



REACHING OUT TO 'INVISIBLE' YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS

Recovery and upskilling pathways for vulnerable groups

Low qualifications, disengagement from education and training, and long-term unemployment are interconnected phenomena and tend to cumulate throughout a person's life. Missed chances in early childhood, school age and young adulthood may draw disadvantaged people into a cycle of social marginalisation with ever more scarring effects. Having failed to build adequate soft and technical skills, they may have lowered their expectations, do not know how to search and apply for jobs, and may be under severe stress caused by family, financial and social pressure. Long unemployment spells tend to become more frequent, low skills and qualifications persist, and decaying physical and psychological health conditions may ensue ⁽¹⁾.

National authorities across Europe have been developing outreach measures to address the needs of people who slip through the cracks of standard education, training and employment policies ⁽²⁾. People who lack basic life and work skills require holistic strategies, which may mobilise health, social and psychological services and delay standard employability measures, such as job search and traineeship placements, to the last stage of an individualised recovery programme.

⁽¹⁾ Qualified people are also increasingly at risk of (long-term) unemployment. This may be linked to their education choices or the low labour market value of the skills and knowledge they have obtained. There are also inactivity patterns resulting from family obligations, especially in women. This briefing note focuses on the most vulnerable, with no or low qualifications, and national policy responses. Support to inactive higher-qualified people will be discussed in future briefings.

⁽²⁾ Outreach services address people beyond the reach of standard provisions, allowing them to benefit from career development support and learning activities by adapting methodologies to their needs. Typically, target groups include the non-registered unemployed, inactive young people, marginalised individuals, and ethnic minorities.

European funding helps countries finance outreach measures

Three main EU-level initiatives encourage the development of outreach: the Youth guarantee ⁽³⁾, the upskilling pathways for adults ⁽⁴⁾ and the Council *Recommendation on the integration of long-term unemployed into the labour market* ⁽⁵⁾. However, the nature and extent of outreach services vary across the EU. To understand better the state of play, Cedefop has produced, in cooperation with its network of national VET experts, ReferNet, a series of reports on outreach services in all EU Member States ⁽⁶⁾.

Many such services are part-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF). Projects differ considerably, which shows the openness and flexibility of this financing mechanism. ESF support has included training of administrative and technical staff, operation of support centres, field and networking activities, and production of methodologies and documentation. In some cases funds were centrally managed and allocated to municipalities. In other cases, calls for outreach services were issued at regional or local level with the opportunity for public and civil sector organisations to apply for funding. In recent years, EU Member States have increasingly tapped funds under the Youth guarantee to finance outreach measures.

⁽³⁾ [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32013H0426\(01\)](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32013H0426(01))

⁽⁴⁾ http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:JOC_2016_484_R_0001

⁽⁵⁾ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32016H0220%2801%29>

⁽⁶⁾ Publication of reports forthcoming.

Outreach to enable upskilling: the young are better off than adults

There are many structures in place to reach out to young people at risk. Denmark has around 100 'production schools' offering work-based training and comprehensive support to young people under the age of 25, enabling them to develop basic soft and technical skills ⁽⁷⁾. Germany and Austria have created similar schools. In Austria, they are part of a nationwide youth assistance network piloted by the Ministry of Social Affairs and jointly funded by the ESF and the Youth guarantee. The latter serves as an umbrella which integrates distinct measures such as networking with youth groups, guidance and counselling, coaching, basic skills development, work-based learning and placements.

Acknowledgement of long-term unemployment issues in national policies is less clear and frequent. It is still common practice across Europe for registered long-term unemployed (LTU) adults to be 'parked' after having unsuccessfully undergone activation measures. Depending on national regulations, individuals deemed unfit or hard to recover receive reduced support or lose access to activation measures. On an even lower threshold of social risk, people who are not registered with public employment services (PES) or are difficult to contact will find even less help. Frequently, tracking and activation of these adults tends to be undertaken by NGOs with variable levels of support by public administration. To start building capacity in this area, the Czech Republic has participated in the pilot project *Goal*, using Erasmus+ funds. This has helped the country to reinforce career guidance and support to hard-to-reach unemployed people, integrating it with national VET and validation systems ⁽⁸⁾. In Spain's Extremadura region, outreach measures are developed by organisations subcontracted by the State to encourage the LTU to register with regional employment services with a view to obtaining access to guidance and training.

Support is best organised locally

To be effective, outreach policies need to be anchored in national strategies and target groups clearly identified. While interministerial cooperation and

⁽⁷⁾ <http://www.psf.nu/>

⁽⁸⁾ <http://www.projectgoal.eu/index.php/czech-republic/ministry-of-education-youth-and-sports>

multisourcing of funds and technical resources are best planned centrally, implementation requires regional or local coordination. Coordination by municipality is desirable but presents considerable challenges, as these deal with a wide range of issues and have limited resources.

Finnish national legislation for youth support and education explicitly addresses outreach, while municipalities frequently hold the main technical and financial resources to sustain outreach provision, and coordinate efforts of PES, youth services, social and health services, NGOs and schools. They also tend to have a brokerage role in establishing cooperation with local employers willing to provide mentoring and work-based learning programmes. Municipal outreach responsibility can be a legal obligation, as is the case in Sweden for the young. One-stop shop services also tend to make use of municipal facilities and staff to support their operation.

In the Netherlands (Amsterdam), interdisciplinary outreach teams consist of both PES and municipal staff. 'Learning and working desks' provide young adults (23 or older) with information on learning and validation options as well as brokerage services with employers.

In Latvia, the municipally managed programme *Know and do* aimed at non-registered people (NEETs: neither in employment nor in education/training) has notable central administration support. The Agency for International Programmes for Youth provides funding, training and counselling to local programme managers and mentors, and helps them monitor the measures they implement.

Evaluation: a condition for mainstreaming policies

Regular evaluation of measures is essential to promote consistent support and mainstream successful practices. In Finland, evaluation of local partnerships coordinated by municipalities is standard, and best outreach practices are generalised to the whole country. In Austria, production schools are assessed in terms of the employability of participants based on follow-up contacts one year after conclusion of the programme.

Tracking people in need

Successful practices in Scandinavia, the Baltic countries and the Netherlands show that shared records allow for quicker, broader and more effective measures at local and regional levels. School records can identify (potential) early school leavers, while social services' records tend to be effective in identifying at-risk adults. NGOs also possess valuable information about disadvantaged individuals, which often includes both official and informal ways to contact them. When this information is up to date and available to municipal or regional outreach services, it can be used to identify and contact people who may benefit from reintegration programmes. Exchange and usage of personal data is, however, a sensitive issue and may be limited due to privacy law. Reviewing and relaxing privacy regulations while maintaining essential civil rights may be a necessary step. There is also a need for standards regarding format, consistency and timing of updates, as well as fixed agreements on information sharing across services.

Reaching out is a holistic, proactive service

Finding and contacting people who may be in weakened health and psychological states, marginalised or involved in criminal activities requires holistic methods, active networking and trained professionals. Field networks developed by youth services and NGOs, allowing for quick and informal access to potential users, have proven to work well.

In Latvia, the State Employment Agency reaches out to non-registered people in cooperation with NGOs in the field who help identify potential beneficiaries. Once beneficiaries are engaged in the services, health checks are performed and psychological support is provided, alongside skills and attitudes assessments. Participants also benefit from motivational support and mentoring and have access to counselling and rehabilitation from substance abuse. Job search and contact with employers is generally postponed until participants are deemed ready.

Municipal outreach for young adults in Stockholm

The municipality of Stockholm, in cooperation with the local employment service, the Social Insurance Agency and the youth centre Fryshuset has developed the ESF-supported SUVAS programme ⁽⁹⁾ to address people aged 20 to 29. The project follows a structured outreach strategy, consisting of initial contact followed by an information session, coaching, and guidance and counselling, culminating in a job or training-oriented solution.

One of the most notable characteristics of the SUVAS programme is the effort dedicated to reaching and contacting people in need. Parental cafes, girls' evenings and other social events are organised to attract potential participants. Mobile counsellors attend events, such as concerts or group gatherings, where they can meet hard-to-reach young adults. Young adults identified as undertaking criminal activities are also contacted, using police records and through close relationships. Since most of the potential participants with criminal records are hard-to-reach young men, girlfriends are frequently used as intermediaries.

Harnessing the strength of groups: peers and communities ⁽⁹⁾

People returning to school or work need a safe and supportive environment. In Spain, the NGO-coordinated 'launch pads for employment and social entrepreneurship' ⁽¹⁰⁾ bring together groups of vulnerable adults, supported by a coach, to promote development of motivation, self-awareness, and skills. Participants are encouraged to share experiences and cooperate in various activities.

Social entrepreneurship and communitarian organisation are also used to reintegrate adults into learning and work. Poland has recently set up State-funded social cooperatives. These can form spontaneously or with support from NGOs; at least half of their members must be at risk of social

⁽⁹⁾ Stockholms Unga Vuxna Arbetar eller Studerar: <https://www.esf.se/sv/Resultat/Projektbanken/Behallare-for-projekt/Stockholm/Unga-vuxna-20-29-ar-som-varken-arbetar-eller-studerar/>

⁽¹⁰⁾ <http://www.lanzaderasdeempleo.es/>

exclusion. Cooperatives market their services and products, while developing social and vocational reintegration activities. They offer great promise, reporting increasing numbers of successful cases involving reintegration of marginalised or disabled people or refugees. Social cooperatives have a potential to reach a high level of autonomy and become successful business models.

Grantoftegaard: farming a future

Grantoftegaard ⁽¹¹⁾ is a Danish socioeconomic company which develops ecologic farming; it also has a shop and a canteen on its grounds. The farm employs young dropouts and LTU (referred to Grantoftegaard by the municipality) as well as regular apprentices. Once engaged, participants benefit from counselling, needs assessment and personal career development plans. They are integrated in the farm work and undergo a tailored development programme, which is closely monitored by group managers.

The approach is progressive, based on building self-esteem. Participants develop basic and career management skills; guidance and counselling strategies also engage their families.

The programme is sustained by strong work ethics, with the goal of finding an appropriate work or apprenticeship placement, lasting a minimum of 13 weeks. Results of the final assessments are communicated to municipalities. The farm has a recognised brand, being especially well-reputed for the bread it produces.

Caveats and ways forward

Successful initiatives and policies for all age groups have multiplied and diversified across Europe. There is plenty of room for mutual learning, for example, on how to strengthen the links between policy-makers and practitioners with a view to mainstreaming policies, or on how to conciliate national priorities with the opportunities provided under EU initiatives.

Outreach policies need to cater both for the young and adults and to focus on recovery and rehabilitation, besides prevention. In many countries, people lose entitlement to support after a certain period of time or

when they outgrow age-based programmes. Once people drop off the radar of public services, their career pathways tend to spiral downward. This is why outreach policies require time and flexibility, to allow beneficiaries to establish an individual perspective on themselves and the labour market.

To offer an effective complementary approach to standard welfare support, outreach needs to grow and rely on strong cooperation and exchange of information between public, private and civil sector stakeholders at local and regional levels, promoting services that go to the streets, beyond the traditional 'open door' offices. Such outreach needs to be backed up by teams of professionals who can provide individual services, based on assessment of skills and needs, so that reintegration is supported by the right tools at the right pace. To be sustainable, outreach policies must be built on the common understanding that a society that leaves no one behind is stronger, socially cohesive and more capable of producing economic value.

⁽¹¹⁾ <http://grantoftegaard.dk/>