



Survey Report

Interviews on Youth Unemployment

Erasmus+ Strategic Partnerships for Vocational Education and Training

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ENTRE-YOU Consortium

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Introduction

The Project ENTRE-YOU



Youth unemployment is one of the most pressing challenges European labour markets and VET systems face. While many young people search in vain for employment or apprenticeship positions, vacancies are often not filled because employers complain they cannot find suitable young candidates.

This phenomenon occurs particularly for young jobseekers from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Among the reasons for this gap are lacking basic knowledge about the way enterprises function and an unsatisfactory level of key competences.

ENTRE-YOU - Entrepreneurial Mindset for Young Disadvantaged Jobseekers, addresses this problem by developing a low threshold qualification programme which provides disadvantaged young people with basic economic knowledge and key competences for a successful entry into the labor market.

To this end EBC Licensing GmbH and EBC*L training and testing centers in seven European countries collaborate in the creation of a catalogue of learning objectives, didactic and methodological concepts, a set of attractive and motivating face-to-face and online learning materials and a guiding publication for VET trainers.

A row of train-the-trainer seminars will enable VET trainers to apply the developed products. The ENTRE-YOU training approach will provide an interface with the existing certificate EBC*L LifeManagement.

Qualitative Research Concept

The aim of qualitative research in the form of interviews was to capture and analyse different opinions and points of view from

- directly or indirectly involved stakeholders in the training and/or employment of young people (such as schools and training providers, employment agencies, authorities, social partners and NGOs) and
- young disadvantaged jobseekers (18-24 years).

From the results of this analysis we want to take important clues to the actual needs and problems of disadvantaged young people in the partner countries (Romania, Austria, Netherlands, Spain, Croatia, Hungary and Bulgaria), so that we can develop a tailored design for the ENTRE-YOU training.

In the survey period December 2015-January 2016 a total of 147 young disadvantaged job seekers and 47 stakeholders were interviewed.

In the following the answers given to the various questions are summarized.

Results from the interviews with young people

The questions 1.1, 1.4, 1.5 and 1.8 were considered being particularly important and thus were prioritized. Interestingly, there appears to be no significant differences between the views of young people in the partner countries; the answers and statements are very similar.

1.1. Why are there so many unemployed young people?

All young people surveyed have given similar answers to this question. As one of the biggest obstacles on the way to working life almost all see the lack of work experience. Approximately 70% of respondents said that there are fewer jobs than unemployed, which would complicate taking up work additionally, especially for those without work experience. Others said it was not easy to find employment in their vocational and qualification area.

Among young people in the partner countries the reasons of current youth unemployment, particularly among young professionals are seen in the financial and economic crisis and the ensuing recession, bad policies and bad decisions of governments. During this period, the overall unemployment rate is very high and affects the job opportunities for young people negatively. With their lack of professional experience, relatively short or incomplete education, the great instability of contractual relationships and only a few contacts for job search they would have relatively much more difficult conditions to get a job. This applies even in good times, in the recession they were even the last ones employed and with predominantly fixed-term contracts under the first, which would be released.

Also labour legislation, along with several other practices in the labour market, such as collective agreements, would penalize young people at the labour market. Moreover, there would be also non-economic reasons, namely poor decisions of the young people themselves or their families. So non-working parents could have negative role model affects, but also disproportionate financial support from the families would influence young people negatively and could lead to unemployment and inactivity.

More than half of the young people surveyed think that high unemployment among them might partly also be because of a lack of motivation. Another reason for the high youth unemployment is seen in a lack of knowledge and skills for successful job search by the majority of respondents. So they were, for example, not sufficiently able to set up a motivation letter and know too little about how they behave correctly at interviews, or how they should ever tackle job search with a positive attitude and appropriate motivation.

1.2. What means being employed to you?

For the young people owning a workplace seems to mean primarily to generate income and thus to attain security and protection against a wide range of social risks. With the earned income their daily needs could be satisfied and expenses could be covered.

Some indicated in addition that they would be able to support the income of their family (parents' house but in the future also own family and children) or could take opportunities for further training in other areas.

In addition, employment in the eyes of the young people surveyed would have a motivational impact on them, what they connect on the one hand very strongly with financial independence, on the other hand with new skills and new opportunities.

1.3. How does unemployment influence the life of young people?

The survey young people perceive unemployment above all as a situation in which their independence is impeded. About half of the respondents face an income that is too low. Also about 50% of young people surveyed stated that unemployment has negative influences on their self-image; they are uncertain and lose motivation.

Unemployment could lead to poverty, which goes hand in hand with the risk of social exclusion. Long-term unemployment and "doing nothing" could lead just to stress, lack of motivation and depression as in adults.

1.4. What makes young people happy?

In summary, one could say that the respondents are happy when they do not have to take on obligations that restrict their interests and if they have enough money to spend. The young people report that they were happy in their teenage when they did not have to do any homework, received good grades at school, went to a concert or could meet their idols, or when they were in love for the first time.

In their present age they are happy when they attend a vocational school and make a success with their exams or have a job respectively own source of income, thus are independent and can finance new clothes, mobile phones, travelling abroad etc. A very important precondition for their luck is to satisfy social needs, meet new people and to be able to go out often.

For their later life the respondents expect that they will be happy when they have a good job, can make their living outside and independently of their parents' house, have a friend, or even husband/wife and children. Approximately 80% of respondents make their future happiness dependent of the feeling to be productive and to learn new things.

1.5. ... and what are young people afraid of?

In answering this question the young people tend to proceed more speculative as that they would have expressed real fears. Basically, they feel confronted with a number of frightening things, inter alia:

- Fear of failure in examination situations,
- Disappointment of parents,
- Loss of friends and loved ones,
- Lack of prospects after leaving school,
- Difficulties in finding a job or a job in the own country,
- Inability to recognize own potentials
- Unemployment and inability to achieve the desired

The themes of the fears regarding their future lives are probably similar to those of adults: success in admission to vocational school, finding a job, finding a partner and partner choice, high enough income to realize the kind of lifestyle they want to, for example, to afford going on vacation.

1.6. Who is responsible for the happiness in ones life?

(To what extent do you think you're the boss in charge of your life - and is it from your perspective a good thing to be able to take something into your own hands ...?) On this question almost all young people interviewed agreed that everybody is responsible for it's own happiness.

1.7. Could schools prepare young people better?

The analysis of the statements made on this issue has shown that the respondents judge similarly: according to them young people should gather not only specific knowledge in school but also learn various practical skill for searching jobs and learn about values, beliefs and adequate behaviours.

Young people want to become familiar with the “real world” in school already; and they want to know what exactly to expect in the future. Especially young job-seekers among the respondents feel insufficiently prepared for the active job search by the school.

According to single statements of the interviewed young people part of a good preparation for the working world are among other:

- social and intercultural competences,
- foreign languages (especially English),
- computer skills,
- vocational orientation offers at an early stage,
- practical training possibilities

as well as the skills

- to recognize ones own innovation capacity and creativity and
- to present ideas.

1.8. What does „being successful“ mean to young people?

“Being successful” in the opinion of the young people surveyed has different meanings. In many cases success is connected with the possession of a lot of money by them. Some also have mentioned stars (rap stars, football stars, musicians, etc.) as good examples, but partly qualified that against the background of the realization opportunities.

The following other success factors were among others called:

- Enjoying the things you have,
- To have a home,

- To have a family,
- Being socially integrated,
- To have a job,
- Having a qualification (finishing apprenticeship e.g.),
- To achieve something in life/the set goals, both professionally and personally,
- To live a safe and balanced life,
- Doing things that you want to.

1.9. What are your plans for the next future?

The main goal among respondents is to find a training place or a job. During the interviews many of the young people stated that they have indeed operated active job search, but so far without success. Even graduates are among them. In the Eastern European partner countries the alternative, to continue job search abroad, seems to be relatively widespread.

Results from interviews with businesses and other stakeholders

In addition to the youth we interviewed 74 stakeholders, that have contact with young jobseekers (companies, teachers, trainers, social workers etc.). Questions 2.1, 2.4, 2.5 and 2.8 were considered particularly important by the ENTRE-YOU consortium and thus prioritised.

2.1. What reasons do you see for youth unemployment?

When the surveyed stakeholders talk about the reasons of youth unemployment, all company representatives in the partner countries agree that they see a variety of difficulties in accommodating young people (and especially those with low skills) in the current labour market. On the other hand many respondents mention that they have difficulty in finding suitable young applicants.

The education system still does not offer enough opportunity for young people to acquire practical skills that make them more competitive in the labour market. Also, the surveyed stakeholders believe that the quality of education for young people is not satisfactory or too general. The lack of practical training, favourable economic conditions, a certain lack of motivation, the unfavourable economic situation, and the lack of experience were also cited as barriers for young jobseekers.

An interesting contradiction was also addressed in this question: Although there is a high unemployment rate in the partner countries, companies often cannot find a suitable young candidate for a specific position advertised. The reason mentioned was that young people sometimes are not motivated enough to go to great lengths and are not willing to accept a very low first salary.

Young people seem to expect others to solve their problems; they have high expectations of society.

The following perception was also mentioned: it seems that some youth do not want to find a job, because it is better to live at home with their parents and the economic crisis serves as justification for that.

2.2. What does it mean for young people to have a job?

From the stakeholders' perspective permanent employment for young people means to be responsible and a part of society. This in turn gives them the opportunity to develop their skills, to become financially independent, to be more motivated, to positively look into the future, and eventually to start a family, if they wish.

2.3. How does youth unemployment affect the lives of young unemployed?

With this question, the stakeholders had put themselves in the situation of the young unemployed. A common response was that unemployment for young people means having a lot of time but little or no money, which has both positive and negative effects.

The positive impact of having the freedom to organise their leisure time as they want was mentioned. This may result in more social contacts. In this stage of life, it seems, in the opinion of respondents, very important to "hang out" with friends.

The negative impact, mentioned by almost all stakeholders, is that unemployment and unsuccessful applications mean repeated disappointments and setbacks for the youth. This may lead to them losing confidence and no longer trying to overcome the perceived barriers.

The pressure from various sides (especially from their parents, but also by young people themselves) was also mentioned frequently. This is expressed in statements such as "They are not stupid, they know the longer they are unemployed the smaller their chances are in the future".

Furthermore, disorientation, a feeling of worthlessness, a sense of powerlessness, and a lack of sense of achievement were mentioned as a result of youth unemployment.

Nearly all respondents (more than 96 %) agree that unemployed young people are usually not able to move away from their parents and to become financially independent. They often feel frustrated and see no perspective for the next stage in their life. Furthermore, the lack of disposable income has social consequences: unemployment of the youth means that they can not participate in social life.

2.4. What do you think: What makes young people happy?

Respondents predominantly agreed that a single recipe of happiness does not exist. Everyone has their own idea of happiness. By trend, young people were seen as lucky if they pass their exams in school, earn their own money, if they have a positive outlook for the future, and if they are having fun with their friends.

The chance of work that allows young people independence, professional development, and career progression was also often mentioned as a factor of happiness.

Important for the happiness of young people, according to some stakeholders, are also recognition and respect for their personality and for what they do.

2.5. What do you think: What are young people afraid of?

The impossibility of finding work, which involves the question of attainable independence, is seen as a main concern of young people (100 % of respondents).

At the same time it was pointed out that the youth were afraid to take responsibility. There were a large number of young people who did not want to work, so the opinion of some stakeholders.

Fear of failure was also mentioned frequently, for example, to be rejected by potential employers (or to be terminated when they work) and thus be socially isolated.

Furthermore, the fear of the youth not being able to take care of themselves in the future was mentioned as well as the fear of failing to achieve their own potential.

2.6. What strategies or measures are helpful? Which are not?

All answers to this question had the same attitude: "We should not leave them alone, we need to support these young people."

Most of the comments related to schooling and measures during school age. The quality of education should be appropriate, so that the young people who have left school and have been evaluated positively, have the necessary basic skills such as reading and language skills to cope with the basic requirements of an education.

All respondents viewed it as important to strengthen the link between school and the labour market. The transition from school to work is very important. More practical orientation and the ability to get insight into working life through internships were also mentioned in this context. Respondents said teachers should be better informed about possible career options for graduates.

Some of the respondents are in favour of longer compulsory education since 15-year-olds are not in a position to make a living and those who are, continue the education anyway.

Some strategies, that are already being implemented, were also assessed as positive, such as preparing young people for the labour market with seminars that teach them to write excellent CVs, how to leave a good impression at a job interview, how to gain self-confidence etc.

In the opinion of stakeholders employers are also called upon. They should have a clear strategy for their investments in the education of their future employees, such as financial resources for the training of their employees.

2.7. Can schools prepare young people better? How?

All respondents in all partner countries agree (100 % of respondents) that schools could prepare young people better. The entire school system must adapt to meet the needs of the labour market. Schools should strive more to develop the creative abilities of their students, teach more work-related content, and better qualify the teachers in regards to this.

2.8. What does success mean to you? Who is successful?

For the majority of interviewed stakeholders one is successful, who systematically works at one's skills and who is productive in one's workplace. At the same time success means to be satisfied with one's life and job, to have a job you like and thus inspire others.

A balance between private life and professional life was also cited as an indicator of success. There would always be successful people who could serve as an example for the connection between hard work and success.

Summary and conclusions

From the statements made, the following conclusions or aspects can be derived that should be taken into account when designing the ENTRE-YOU trainings.

The survey of young people resulted in the following central conclusions:

- There is basically still a need to know the labour market in order to make a good career choice, not only in terms of their own interests and inclinations, but also with respect to future job opportunities.
- The young people themselves expressed a desire for motivation, or removing their uncertainties, for example, when it comes to “How do I behave at the interview or in the company?”. Simulations/role plays could be helpful and compensate for lack of experience in part.
- On the one hand the base “I am responsible for my own happiness” seems to be present; on the other hand, young people have a strong tendency to externalise, meaning “the policy, the economy, the circumstances are all to blame for my situation ...”. It seems particularly important, to intercept resignation and to strengthen personal responsibility by means of reflections and other methods!

The survey of stakeholders resulted in the following central conclusions:

- On the part of stakeholders, there is the consentaneous opinion that young jobseekers are often overwhelmed by the complex demands of today’s working world. They therefore see the great need to support and help young people in this situation.
- Important players mentioned in this context are the schools. They have a key role in preparing young people for a successful entry into the labour market. The transfer of content, that better prepares the youth for the working world are seen as essential.
- In addition, young people have to be supported in their personal development, for example by reducing the (often self-imposed) pressure or pointing out to them positive outlooks for their futures.

Comparing the responses of young people with those of the stakeholders, to the questions the two groups were asked in a similar manner, the following picture emerges: partly, stakeholders could assess well what young people moved (for example, what makes them happy, what they are afraid of), but partly major differences prevail. It seems as if even stakeholders who are used to working with young people are not always able to put themselves in the world of the youth.



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