



Recent policy developments related to those not in employment, education and training (NEETs)

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Increasing the participation of young people in the labour market has become an urgent policy goal and in recent times the focus has been directed at the 'NEET' group – young people 'not in employment, education and training'. This report summarises the findings from 28 national reports by experts from the 'European Restructuring Monitor' (ERM) network on the topic of public and social partner based measures aimed at re-engaging young NEETs (aged 15–29 years). The aim of the report is to explore the most recent NEET-specific policy interventions in the EU Member States and Norway, as well as other policy measures aimed at promoting the general employment participation of young people, which potentially impact on NEETs. The findings show that given the diversity of the NEET population, Member States have adopted policy measures addressing various NEET sub-groups in order to provide more tailored and personalised support.

Introduction

Across Europe, there is growing evidence of young people being excluded from the labour market and society. Young people have been hit hard by the recession and their transition from education to work has become very difficult. This disengagement from the labour market may have lasting effects. It is certainly resulting in a growing core of disaffected youth who are distanced to such an extent from the labour market and from society itself that they need considerable support to re-engage.

Unemployment is high among all young people in comparison to adults and has worsened since the economic crisis; young people accounted for almost one-fifth (17.8%) of the increase in unemployment between 2008 and 2010 (European Commission, 2010a). This is partly because of the precarious situation of many young people who are in work – they were often among the first to lose their jobs as their temporary contracts were not renewed. Job prospects for young people entering the labour market may also have diminished as they are now competing with jobseekers with more employment experience in a market with fewer jobs to offer.

The labour market situation of young people has traditionally been illustrated through indicators such as the employment and unemployment rates (European Commission, 2010b). However, it has been recognised that such indicators give only a limited picture of the labour market and social situation of young people, since many young people are not in the labour force because they are still in school, training or university. Therefore, the concept of 'NEETs' has come to be commonly used to describe this group. The acronym NEET stands for young people 'not in employment, education or training', and the first emerged in the UK where, during the 1980s, it was used as an alternative method of categorising young people in line with changes in unemployment benefit policies (Furlong, 2007). NEETs have also caught the attention of policy-makers across the EU as a useful indicator for monitoring the situation of young people in the context of the Europe 2020 Employment Guidelines (European Commission, 2010b).

As defined by Eurostat, the NEET category encompasses all unemployed and inactive young persons who are not in any education and training (European Commission, 2010b). This definition is seen to be more suited to capturing the extent of the group of young people who are disengaged from both work and education and therefore at greater risk of unemployment and social exclusion later in life.

In 2010, over a tenth of young people aged 15–24 in Europe were NEET (in total 7.4 million), with the EU27 average NEET rate at 12.8%, an increase of two percentage points compared to 2008. However the rates vary considerably across the EU, with the highest rate in Bulgaria (21.8%) in 2010 and the lowest rate in the Netherlands (4.4%). The problem is also particularly acute in Ireland, Italy, Spain and Latvia. The situation is no better for those aged 25–29, as shown

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by the Eurofound elaboration of 2009 Labour Force Survey data, with around one-fifth of the age cohort being classified as NEETs.

However, the NEET definition does not necessarily mean that this is a heterogeneous group; on the contrary, it includes young people with widely differing backgrounds and a range of reasons for falling into NEET status.

NEET sub-groups range from the most disadvantaged and disengaged to those who become NEET after dropping out of a course or losing a job (LSN and IES, 2009), or simply deciding to be NEET. Thus the NEET category encompasses young people who have no or little control over their situation, such as the unemployed, those suffering from an illness, the disabled and young carers, and also sub-groups who do have control over their situation, including young people who are not seeking work or a place in education or training and are not constrained from doing so by other obligations or incapacities. The NEET category also includes those young people who are involved in constructive activities such as unpaid voluntary work, art projects and travelling during 'gap years' (Eurofound, 2011a).

A number of social, economic and personal factors, including both individual and family background factors, that are likely to increase the chances of an individual becoming NEET have been identified in the literature (Eurofound, 2011a; LSC, 2006). In particular, young people with a low level of educational attainment, young people with a disability and young people from an immigrant background are more likely to be NEET. Nonetheless, it is important to highlight that, as a result of the economic crisis, a large share of young adults with tertiary education are now also at risk of ending up in NEET status. In countries such as Estonia, Greece and Italy around one-fifth of young people with a tertiary education degree are NEETs.

This implies that even if being NEET is often a consequence of deprivation (often transferred over generations) and disadvantage (such as financial problems, substance abuse issues, criminal activity, low self-esteem, low attainment at school of both parents and children or a complex combination of such factors) (LSC, 2006), being NEET is not the same as being deprived. As shown above, high-achieving young people can become NEET if there are few jobs on offer and the skills of some highly educated young people are not in high demand by employers, as a result of skills mismatch.

Targeting youths who are NEET is extremely important, as being NEET at a young age can have devastating consequences; it is widely agreed that a spell of unemployment early in a young person's working life can have long-term or 'scarring' effects. These effects can influence not only the young person's employment prospects and income but also their health status and job satisfaction. A study using UK data published in 2009, for example, found that unemployment when a young person is in his /her early 20s can generate permanent scars in terms of unemployment, health status, wages and job satisfaction. This is not the case for unemployment among people in their 30s (Bell and Blanchflower, 2009). Another study into the longer-term consequences of being NEET found links to persistent offending, as involvement in criminal activity amongst 18–30-year-olds is highly correlated with 'having been excluded from school, having no or low qualifications and regular drug and alcohol misuse' (Coles et al, 2002). The effects continue throughout the young person's lifetime and even their pension entitlements may be reduced due to periods of unemployment and involvement in low-paid work (Coles et al, 2002). Furthermore being NEET is also an enormously costly problem, both for the individual and their family, as well as for society as a whole. In Finland, for example, the cost of exclusion at a young age has been calculated at €27,500 per young person per year (Valtionalouden tarkastusvirasto, 2007). In the UK, the average individual lifetime public finance cost of being NEET was estimated at around GBP 52,000 (around €60,900) in 2002, increasing to a lifetime cost of an estimated GBP 56,300 (around €66,000) according to calculations in 2009 (Coles et al, 2010). More recently, [Eurofound](#) (2011a) has found that the cost of the problem reaches around €100 billion per year across a sample of 21 European countries.

It could be argued that the term ‘NEET’ crept into the policy vocabulary without much consideration being given to what it means and what it tries to capture. Therefore the term NEET draws attention to the multifaceted nature of disadvantage. It includes different groups with varying needs but who are highly likely to be unemployed regularly or persistently or to be out of education and training in the short- to medium-term. For this reason, while it is correct to set targets to reduce the overall numbers of ‘NEETs’, policies and interventions should take account of the varying needs of the different sub-groups among the NEET population (Eurofound, 2011a).

Within this framework, this report aims to investigate the policy measures that Member States have adopted in recent years in order to re-engage young NEETs into education and employment. In fact, as there is a clear recognition of the importance of tackling the problem of NEETs at European level, highlighted in policy documents as well as in the setting of targets and recommendations to Member States at the national level, there seems to be a rising level of awareness of the issue. This is confirmed by the ERM country experts for this CAR, who were asked to assess the level of interest among different stakeholders in their country (policy-makers, the media, employers and trade unions) in the issue of NEETs.

With regard to measures tackling early school leaving and measures to make the transition from education to employment easier, the report outlines the way in which countries across Europe are focusing their policy responses on certain sub-groups of the overall NEET population, in order to develop more tailored and personalised support.

An overview is given of measures that have been introduced at national level in order to tackle the problem of NEET in relation to the following core themes.

- Tackling early school leaving:
 - Preventive measures;
 - Reintegration measures.
- Facilitating the transition to employment:
 - Measures to support school-to-work transitions;
 - Measures to foster employability;
 - Removing practical and logistical barriers.
 - Employer incentives

Tackling early school leaving

Preventive measures

In recent years there has been growing recognition that educational policies and programmes (together with those in the social, health and labour market fields), as well as schools and teachers, can and should play a growing role in efforts to prevent young people from leaving education early. This means that early school leaving (ESL) is understood as a problem of the education system, society and the school, rather than as a problem caused only by the young person and his/her family, background or peers (Nevala and Hawley, 2011).

There are also other drivers for the Member States to invest in preventive policies. It is, for example, recognised that the prevention of ESL can be less time-consuming and resource-intensive than facilitating reintegration for those who have already become disengaged (Lyche, 2010). This is illustrated, for example, by policy changes to integrate pre-primary education policies within the ESL framework to ensure that children start primary education on an equal footing.

Over 80 policies and measures to prevent ESL were reviewed for this report. An overwhelming majority of these were national (rather than regional or local) in scale, indicating a recognition of

structural weaknesses in the education system that need to be addressed in a coordinated manner, typically through a national framework (even if in many cases the local actors have a great deal of freedom to choose a policy mix most appropriate to them).

More countries now address ESL within a broader policy framework, either through a dedicated national umbrella policy on ESL or through a broader strategy addressing the situation of disadvantaged youth. Fundamentally, the benefit of such an approach is that it recognises that the issue is multifaceted and complex (Nevala and Hawley, 2011). For example, in the Netherlands the ‘Drive to reduce dropout rates’ (*aanval op schooluitval*) encourages the development of programmes at a local level to prevent ESL, through contracts with local schools and projects, additional funding and further financial incentives to schools. This framework programme has contributed to a significant reduction in the rate of ESL. For example, the number of students dropping out of education fell by nearly 20% between 2005/2006 and 2008/2009.

Unsurprisingly, countries with regional administrative structures (such as Germany, Italy, Spain) have more regional leadership in this field, but it is also apparent that there is an aspiration, and in some cases also the political will, to make ESL a priority at national level. For example, in Spain, a holistic, national plan for the reduction of early school leaving was introduced in 2008 (*Plan para la Reducción del Abandono Escolar*). The plan includes broad guidelines and funding for regions to support activities that reduce the number of early school leavers.

The review of the measures introduced also suggests that there is some variation between the Member States in the general approach taken, which is due to a range of factors, including the rate of ESL, socio-economic context and the history of the country. In countries such as Ireland, Luxembourg and Poland, current policies focus on targeted initiatives – measures that provide support to children and young people who are at risk of exclusion. In other countries, such as Malta, many of the recent reforms to prevent ESL have been structural in nature. However, a mixed approach is prevalent in most countries.

Typically there are clear warning signs for at least one to three years before young people drop out that they are losing interest in school (Bridgeland et al, 2006). For this reason, it is essential that ESL policies are timely and reach the young person at risk of dropping out early on, before they make the (cumulative) decision to drop out (Cedefop, 2010). One effective way of ensuring timely support is to have a system that, on the one hand, gives information to schools and education authorities about how many students have dropped out of education and why, and on the other hand helps to identify individual students at risk of doing so. In practice these systems are typically databases of students that include data on student absences, grade retention and/or academic achievement (Dynarski et al, 2008).

The past three years have seen developments in relation to these diagnostic policies and practices in countries including Belgium (Wallonia), Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Norway. Denmark, Ireland and the Netherlands have had electronic registration systems in place for some years and in England and Italy such activities have been devolved to local and regional authorities, some of which have reasonably well established systems in place (Cedefop, 2010; Dynarski et al, 2008; Nevala and Hawley, 2011).

Some of the diagnostic measures are focused purely on monitoring absenteeism, as attendance patterns are a clear early sign of a dropout risk for almost all young people (Barton, 2005). In all three Baltic States the recent legislative measures have focused on tackling absenteeism through greater involvement of parents. In Lithuania for example, an online system called ‘Your School’ has been introduced as a way of providing a platform for schools, teachers, parents and students to share information about school life and inform parents about the progress of their children in schools (including grades and absenteeism).

Some of the national action plans/programmes for the prevention of ESL are accompanied by additional funding or resources (such as assistant teachers) for schools or areas with a higher than average share of students at risk of dropping out. In Greece for example, ‘Educational Priority

Zones' (EPZs) have been established under the national programme for the reduction of school failure. Schools in EPZs are granted additional funds, new teaching methods are implemented and specially trained teachers are recruited. Particular attention is also paid to certain groups of students (Roma students and repatriated Greeks). Results from similar zones in Cyprus show that participating schools have witnessed considerable reductions in ESL and improvements in literacy and academic achievement. Education zones in Portugal have also had a positive impact on ESL rates in participating schools, as described in the box below.

Portugal: TEIP2 (*Territórios Educativos de Intervenção Prioritária de 2ª Geração*)

The TEIP2 territories were introduced in the 2008/2009 school year. Contracts are signed between the Ministry of Education and the chosen schools to support school completion and successful transitions to working life. The channels to achieve these goals include, for example:

A requirement for the school to build a partnership with other public and private entities, health centres, cultural associations and child protection agencies.

Provision of curricular alternatives, second chances and vocational courses.

The evaluation of TEIP2 pilot activities shows positive results. For example, the rate of ESL in participating schools declined between 2006/2007 and 2008/2009:

- from 1.7% to 0.4% in the first cycle (children aged 6–10);
- from 2.6% to 0.9% in the second cycle (children aged 10–12); and
- from 2.9% to 1.6% in the third cycle (children aged 12–15).

Other positive outcomes include better classroom discipline, fewer conflicts at school and better quality learning.

Hungary is the only country where an example of a privately funded programme was given. The 'Education Programme for Disadvantaged Children' (*Hátrányos Helyzetű Gyerekek Oktatási programja*, H2O) operates in the most disadvantaged parts of the country and is supported by volunteers from local businesses. The programme offers additional funding for schools to spend on infrastructure, and volunteers work with students to raise aspirations.

Alternative learning environments exist within the public education system, either off-site as separate schools or on-site as temporary programmes within schools (Ofsted, 2010). Students in these alternative learning environments still belong to the public education system, or even the same school, but they are physically in a separate location or classroom for a specific period. Usually students are referred to such programmes if they are at risk of education failure, play truant or demonstrate disruptive behaviour (Barton, 2005). Such programmes typically utilise different and innovative teaching pedagogies, have more specialist staff available to support the students and use a range of environments (sometimes non-classroom based environments) to revitalise the motivation of young people to learn. In some Member States such programmes are coordinated nationally (such as France, Germany, Luxembourg and Finland), but even then the availability (and quality) of provision can vary greatly from one local authority to another.

Luxembourg is one country that has piloted and then mainstreamed alternative learning provision over the past five years.

Luxembourg: ‘Mosaic Classes’ (*Classes mosaïque*)

Mosaic Classes are a part of the mainstream school system. Students demonstrating risk behaviours can be temporarily (for 6–12 weeks) moved to the classes where they receive intense support with their personal and school-related problems.

The piloting of Mosaic Classes started in 2005 and, following positive evaluation results in 2009, the classes were introduced as a part of the mainstream school system.

Between 2005 and 2009, 335 students from 14 schools participated in the classes. Nearly three-quarters (73%) were reintegrated back into their original class and just over half showed improvement in handling the problems that had led to them being moved into the Mosaic Class.

One problem found almost universally across Europe is the shortage of time and dedicated personnel for guidance and counselling (Cedefop, 2010). This review shows that this is an area to which more resources are being dedicated in some countries, whilst in others it has been negatively affected by budget cuts. The measures suggest, however, that there is a greater acknowledgement of the importance of making sure that the teams in charge of counselling and guidance include specialist counsellors from a range of different fields, even if there is not always funding to enable it.

For example, ESF cofinanced measures are supporting the provision of guidance and pedagogic-psychological care for students in Estonia and Poland, and Lithuanian schools now employ social pedagogues, who are directly responsible for responding to non-attendance problems. In Slovakia, special projects have been introduced among the Roma community where social workers and community services play a part in informing children, young people and their parents about the importance of education.

Careers guidance is particularly important at transition points from one level of education to another (Gracey and Kelly, 2010; OECD, 2010b), and a number of national programmes have been set up over the past few years to help ensure successful transitions. Bridging programmes and ‘pick and mix’ taster opportunities have been introduced in, for example, Austria, Hungary, Finland, Germany, Luxembourg, Norway and Sweden (see examples below).

Finland: ‘Occupational Start’ (*ammattistartti*)

‘Occupational start’ (*Ammattistartti*) offers young people who are unsure about their study and career direction an alternative programme during which they can find out about different occupations. The programme is linked to the initial vocational education and training (VET) system in the country. This training aims is intended to improve the participants’ study skills and give them information about different occupations. The training takes place in groups and follows a curriculum, but in a flexible and individualised manner.

The service was piloted from 2006 to 2010 and has been permanent since 2010. According to an [evaluation](#) of the pilot, trainees moved along their ‘paths’ with relative ease and in a variety of ways, indicating the programme’s effectiveness. The personnel involved also proved to be highly professional and had good networks. Furthermore, the content and procedures of the programmes were sufficiently diverse to suit a diverse trainee population. Finally, a good and supportive climate developed in the groups.

Germany: ‘Qualifications and connections’ (*Abschluss und Anschluss – Bildungsketten bis zum Ausbildungsabschluss*)

‘Qualifications and connections’ is a four-year programme introduced by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research in 2010. The programme consists of three activities which aim to ensure that students make a smooth transition to the next level of education and do not end up leaving school without a qualification:

- analyses of the potential, interests and aspirations of students in grades 7 or 8;
- occupational guidance in grades 7 or 8; and
- overseeing and mentoring students in their penultimate school year until the completion of their first year in vocational training.

The programme involves over 1,000 basic and special secondary schools (*Hauptschulen*) and it is expected that 60,000 pupils will take part in an initial analysis and around 30,000 will need support/mentoring during the programme period. Around 2,000 mentors will be trained and recruited to work on the programme.

Poor academic achievement is one of the top reasons identified for leaving school early (Bridgeland et al, 2006). Targeted support for at-risk groups, such as supplementary tuition and teaching assistants, can help to tackle achievement problems before these lead to dropout.

Teaching assistant posts have been created in some countries to work either in schools with high numbers of students from disadvantaged backgrounds (for instance, in the Czech Republic) or with specific groups of students such as Roma (Slovakia). Dedicated measures for children with special needs were classified as some of the most important preventive ESL measures in countries such as Bulgaria, Malta and Spain.

Specific programmes providing additional academic support for under-performing students can be found in France, Hungary, Slovenia and Spain. An example from Hungary is described in the box below.

Hungary: ‘Tanoda’ programme

The ‘Tanoda’ network of centres is aimed at providing disadvantaged children with the extra support that better-off children would normally receive at home. The centres help children with homework, provide mentoring and also organise arts and sport activities. The centres are led mainly by NGOs that organise and lead the after-school activities and, importantly, are separate entities from schools. They support between 2,000 and 4,000 children each year.

Self-evaluations of Tanoda centres suggest that they have been particularly successful at helping participants to develop skills such as communication, problem solving and creativity.

The strategies adopted by the Member States to prevent ESL rates among migrant populations include the development of policies on intercultural education, providing continuing professional training for teachers, and addressing multiculturalism through revised textbooks and reception classes for migrant and repatriated children. For example, in Greece, new Intercultural Schools where the curriculum is adjusted to the particular educational, social or cultural needs of their students, are attached to 26 existing primary and secondary schools.

Financial support mechanisms introduced in recent years by the Member States to support school completion come in the form of subsidies (for instance, subsidised textbooks in Poland), free school meals, allowances and scholarships (such as in Italy, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia). In some countries school meals and books have for a long time been free either for compulsory school-aged pupils or pupils in primary schools. In others this is a newer trend (for instance, Bulgaria and Romania) while in some countries free school meals have recently been made available for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (for instance, in Slovakia). In some countries the financial support for children and/or their families is used as an incentive for continued school attendance. For example, a scheme of free school meals and books in Slovakia is tied to the children’s attendance in kindergarten or school.

There are signs that there is a growing political will to tackle the problem of ESL through legislative means, which can include disincentives for young people to drop out of education and incentives for parents to ensure their children do not play truant or drop out of school. For example, following a legislative change in Hungary in 2010, families may lose some state

benefits if their children of compulsory school age do not attend school. In a similar manner, sanctions can be imposed on parents and guardians in Greece who fail to enrol their children in school and to make sure they attend school regularly. In the Czech Republic, the threat of removal of unemployment benefits for early school leavers was introduced in 2005, with positive effects on ESL. The unemployment rate of young school leavers dropped markedly following this change.

In the Netherlands, it is the schools that are targeted with financial incentives to reduce the number of school dropouts. In addition, school inspectors have greater freedom to penalise schools that are not actively working towards a reduction of ESL (for instance, fines will be imposed on schools that do not develop action plans to reduce ESL).

The scope of compulsory education has evolved in a number of countries over recent years (for instance, in England, Hungary, Italy and Portugal). In Italy, for instance, since 2000 there has been a progressive increase in the school leaving age (raised to 15 in 1999/2000 and to 16 in 2007/2008). In some countries the age at which children must start education has been lowered, and others have imposed a specific educational level or qualification that must be attained before the young person may leave school (as in Poland). The idea behind this type of reform is that it can prevent young people with low motivation from dropping out. It may also force education and training systems to 'provide credible educational pathways' to those who struggle with mainstream schooling (Nevala and Hawley, 2011). The effectiveness of reforms depends, however, on the quality of provision because compulsion alone will not automatically lead to the desired improvements in young people's motivation and attainment (CBI, 2008). Instead, changes in the length of compulsory education should always be part of a mix of measures to raise young people's aspirations. Raising the school-leaving age may only mean that those who drop out at an early age are left even further behind.

A contradictory trend is prevalent in Hungary, where in April 2011 the Ministry of Education introduced a plan for a new Education Act which would bring down the compulsory school attendance age from 18 to 16 years, and there were initial discussions about lowering it to 15.

A constrained and restrictive curriculum that 'turns pupils off' is a factor contributing to ESL (Gracey and Kelly, 2010; OECD, 2010b). A good quality curriculum at secondary level that is responsive, varied, stimulating and relevant is therefore a significant part of the 'battle' against early school leaving. Some Member States have therefore tried to make classroom instruction more relevant to the lives of young people, for example by introducing new teaching methods (as in Hungary and Malta), updating and making the curriculum more relevant (Romania), having better teachers who keep classes interesting (Greece), improving standards (Latvia) and having smaller classes with more one-on-one instruction, involvement and feedback (Sweden).

In most Member States the curriculum-specific reforms have also included the initial VET sector. There is a much greater focus on offering kinetic learning opportunities for young people and therefore vocational and/or work-based learning is used to offer an alternative environment for students at risk of dropping out. In Italy for instance, the recently established school and work alternation programme also shows promise as an alternative route to achieving formal qualifications. In Norway, a so-called 'Practice Certificate' – a two-year work-based training programme – has been trialled among young people who are interested in vocationally orientated learning but who have problems following the ordinary school-based VET programmes. The initial results are promising; 41 out of 51 students completed the programme and seven left to take up other training – only three dropped out. These results (though based on a small sample) are a stark contrast to the dropout rates from the mainstream VET system, from which only just over half (55%) graduate within five years of starting and 27% drop out.

The active involvement of parents in the development and educational progression of their children can have far-reaching positive effects and is widely acknowledged to play an important role in motivating students to remain in education and strive to achieve qualifications (Bridgeland

et al, 2006; Pinnock et al, 2009; Research as Evidence, 2007). Some Member States are seeking to strengthen communication between schools and parents by including parental involvement as a cross-sectoral priority. For example, in Luxembourg the national ESL policy, which is seen as a key contributing factor to declining ESL rates since 2003, recognises the importance of including parents in the ESL policy process and addressing their underlying problems too. In other countries specific measures have been introduced to involve parents in a more systematic manner than before. Closer parental involvement is one of the objectives of the ‘Home School Liaison Scheme’ in Ireland, for example, which seeks to reduce school failure by establishing partnerships between parents and teachers in the interests of children’s learning. In the Czech Republic, there are various local projects that seek to educate parents about the importance of education.

Reintegration measures

There are a number of barriers young people who have dropped out of school must overcome if they are to return to formal learning. Previous negative experiences of formal schooling and a sense of failure and rejection may mean that many have a lack of confidence in their ability to learn, or a lack of direction. For some, their individual circumstances may mean that they have multiple personal reasons for becoming disconnected from learning.

Systems that provide second chances for young dropouts have already become established elements of the education and training landscape in most European countries. In many of the smaller Member States (such as Finland, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Sweden) there is a single established but evolving reintegration programme, while in larger countries such as England and France the policy landscape in this area is made up of a range of different second chance opportunities which are implemented by various different actors. Overall, they tend to focus on the provision of alternative training/teaching environments and methods. They also tend to be more practically orientated than mainstream provisions and include elements of non-formal learning. These measures also usually highlight the importance of gaining soft skills and of both personal and social development (Garcia and Borg, 2011).

Most of the reintegration programmes identified for this report are national in scale, implemented by multidisciplinary teams, sometimes in collaboration with NGOs and/or social partners. They vary in the level of support they provide to the young person, depending on the needs of their target groups.

Their importance has been accentuated by the economic crisis, which has made a return to education a more attractive option for many young people due to fewer job opportunities. A number of second chance programmes in fact struggle to cater for all young people who need/seek their help (Nevala and Hawley, 2011).

The re-engagement process of an excluded young person can be complex, involving a range of public authorities. Sweden (see below) and the UK (England) are two countries which have responded to this challenge by setting up ‘one-stop-shop’ guidance centres which provide a broad range of services to young people.

Sweden: ‘Navigator Centres’

The Navigator Centres are a national network of one-stop-shop services for young people seeking (re)integration into education, training and employment, rather than being directed to contact several different public agencies. According to a national evaluation, around 45%–71% of all visitors to Navigator Centres manage to move on to employment or education within a year. In addition, those who did not stated that their confidence and commitment to work had been strengthened.

Tracking or ‘catch up’ services have been introduced to identify, support and monitor inactive young people in countries like Denmark, Finland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway and the

UK (England). Such measures monitor participation in education and training, contact early school leavers after they have dropped out and seek to find a pathway to education, training or employment. For example, the Regional Registration and Coordination institutes (RRC) in the Netherlands monitor and keep records of young people who do not have basic qualifications and ensure that those who are inactive are contacted and supported in their efforts to find a training place or a job. In Finland municipalities or groups of municipalities have been obliged since January 2011 to recruit youth outreach workers, who contact and follow up young people who have left the education system before obtaining an upper secondary level qualification and are at high risk of becoming NEET.

A ‘whole-person’ approach to reintegration aims to identify and address the full range of barriers and issues the young person is facing. Such approaches rely on an intense level of support from a range of professionals from the education, social and health sectors. They also start from the ‘basics’, such as helping young people to rediscover an interest in learning and to learn how to live a structured life with boundaries. Such measures can be found in around a third of the countries covered by this report. Most of the examples are fairly well established systems, based on years of piloting and development. For example, ‘Project Learning for Young Adults’ (PUM) in Slovenia has been running for nearly 20 years, although it is facing difficulty in accessing funding from the state to continue its activities.

Slovenia: ‘Project Learning for Young Adults’ (*Projektno učenje mladih – PUM*)

The PUM is a non-formal education programme for unemployed young adults aged 15 to 25 who have failed at school, have no basic vocational education and face social exclusion. Participants are meant to gain positive learning experiences and to more clearly define their aspirations concerning their career and their general life. Participation is voluntary and participants are entitled to stay in the programme for one year.

The programme has a high success rate; around 60–70% of participants enrol in a suitable educational programme and/or find employment. The high success rate is said to be due to the provision of an individualised, supportive yet flexible learning environment. The role of the mentor is also crucial in supporting the individual through this transition.

Some of the main second chance opportunities in Cyprus, Portugal and Spain are vocationally oriented. In Spain for example, ‘Initial Vocational Qualification Programmes’ (*Programas de Cualificación Profesional Inicial*, PCPI) are intended to be an option for young people aged 16 and over who left school early, and in Portugal the ‘New Opportunities Initiative’ (*Iniciativa Novas Oportunidades*) aims to reduce school failure in secondary education and to place half of all students in vocational courses until the age of 18. In Estonia, the government is working during the economic downturn to increase the qualification levels of VET dropouts through a campaign called ‘KUTSE’ (meaning ‘invitation’). This involves the creation of new VET study places for former dropouts and a media campaign to inform unemployed young people about the opportunity.

Financial incentives are also offered in some countries for unemployed adults who decide to pursue higher-level qualifications (for instance, in Italy, Malta, Sweden and the UK). In the UK for instance, the ‘Activity Allowance Pilot’ project was run in eight areas between 2006 and 2011, offering an allowance of GBP 30 per week to NEETs (16–17) in exchange for agreeing to and participating in a personalised plan to re-engage them in learning. An evaluation of the pilot judged the scheme to be an extremely effective engagement mechanism, but it is unlikely to be extended in the current downturn.

Many early school leavers have acquired skills and competences outside the classroom, for example through work experience, responsibilities within the home, participation in non-formal training, hobbies or volunteering. Opportunities to recognise this non-formal and informal learning can help to increase the self-esteem, aspirations and employability of young school

dropouts (Nevala et al, 2011). The national systems to validate informal and non-formal learning are seen as an opportunity to reintegrate early school leavers in Estonia, Latvia and Romania. For example, in Estonia, the APEL ('Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning') programme offers a process where a person can take their study and work experience and convert them into study results (credits) when continuing or entering education. In 2009 approximately 8% of the applicants were able to obtain credits following assessment of the skills they had acquired in non-formal and informal settings.

Other second chance opportunities are typically taken up by young people and adults who have dropped out of school but have less complex support needs. They are 'just' looking for a second chance to participate in education and training. Recent such models include formal and non-formal adult education opportunities (as in Sweden); dedicated 'second chance schools' (Greece); short courses offered by the employment services; opportunities to take a secondary-level exam without having completed the associated studies (Belgium and Germany); evening schools (Cyprus, Latvia and Romania); distance learning (Hungary); and mobile education systems (Portugal).

Facilitating the transition to employment

Measures to support school-to-work transitions

The transition from education to employment can be difficult for young people. In fact, it often takes young Europeans two years or more to find their first job after finishing education, although the length of time varies considerably from country to country – from 28 months in the Netherlands to 103 in Romania (ISFOL, CESOS, NTF, 2008). While some period of transition is to be expected as young people make their way from formal education to the world of work, a slow or difficult transition to the labour market can have a lasting impact on the career development and income of individuals over their lifetime.

There are a number of reasons young people find it difficult to gain a 'foothold' in the labour market. These range from their lack of work experience and/or low levels of qualifications, to the mismatch between the skills they have to offer and those required by employers. Member States have implemented a range of policies and measures to try to tackle these issues, including the provision of information, advice and guidance and work experience opportunities, improving the relationship between education and the world of work, youth guarantees, job-search assistance and the promotion of entrepreneurship. These are discussed in turn below (internships were also mentioned in some countries under this heading but these are discussed in detail in the following section, on 'Fostering employability').

The provision of information and in-school guidance/counselling plays an important role in supporting young people to move on to their post-school careers. Career counselling helps young people to better understand their prospects and options in the labour market, to find out about study opportunities and equip themselves for job-seeking, among other things. The approach taken to the provision of guidance might be to provide it on a mainstream basis, as in Austria, where schools are required to provide specific courses on 'career and educational guidance' for school pupils, or through specific projects or programmes. For example, in Slovenia, the 'Looking at jobs in a different way' project focuses on informing young people about professions where there is a shortage of labour.

Slovenia: ‘Looking at jobs in a different way’

‘Looking at jobs in a different way’ is an active labour market measure which is run by the public employment services (PES) and funded by the state. The measure is specifically targeted at pupils in primary and secondary schools to help them choose which profession to pursue. The objective of the measure is to acquaint young people with various professions, in particular those where there is a shortage of labour and so improve their career planning. Programme activities, which are organised by external providers, include courses and visits to enterprises.

As explained earlier in the ESL sections, in-school guidance can go beyond the concept of career guidance and indeed, for those young people encountering difficulties at school and/or outside school, a more holistic approach may be required.

The provision of information and advice can also take place through websites and web-based tools, an effective way of bringing together a wide variety of information and reaching out to large numbers of young people at low cost. Web tools can also be a means of bringing together or matching young people and potential employers and can provide a first point of contact, which can then lead to more intensive support such as face-to-face career guidance. An example is the Latvian education and career internet portal ‘www.prakse.lv’ which offers consultations on education and employment issues for young people, as well as information on job and placement vacancies and educational opportunities. Employers can use the website to provide information about practical aspects of employment in their enterprises and to recommend professions and higher education (HE) institutions that they consider the best for them. By June 2011, 778 enterprises, 452 education institutions, 106 NGOs and 35,276 young people had registered. Its success in terms of the number of users is attributed to the fact that it provides access to a multifaceted and unique database that includes not only facts but also information on practical aspects of employment and professions, views and opinions.

Other measures targeted at school pupils aim to bring them together with employers, and these are considered to be particularly important in order to familiarise young people with the world of work. In Estonia, it is suggested that the most effective measures for young people are those which facilitate contact with potential employers, such as careers days and similar events which bring together young people with external representatives of companies or continuing education providers, entrepreneurs or even former students to give information sessions on their working lives. These opportunities give young people a ‘real-life’ glimpse of different opportunities in the labour market and help them make a more informed decision regarding their future.

In Germany, the Occupational Orientation Programme helps young people make career choices based on both occupational orientation courses and practical experience of the workplace through internships.

Germany: ‘Occupational Orientation Programme’

The ‘occupational orientation programme’ in inter-company or similar training centres (*Berufsorientierungsprogramm*) seeks to improve occupational orientation courses in the training centres and support the transition of pupils (especially from basic secondary schools) from school to working life. Participants analyse their own skills, abilities and career choices and have the chance to consider at least three different occupations during an internship.

An [evaluation](#) of the programme shows that nearly two-thirds of the respondents stated that at the end of the programme they knew which occupation they wanted to pursue and another 80% had also learned which profession not to choose.

Work experience opportunities can also help a young person to make a decision about their future career and at the same time to develop useful skills for the labour market. Students gain an insight into working life and can also ‘learn by doing’. Fundamentally, the measures help to tackle one of the main disadvantages faced by young people in making the transition to the labour market, which is their lack of practical experience.

In the Netherlands, for example, ‘learn-work jobs’ are offered by recognised ‘learning companies’. Young people can gain experience through this measure and at the same time receive a salary. Learning companies have to have a clear profile on the scheme’s website so that the student can consciously choose the job that fits their needs and vacancies are filled more quickly. By providing the young person with work experience, this measure is considered to help make the school–work transition easier. In Malta, another example is the ‘Job Shadowing Exposure Scheme’ which places students with an employee at a particular workplace. The aim is for the student to follow the work of the employee for a week, have the opportunity to ask questions about the work, and attend an interviewing skills session to serve as preparation for future job seeking.

Some countries try to tackle the problem of school-to-work transitions by identifying and addressing the reasons employers do not recruit young people directly from education. This approach seems to be more common in eastern European countries. For example, in Poland and Estonia the approach taken is to improve the provision of vocational training. In Estonia VET has not been as popular as general education in recent decades. It is therefore suggested that because young Estonians often do not have any work experience or vocation, their chances of entering the labour market are low. To address this issue, the Government Programme for 2011–2015 aims to popularise and increase the quality of vocational education and to turn the vocational schools into local ‘competence centres’.

Other measures to try to smooth the pathway to work for young people include those that enable them to gain skills and qualities which are recognised as being important by employers and are in demand on the labour market. In Romania for instance, the ‘Transition from School to Active Life’ scheme aims to increase the employability of individuals while they are still in VET by supporting them to develop practical skills and work habits.

Youth guarantees have been in place in countries such as Finland, the Netherlands and Norway for several years (OECD, 2006), but such examples can also be identified in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Poland, Spain and Sweden (Scharle and Weber, 2011). The aim of these ‘guarantees’ is to ensure that all young people have an offer of a job, or an educational or other type of opportunity, within a certain timeframe of leaving their previous education/employment. In Sweden for instance, a job guarantee for young people (*Jobbgaranti för ungdom*) enrolled with the public employment services was introduced in 2009.

Sweden: Job Guarantee for Young People

The job guarantee for young people (*Jobbgaranti för ungdom*) was introduced in 2009. Anyone aged 16–25 and enrolled with the public employment service for at least three months is entitled to take part in the job guarantee. The aim is to help these young people to find a job or enrol in the regular education system more quickly. The focus is on job search activities such as guidance and coaching, combined with work internships, apprenticeships and other work experience placements.

According to an evaluation carried out by the Institute for Labour Market Policy Evaluation (IFAU), unemployed 24-year-olds participating in the guarantee managed to find a job more quickly than older people enrolled with the public employment services in 2008. However, this effect was no longer evident in 2009 – leading IFAU to conclude that the measure may be less successful in times of economic crisis.

The findings of evaluations of these youth guarantees from the different countries vary widely. An [evaluation](#) of the Finnish youth guarantee found that the system has enabled early intervention, fostered regional equality, improved cooperation between different authorities, and improved the relationship between the authorities and the young person. Importantly, the evaluation also demonstrated that the youth guarantee had accelerated the pace at which

personalised employment plans were drawn up, and that it had reduced unemployment, having led either to employment or further training. The guarantees were not, however, always met.

International reviews of youth guarantees indicate that the programme design and implementation of such measures needs to be carefully considered, and that they have an important impact on outcomes (OECD, 2006). For example, timing is crucial for the success of activation, and the success of the activation strategies also depends on offering people-centred approaches to counselling and case management (Scharle and Weber, 2011).

In terms of job search assistance, some young people only have access to the mainstream support offered to all unemployed people, but in certain countries specialist youth services have been set up. In Lithuania for instance, Youth Employment Centres aim to help young people make the transition to the labour market.

Lithuania: Youth Employment Centres

There are 11 Youth Employment Centres spread across Lithuania. Their main task is to prompt young people's integration into the labour market, help them gain a better understanding of the social environment and the labour market and help them find employment. The services are free of charge and registration is optional. The centres provide information and counselling for young jobseekers; introduce young people to the world of professions; organise informative events and practical training; assist in preparation for job interviews; and also promote entrepreneurship. The centres also provide free internet access for job search, occupational profiles and informative films about professions, offer professional orientation tests, information about conditions for studies in HE institutions, and consultation on writing a CV and a motivational letter.

Some countries identify young people as a specific disadvantaged group with priority access to certain services. In Slovakia for instance, young people have been granted the status of 'disadvantaged group' on the labour market, which provides them with privileged access to employment services and preferential inclusion in active labour market measures.

In Malta, the '[Youth Employment Programme](#)' (YEP) has been designed to help young people to enter employment. The programme comprises services from a multidisciplinary team (such as a career guidance practitioner, psychologist, occupational therapist and youth workers), a website, a TV programme and youth days. The services provided by the multidisciplinary team are seen as one of the programme's success factors, as the team members work together to provide a personalised service.

For young people who have already left education, it is again important to make sure that the skills and competences they develop, and the information and guidance they receive, helps them to move towards employment in sectors where there is a demand for workers. In the Netherlands, for example, the 'XXL Jobs' initiative offers young people jobs in sectors where the departure of older people will lead to a shortage of skills and knowledge. It is intended that the older employees will transfer their skills to the young people and that the young people will receive strong guidance in their transition to the labour market.

Finally, in several countries entrepreneurship is promoted as an alternative route into the labour market. In Cyprus and Slovakia, for example, young people are offered grants to promote their integration in the labour market through entrepreneurship. In Slovenia, the PES provides the unemployed with training and consultancy to help them take forward their business ideas. In Greece, special 'youth entrepreneurship support structures' have been established, which provide consultancy services to young people interested in entrepreneurship and in setting up their own business. In Italy, entrepreneurship is promoted to HE students through special 'start-up offices' in universities, and with free consultancy via a ministerial website which offers online documents and tutorials about, for instance, how to draw up a business plan.

Measures to foster employability

Young people with low levels of education/training are at a disadvantage in today's labour market, which demands high-level skills to meet the needs of a knowledge and innovation economy. The level of education a person has achieved thus has a strong influence on his/her chances of finding work and, generally, people with a higher level of education are less likely to be unemployed (Eurofound, 2011b).

Today, however, higher education graduates are also finding it difficult to obtain work after they leave education, as already noted. The fact that such graduates are also having trouble gaining a foothold on the labour market may be a reflection of their 'employability'. In order to succeed in finding a job, individuals need, in addition to the specific skills for the role concerned, a set of cross-cutting core competences (European Commission Expert Group on New Skills for New Jobs, 2010). Yet studies show that employers feel that job applicants are not only lacking in basic skills such as literacy and numeracy but also in key 'soft' skills. A Eurobarometer survey of employers on graduate employability carried out in 2010 confirmed the importance of soft skills to employers, including teamworking, communication skills and adaptability, with over 60% of employers identifying these skills as being very important.

The majority of the initiatives identified under this heading focus on equipping young people with the skills they need to improve their employability, either by participating in apprenticeships, internships or training/re-training courses.

Encouraging young people to take up apprenticeships, or increasing the number of apprenticeship places on offer, are approaches taken by around a third of the countries covered by this study. In Austria for example there has been a focus on ensuring that there are sufficient places for all young people who wish to take up an apprenticeship.

Austria: 'Supra-company apprenticeships' and an apprenticeship guarantee

Since 2004/05, 'supra-company apprenticeship' places have been offered through the Youth Training and Education Provision. Additionally, in June 2008 the social partners negotiated a labour market package for young workers with a focus on improving the situation of young apprentices. Together with the federal government, an apprenticeship training guarantee was agreed upon (among other measures). This means that sufficient offers of places in supra-company training facilities are available for those who cannot find a regular apprenticeship placement in a company. Priority, however, still lies with approved apprenticeship employers because candidates who have completed their apprenticeship in such companies are thought to have a better chance of entering the job market.

During the school year 2008/09, 16,107 young people participated in the supra-company apprenticeship programme, of whom 22% were either without employment or an apprenticeship for more than six months or had participated in educational courses before the measure.

By providing every young person in need with an apprenticeship place the dependency on employers providing places is reduced. This means that in uncertain economic times (when employers reduce their training activities), apprenticeship training for all adolescents is guaranteed.

The economic crisis has had a negative impact on the number of apprenticeships on offer or has led employers to make existing apprentices redundant. In Ireland, a number of measures have been taken to address this problem. For example, under the ['Redundant Apprentice Placement Scheme 2011'](#), the National Training and Employment Authority (FÁS) can place certain redundant apprentices with eligible employers and help the employers meet the employment costs of these apprentices. The scheme applies to apprentices in certain trades in specific sectors (construction, electrical, engineering, printing and paper) and provides on-the-job training for up to 1,000 apprentices.

(Short) training courses are mentioned as a means of helping young people to improve their employability in a number of countries. Many of the training courses mentioned seem to have a practical or vocational focus, or they prioritise the cross-cutting skills valued by employers. The aim is to address the gaps in learning these young people need to fill in order to improve their employability. In Malta for example, short courses/training programmes are offered as part of the 'I CAN [Employability Programme](#)' (EP).

Several of the training measures mentioned have been designed to directly link with the needs of employers. By creating a link between the young person and an employer, training schemes such as the one described below in Slovenia may be a route towards a job in the longer term.

Slovenia: Training of undergraduate students

The aim of this scheme is to encourage students who are about to graduate to actively acquire skills for easier inclusion in the labour market and to stimulate the employment of graduate students by giving subsidies to their employers for a period of six months. The scheme has two phases. The first phase is the training of undergraduate students at the workplace. This enables the employer to get to know the student. At the end of the training, the employer is entitled to a six-month subsidy if he/she employs the student.

Aside from skills needs, motivation can also be an issue for young people, particularly in the current economic downturn, when jobs are scarce and there is greater competition for vacancies. Bulgaria and Malta have initiatives in place which take account of this issue.

In addition to proving relevant content, it is important for training measures targeted at young NEETs to be flexible in terms of both practical aspects such as the timing and location of the training and in terms of the mode of delivery. For example, breaking a course down into smaller units or modules can present a more flexible opportunity for early school leavers who may only need to fill in the gaps in their learning, rather than take a course in full. A new approach in Germany, for example, has been to introduce training modules (*Ausbildungsbausteine*) into vocational training, which take the trainee step by step from a basic to a sophisticated understanding of a profession.

Some countries offer financial support to individuals wishing to undertake training. This gives young people more freedom to choose the subject of the training and how they undertake the course, although restrictions or conditions can be imposed to ensure that the training course chosen is appropriate to the young person's employability. In Italy, for example, some of the regions allocate individual funds called 'endowments' as an incentive to training. The beneficiaries can use these funds only if they undergo reintegration programmes, which are managed and designed by acknowledged institutions.

Internships can present a good opportunity for young people to bridge the gap between education and employment and for some they may lead to a paid – and perhaps permanent – job with the employer in question. When properly designed and used, such placements can give young people the chance to develop practical skills and to become accustomed to the work environment, as well as to gain valuable experience in their chosen career. Several countries have recognised this and have developed recent initiatives focusing on internships, including Denmark, where additional funding has been allocated to maintain and create internship places, in recognition of the fact that the number of places has fallen since the economic downturn. A new initiative was added to this programme to increase internships in 2011, aiming to bring NEETs into a traineeship in a company in order to let young people experience working life in a company and support them to take up vocational training or further youth education. Some internship programmes are specifically designed for those with tertiary education, such as the Young Potentials Programme (YPP) in Sweden, which is a joint collaboration between some of Sweden's largest companies and the Swedish Public Employment Service (*Arbetsförmedlingen*); it offers 1,000 academics aged 25–29 internships lasting three to six months in a company like IKEA or Telia Sonera,

followed by one month in an NGO. Such programmes can also be led by social partners. In Ireland, the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) runs its own internship scheme called 'Gradlink' to provide work experience for recent graduates.

In Romania the START internship programme, which is based on a public-private partnership, has been found to have a positive impact on the labour market outcomes of participants.

Romania: START Internship programme

The main aim of the START Internship project is to help young people (HE graduates) to improve their employability by familiarising them with their role as future employees and to bridge the gap between the knowledge acquired through education and the demands of an actual workplace. Evaluation has shown that approximately 15% of the young people taking part are hired immediately after completion of the programme and that one in three such students finds a job after completing their studies. The project's success is attributed to the flexibility of the schedule, the fact that internship sessions are offered during the entire length of the year, and the provision of guidance materials for companies wishing to take part.

It is not just private sector employers who can offer valuable work experience to young people. In some countries placements or internships are also offered in the public or third sectors. In Latvia and Malta, for example, there are measures which are designed to give young people who are having difficulty finding a job the valuable work experience they need to improve their employability in an NGO.

It is important to acknowledge that there are also risks associated with internships. In France, for example, there is talk of an 'internship generation' of young people who have completed several internships and cannot find their way into paid employment (although no official statistics exist, it is reported that an estimated 50% of all people who went through higher education in France – with a masters qualification or above – have completed three or more internships). The risk associated with internships is that employers can use them in place of a paid, possibly permanent employee and thus reduce the number of paid opportunities available to other jobseekers on the labour market. This is particularly a concern for young people who do not have the financial means to take on an unpaid placement. It is also important that any work experience or internship measures are well structured and monitored, to ensure that young people are able to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Removing practical and logistical barriers

As already mentioned, some young NEETs have complex support needs and in addition to a lack of work experience or qualifications, they can face a range of other practical and logistical barriers to taking up employment or further education/training opportunities. For example, young people with a disability may require additional adjustments to be made in order to improve the accessibility of the workplace. Young people with caring responsibilities may require access to childcare or other kinds of support and young immigrants may need support to improve their language skills. These and other issues present barriers to the young person's 'employability'.

Few (around a tenth) of the measures to 'remove barriers' identified in the questionnaires are specifically targeted at NEETs, although around half are targeted towards a specific group which, as discussed below, seemed to commonly be the disabled (around a fifth of the measures identified) or young people from a migrant background (around a tenth). Some of the measures to tackle the barriers faced by NEETs are described in more detail below.

Several countries offer alternative training provision, or have adapted existing training offers to the needs of (young) disabled people. In Latvia, for example, the e-learning initiative run by the state employment agency (NVA) offers training to the employed in general but more specifically to people with disabilities. Another example is the Maltese 'Pathway to Independent Living Programme' which is provided for students with mild to moderate disabilities/learning

difficulties. Its objective is to support students to acquire the skills required to gain and maintain employment.

Some measures aim to adapt the existing workplace or training environment, rather than offering alternative provision. In Austria, the 'Managing Diversity' project is intended to integrate disadvantaged young people from migrant backgrounds into measures run by the PES or into employment, by improving the accessibility for the young person (for instance, by providing information in several languages, taking into account family context, providing companies with support about diversity issues).

A number of countries have recognised that for migrants, language difficulties can present a barrier to employment or to further progression in education/training. Language support measures were mentioned in the questionnaires for Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Sweden as an important means of removing a barrier to employment for migrants and minorities. In Bulgaria, for example, there is a national literacy programme targeted at the minority Roma community while in other countries (for instance, Cyprus, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Sweden), the focus is on migrants.

Jobseekers, including young people looking for work, may not be able to access career opportunities because of the costs of daily transport or because the opportunities are simply too far away to travel on a daily basis. Around a third of the countries covered by this survey indicated that there were measures in place to support jobseekers to access training or employment opportunities by facilitating their mobility, through support for transport to work or with accommodation. These measures tended to be for jobseekers as a whole and not focused specifically on young people. Countries tend to set certain criteria for the receipt of support for transport and accommodation costs, to ensure that they are made available to people most in need.

Most of the initiatives described focus on enabling people to travel to a paid employment opportunity. In Bulgaria for example, the 'Close to work' (2011–2013) measure covers the total travel costs of newly employed people for 12 months when the place of residence and the workplace are more than 80 km apart.

Some of the measures are targeted at certain groups or only available in certain areas. In Italy, geographical mobility measures are implemented in the northern border regions; in Hungary, support for transport to work is offered to people who have been unemployed for a certain period of time (three months for NEETs and six months for unemployed adults); and the focus in Norway and Poland is on the disabled.

In a small number of countries, measures have been implemented to take account of the difficulties faced by those with caring responsibilities to commit to a full-time job or training course. Again, these measures seem to focus on people of all ages and do not specifically target young NEETs. Childcare support is offered in Cyprus, Hungary, Ireland, Poland, Portugal and the UK. These range from general measures to more targeted schemes focusing on people who are taking part in certain training courses or on groups who are identified as being more in need (for instance, single parents). A more targeted approach is taken in Malta where, for example, a subsidy of €1.50 per hour on childcare services is offered specifically to individuals participating in training offered by the PES. Targeted approaches are also taken in Poland, where childcare costs are refunded for single parents and in the UK, where childcare is offered for young parents who are participating in education.

Direct financial support is provided in certain countries to workers, including the young, or directly to their employers. This financial support might be intended to pay for a specific cost (as in financial support to pay for transport or accommodation costs, discussed above) or may be a grant or allowance intended to cover the cost of living while participating in a certain learning opportunity. These measures do tend to specifically target young people, rather than being open to a broader target group. In Germany, for instance, young people with disabilities can access a

'training allowance' (*Ausbildungsgeld*) if they have not previously taken part in vocational training or in a measure preparing them for vocational training, or been employed in a workshop for the disabled. In France, young people who have completed their training are provided with financial support. Those under 30 who have been working in certain sectors or have just finished an apprenticeship, and who need to move into a furnished flat in order to search for employment, may apply for a rent allowance of up to €300 for a maximum of three months.

Measures providing direct financial support to employers were identified in the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Norway. These measures focus on facilitating the employment of young people with a disability. In the Netherlands, for example, there are fiscal arrangements in place to support employers to make any necessary arrangements in order to employ disabled youngsters.

Employer incentives

Faced with high levels of youth unemployment, some countries have chosen to implement measures which can stimulate demand for young employees, apprentices or trainees, such as subsidised jobs or reductions in social security contributions for employers. These measures can help to ease young people's entry into the labour market and their transition from unemployment to employment. In the long term, by providing a route into the labour market, the measures can lead to a permanent contract, a more stable position or at least to better chances on the labour market for the young person.

Evaluations have shown that employer incentives can have a positive effect in the short term, but their net impact on the future employment prospects of participants can be poor and training programmes are more likely to have positive results (Duell and Vogler-Ludwig, 2011). It is therefore important that any employer incentive measures are adequately targeted in order to avoid dead-weight effects (OECD, 2010a).

The vast majority of the employer incentive measures identified in the questionnaires are national measures, which reflects the fact that many are paid for from the public purse and/or relate to social security/tax reductions applied nationally. A number of the measures seem to have been developed in response to the economic crisis or have been adapted (for instance, extended eligibility criteria) in order to take account of the crisis.

In over a third of the 28 countries, employer incentives are in place to help increase the number of apprenticeship places on offer or to encourage employers to provide more training for young people. Some countries have made these measures available to all young people. In the UK for example, a substantial budget has been allocated by the state to help fund apprenticeships, and employers also benefit financially from the fact that the National Minimum Wage scale includes a rate for apprentices which, at GBP 2.50, is much lower than that for other UK workers. In other countries, the schemes are intended to encourage employers to take on young people who are disadvantaged on the labour market. In Austria, for example, a new funding programme was implemented in 2008 for employers hiring apprentices from certain groups. The programme seems to have been particularly successful in relation to disadvantaged youth, and of the 17,000 new cases of apprentices for which the employers received funding in 2009, some 28% were disadvantaged.

In Germany, employer incentives are used to encourage employers to take on young people who have not been able to find an apprenticeship or who have lost their apprenticeship place because their employer has shut down.

Germany: Encouraging employers to take on apprentices

The Federal Employment Agency offers a financial incentive to employers providing entry-level qualification (*Einstiegsqualifizierung, EQJ*) positions. EQJs are long-term internships lasting from 6–12 months and particularly support young people who do not meet the skills requirements for a regular apprenticeship position.

The ‘bonus for apprenticeship positions’ (*Ausbildungsplatzbonus*) is paid for apprentices whose training was cut short by the closure of their establishment. Companies taking these apprentices on are supported financially by the Federal Employment Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, BA). Rules for application and bonus payments were relaxed in 2009 during the economic crisis.

Employer incentives can be negative as well as positive. For example, in France, rather than providing subsidies to employers, employers are required to pay a fee if they do not hire their quota of apprentices. The government introduced the ‘[additional apprenticeship contribution](#)’ (*Contribution supplémentaire à l'apprentissage, CPA*) in 2009. This fee (0.1% of wage costs) has to be paid by all enterprises with more than 250 employees whose workforce consists of less than 4% apprentices (originally 3%, recently raised to 4%). From January 2012 onwards, there will be a *bonus malus* system in place so that the further companies fall below the quota, the more they will have to pay.

Subsidised employment measures were identified in most of the countries. The conditions attached to these measures and the timeframe over which the subsidies are offered vary. Often the focus seems to be on people who have been unemployed for a certain period of time. In Estonia, for instance, wage subsidies are only provided for employers creating new jobs and are subject to certain conditions, including the length of time the person must remain employed with the company. There are also different eligibility conditions for participants, depending on their age.

Both private and public sector employers can be the target of job subsidy schemes. However, the French state, in its role as an employer, offers jobs in the public sector for low-skilled young people through the scheme ‘Route into careers in three areas of the public sector’ (*Parcours d'Accès aux Carrières des Trois fonctions publiques, PACTE*). They are employed by the public administration, the municipalities or in public hospitals and receive a fixed-term contract of 12 to 24 months, regular training, and a salary.

In some countries job subsidies are intended to support a trial period in employment for the young person, with the intention that this trial period will then lead on to a long-term or permanent contract, or at least will improve their chances on the labour market. For example, the ‘workplace for young people’ scheme in Latvia provides a subsidy for a trial period of nine months.

Latvia: Workplace for young people

The ‘workplace for young people’ measure, run by the Latvian State Employment Service (Nodarbinātības Valsts Agentūra, NVA), gives young unemployed people the chance to be employed for a trial period of up to nine months in order to acquire work experience and to continue in permanent employment after the trial. Priority is given to young people who have been unemployed for more than six months, who are trying to return to the labour market after a break for childcare reasons or who are disabled.

Employment is based on a work contract and participants should be paid a monthly remuneration equal to or above the national minimum wage (currently €285) and the employer should pay all relevant taxes from this sum. Employers receive a subsidy to cover payment of the young person and also a contribution to the costs of a trainer, providing the trainer works with at least five participants. Funding is also provided for any necessary arrangement and adaptation of the workplace.

Contributions to the costs of a trainer/supervisor are also made in the Lithuanian scheme ‘support for the acquisition of job skills’. In Luxembourg it is also recognised that young people entering

the labour market for the first time need support to help them integrate into the workplace and to continue to develop their employability skills; employers utilising the ‘employment initiation contract’ (*contrat d’initiation à l’emploi*), which specifically aims to increase the employability of NEETs by placing them in jobs where they are given training, must work out a training plan and assign the young person a tutor to help with their training.

In Portugal, the focus of the measure ‘Incentives for hiring of young people, unemployed and Specific Groups’ (*Apoios à contratação de jovens, desempregados e públicos específicos*) is on encouraging employers to take on permanent employees, rather than employing beneficiaries on a temporary basis. These incentives are available to private employers and include those who agree a permanent contract with people up to the age of 35 who are looking for their first job. The granting of these incentives depends on the maintenance of the net employment for a three-year period and of the job created for a 36-month period.

As with apprenticeship subsidies, some subsidised employment measures are targeted at specific groups. In Denmark for instance, there are several initiatives focused on HE graduates. In Malta, the Employment Aid Programme targets disadvantaged and disabled persons.

Malta: Employment Aid Programme

The [Employment Aid Programme](#) (EAP), launched in 2009, facilitates the employment of disadvantaged and disabled people by offering wage subsidies to employers when employing these clients. To date, 1,016 young people aged 30 and under have benefited from this programme. Overall, the EAP has already contracted over 1,660 grants and it has been found that 94% of EAP participants were retained in employment after their participation in the scheme.

Some employer incentive measures reduce the costs of employing a new member of staff by covering the social security costs of employers, or offering them a tax reduction. In Hungary for instance, all labour market entrants can get a ‘Start-card’, valid for two years (one year for tertiary education graduates). Employers who take on a person with a Start-card pay a 10% social security contribution in the first year (the first nine months for tertiary graduates) and 20% in the second year (the last three months for tertiary graduates) instead of the regular 27%.

Again some of these initiatives are only targeted at hard-to-reach groups. In Sweden the New-Start-Job reform aims to increase the opportunities available for those groups who are most detached from the labour market, including the long-term unemployed, young people and immigrants. Employers willing to hire people from the target groups are not required to pay social security contributions or payroll tax for the new recruits for a maximum of a year if hiring a person below the age of 26. According to an evaluation carried out by Ramboll Management, 68% of all those below the age of 25 had some sort of employment 90 days after they completed a New-Start-Job, indicating that the reform is an effective door-opener into the labour market.

Commentary

It seems that the 'NEET' phenomenon is becoming increasingly recognised as an important indicator of exclusion among young people. However, the term 'NEET' does not necessarily reveal the great heterogeneity within this group. This comparative analytical report has found that for this reason Member States often do not implement policies for NEETs in general but focus their policy responses on certain sub-groups of the overall NEET population. The differing needs of each sub-group can thus be taken into consideration in order to develop more tailored and personalised support. Other countries focus on a specific sub-group of NEETs, but across the whole population (in other words, not specifically focusing on young people). In fact, the ERM country experts regarded only one in five of the identified 'NEET-relevant' measures as being NEET-specific; those remaining were available to a broader target group.

On the basis of our investigation, across Europe there seems to be a greater focus on some sub-groups of NEETs than others. At the moment, unemployed youth, early school leavers and young people whose qualifications do not meet labour market needs seem to receive significant attention from policy-makers, according to the ERM country experts, who were asked to identify which sub-groups of NEETs are of particular concern for public policy.

A significant majority of recently introduced 'NEET-relevant' measures are national in scale. Information on the funding sources of NEET-relevant measures is somewhat fragmented but the funding seems to stem primarily from public sources. Around three-quarters of the measures covered by this report are funded by the state. Most of them are fully funded by the Member States, with around a quarter cofinanced by the ESF. Fewer than one in ten are funded by private sources, such as NGOs or private foundations.

While it is not possible to calculate the number or share of NEETs who make use of the measures available to them, there is some evidence to suggest that in many cases the demand for specific NEET measures exceeds the supply. This is a particular concern in the context of the economic crisis, which has seen the number of NEETs growing rapidly. Most importantly, there are rising numbers of young people who live on the 'margins of society' and are, or feel, disengaged. These hard-to-help groups are often unwilling or unable to make use of services available to them.

The research found that Member States are introducing a wide range of measures. The ESL measures include both preventive and reintegration measures. There is clearly a growing awareness that too many young people drop out of school or training for reasons which could have been prevented. As a result, there seems to be a growing recognition of the need to tackle disengagement as early as possible and to introduce targeted interventions in particular. Nevertheless, there also seems to be a tendency in the Member States towards 'tougher' policy measures, emphasising the responsibilities of young people themselves, and of their parents and schools. Reintegration approaches tend to offer flexible rather than rigid pathways back to education or employment and are usually tailored to the needs of the participants, with support from a range of specialists. Alternative methods of delivery are often used for the provision of 'second-chance' learning, based on consultation and collaboration with stakeholders from outside the public sector.

Member States have implemented a range of policies and measures to try to facilitate the transition from school to employment, including providing information, advice, guidance and work experience opportunities, improving the relationship between education and the world of work, providing guarantees of employment or training, and specialist job-search assistance. Member States are also investing in opportunities for young people to improve their employability by participating in apprenticeships, internships and (re)training courses. In addition to a lack of work experience or qualifications, NEETs can face a range of practical and logistical barriers to employment and can therefore benefit from support measures such as adapted workplaces, or additional support related to childcare, transport or language competency. Also,

faced with high levels of youth unemployment, some countries have chosen to implement measures which can stimulate demand for young employees, such as subsidised jobs or reductions in social security contributions for employers.

The stakeholders involved in delivering measures to improve the labour market positions of NEETs vary depending on the goals and purpose of the measures. Most of the ESL policies are implemented by public authorities without significant involvement from social partners, though their involvement tends to be more common in reintegration-focused policies dealing with VET and other work-based training opportunities for early school leavers. NGOs have a particularly important part to play in the implementation of ESL policies in many urban areas as well as eastern European countries, and especially in the context of policies targeting minority groups such as the Roma and migrant children.

The situation is quite different with NEET-relevant labour market measures; around half of the labour market-focused measures were implemented either on a tripartite basis with public authorities or on a bipartite basis by the social partners. Employers, business and trade federations, trade unions, NGOs and the public employment services all have an important role to play in ensuring that young people can improve their employability and make a successful transition to the labour market. Other important partners, especially in the context of disengaged young people facing multiple barriers, include organisations such as social and health authorities. Several different ways of bringing together stakeholders or ensuring that all stakeholders are signed up to the same agenda can be identified. These might include, for example, agreements between the different partner organisations, collective labour agreements or simply collaborative approaches to delivery.

This review has also shown that the labour market prospects of young people seem to be particularly sensitive to the economic context; they do not benefit as much as older workers from phases of economic growth and suffer more during a downturn (OECD, 2008).

In some countries, the economic crisis has brought the issue of NEETs to the fore, while in others it has led to new measures being introduced to support young NEETs, or to the alteration or expansion of existing measures. Nevertheless, as a consequence of the crisis, many governments have had to make cuts that have affected the provisions for NEETs. Moreover, it is not just public sector finances which have been affected. The impact on the private sector can have a knock-on effect on the success of measures that might help NEETs, due to the lack of employment and apprenticeship opportunities.

To conclude, while there has been action to tackle the NEET phenomenon at both EU and national level, it seems there is room for improvement in a number of areas. The policy mix and measures to be adopted in each country of Europe will of course depend on the context and the profile of young NEETs in that country; however, some key evidence emerges from this review. There is the need to recognise the diversity within the NEET group, which means that the policy response must be comprehensive and multifaceted.

Furthermore, in the context of globalisation and the shift towards a knowledge economy, young people need to be equipped with the right mix of both job-specific and cross-cutting core skills to be able to access the labour market. Likely to be particularly effective are NEET-relevant policies based on a coordinated, partnership approach that ensures stakeholders from outside the public sector, including the social partners and employers, are consulted and involved. Working life familiarisation opportunities and the availability of comprehensive information, advice and guidance are other key ingredients in supporting young people in finding employment.

Finally, due to the lack of data and long-term follow-up of NEETs, it can be difficult to decide what type of interventions work better than others. In fact, there is a lack of systematic evaluation of the adopted measures, and it seems that more evaluations of NEET-relevant measures should

be carried out. This is particularly important in the current economic context, when evidence is required to identify and implement those measures which are most efficient and cost-effective.

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