mix of employers, education institutions, housing associations and coaching organisations. Local/regional government authorities act as partners and play a facilitating role across four critical areas: work, education, housing and coaching.

Extending cooperation is a characteristic of many projects focused on the individual. This can be international (*ESLplus*), inter-ministerial (in a French project in which even the Ministry of Defence is involved) or involve different

administration levels (in a Dutch project bringing local, regional and national actors together). Three Luxembourg projects show that benefits also accrue from sharper focus: *Recognise, remedy, re-engage* and the *National student database* both concentrate on the individual learner while *Action locale pour jeunes* provides local support for learners in transition from school to VET.

MENTORING FOR SUCCESS

Several of the projects look to help prevent early leaving through direct mentoring of both learners and the staff working with them. Where learners are the target, the initiatives may involve coaching on transition to other forms of training or to employment. Projects working with staff aim to provide training methods to be used to guide those at risk of early leaving. Some projects cover both target groups.

The *Antwerp youth coaching* project uses young people who are themselves school dropouts. They have the same background as their coached peers, so they have credibility with them and are able to detect problems at an early stage and help prevent escalation. The youth coaches are both agents of the project and its targets; their work empowers them and helps them to achieve a qualification and later find a job.

Flemish schools apply to the Flemish Department of Education for a youth coaching project and then



select a candidate and appoint a mentor for the youth coach. The Department of Education provides training for coaches, which includes the coaching skills they will use, and supports them to achieve a qualification. A youth coach is contracted for a complete school year; renewing the contract is possible for a second and sometimes a third year. The specific job content is defined by the school but has to respect the job description from the Department of Education.

WHAT PARTICIPANTS IN THE YOUTH COACHING PROJECT IN ANTWERP, BELGIUM HAVE SAID:

'Seems like yesterday that I started on this journey. I never knew I would be capable of doing this.'

'I was afraid of failing all my life. I didn't know I could get so strong and tell others to have faith in themselves.'

Around 60 youth coaches work in 50 Antwerp schools. Eight out of 10 of those who get involved in the scheme ultimately obtain a certificate, while five out of 10 find a job. The net result of the action is to provide good working experience for early leavers and encouragement to finish studies for those at the respective schools.

In alternative mentoring approaches, the *VerA* initiative in Germany uses senior experts in one-to-one coaching while the *Success* programme in Barcelona uses older students – 'elder friends' – to assist those experiencing difficulty.

Interactive projects have also been devised to support mentoring. *COACH²* in Belgium helps learners to develop 'reality-based' plans for their schools while the joint Danish-Finnish project *Actvise* uses theatre forms in its work: it gathers information on the issues that encourage dropout and turns it into dramas that can be acted out. Managed in Finland but with international partners, the *DIG IT* project harnesses the potential of storytelling to boost learner motivation and engagement.

Staff coaching is a feature of the *QuABB* project in Hesse, Germany, and *STAY-IN*, based in Austria but international in reach. Staff training models and

approaches from the eight-partner project *NEW-D* and the *SOS network* in Denmark focus specifically on the special needs that can accentuate risk of dropout. *NoOut* in Italy combines developing new education approaches to help reduce early leaving with teacher training in these approaches and changes to school programmes.

SEEKING AND SUPPORTING SECOND CHANCES

While preventing early leaving is the core aim of all the projects featured at the conference, some acknowledge that this might not be managed at the first try and that leavers may need continued support either to re-engage them or to move them into employment. One Spanish project under the management of the *Cooperativa Jovent* (Mallorca) has the broad aim of improving the quality of life and the social and labour integration of young people and other groups with vulnerability factors.

The project works with the aid of companies, entrepreneurs, public bodies and social entities, combining their various inputs and skills into a whole that can offer support. It looks to take an individual in need of help and create a training and employment insertion plan that will produce a productive and positive member of society, rather than one on the margins because of missed opportunities. It offers guidance in identifying a path forward, training to suit the selected option, and further training and assistance in seeking a position or relevant work experience. Current figures show that 94% of participants are early leavers when they come to the project: outcomes include continued training in VET or adult education and certification of achievements.

Also in Spain, *Road map* in Barcelona aims to encourage return for early leavers but complements its efforts with career guidance, making the potential benefits of continuing training more obvious. The Belgian (Flanders) two-stage project *Exit folder* and *Exit talk* aims to stimulate young people to reflect on their futures and help them select a suitable alternative pathway. *Youthreach* in Ireland targets those who have not been successful in their education, offering integrated general education, vocational training and work experience as a way forward.

COOPERATIVA JOVENT'S PROJECT RESULTS (2016):

- **7 in 10** of young people who followed training pathway obtained certificate of professionalism
- **15%** of those who followed pathway 'guidance and support in finding a job' re-engaged in education and training

Two projects provide specific locations for giving early leavers a second chance at education and training. The French *Pôle innovant lycéen* is a one-year school for early leavers that helps 100 to 150 to start school again. It offers a less formal environment for learning, different approaches to learner-teacher interaction, and transversal activities that bring together different subjects and more practical activities. The second chance school in Portugal offers programmes designed for the individual with the help of the individual. It supports personal and social development, artistic education, school certification, and vocational training for specific sectors. After a year of training, each participant is helped to continue education or to find a job. The school is part of the European Association of Cities for second Chance Schools, which operates under the banner *2young2fail* – a fitting description of the overarching approach of all those who took part in the forum.



Find out more about each project



Cedefop policy learning forum: VET as a solution to leaving education early



new

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IN FOCUS

VET TOOLKIT FOR TACKLING EARLY LEAVING



The Europe-wide online vocational education and training (VET) toolkit for tackling early leaving from education and training was developed by Cedefop in 2017. Based on evidence of success, it provides practical guidance, tips, good practices and tools drawn from VET, aiming at helping young people to attain at least an upper secondary qualification, and early leavers to reintegrate into education or training and the labour market.



OTHER PUBLICATIONS:

- Towards age-friendly work in Europe: a life-course perspective on work and ageing from EU agencies
- Cedefop annual report 2016
- Sharing knowledge about vocational education and training
- European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning – 2016 update
- Developing and running an establishment skills survey – Guide to anticipating and matching skills and jobs, Volume 5 (with ETF and ILO)
- Briefing note – Vocational education and training: bridging refugee and employer needs
- Vocational education and training in Malta – Short description
- Spotlight on VET – Latvia

coming up



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IN FOCUS

2nd EUROPEAN VOCATIONAL SKILLS WEEK



20-24 NOVEMBER

BRUSSELS, BELGIUM AND ACROSS EUROPE



The first European vocational skills week, organised by the European Commission with Cedefop as a partner, took place in December 2016 with events in Brussels and hundreds of activities in Member States, EFTA and EU candidate countries. To capitalise on this energy and enthusiasm, a second instalment is planned for 20 to 24 November 2017. The initiative aspires to improve vocational education and training's attractiveness and image. It intends to showcase excellence and quality, and raise awareness of the wide range of opportunities available. At the week's closing event, the first-place winners of this year's #CedefopPhotoAward will receive their prize.

OTHER EVENTS

NOVEMBER	9–10	THESSALONIKI, GREECE	The impact of national qualifications frameworks conference – A European vocational skills week event
NOVEMBER	23–24	THESSALONIKI, GREECE	Cedefop skill needs forecasting expert workshop
NOVEMBER	29–30	THESSALONIKI, GREECE	ReferNet annual plenary meeting – A European vocational skills week event
DECEMBER	8	BRUSSELS, BELGIUM	4th Cedefop Brussels-based seminar, jointly organised with the Estonian EU Presidency



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