

Disadvantaged Youth in Europe: Constellations and Policy Responses

Young people all over Europe have benefited less from inclusion and active labour market policies in recent years than the overall population. Therefore the social inclusion of disadvantaged young people is high on the European agenda. This article presents the main findings of a study commissioned by the European Commission on policies for disadvantaged youth in 13 European countries and focuses on three issues: the constellations of disadvantage in youth transitions from education to employment, an overview of policies applied in the countries involved and the conclusions to be drawn from a cross-national analysis. The concept of disadvantage developed in the study is based on the assumption that “old” lines of social inequality like gender, ethnicity and social class nowadays mix with new lines of segmentation. As a consequence, it is argued, that policies for the inclusion of young people need to be designed in an integrated way with a biographical and life-cycle perspective as the underlying principle.

Keywords: Disadvantaged youth, Europe, Youth unemployment, Early school leaving, Transition from education to work

Introduction

Over the past few decades young people's transitions from education to work have become increasingly de-standardised and have been made an important focus of policy and research. While the changes have had an effect on all young people, it is clear that some young people are more vulnerable than others to risks of social exclusion such as unemployment, precarious employment and early school leaving. The European Commission's Joint Report on Social Inclusion published in May 2004 ⁽¹⁾ has identified disadvantaged youth as a strategic target group and defined both increasing labour market participation and tackling disadvantages in education and training as two of the seven key policy priorities. The European Pact for Youth adopted in spring 2005 as part of the revised Lisbon Strategy ⁽²⁾ ascertains the social integration of young people as a means for sustainable and inclusive growth in Europe. It builds upon the first cycle of implementation of the White Paper 'A New Impetus for European Youth' ⁽³⁾ which launched numerous initiatives for enhancing young people's participation and active citizenship. It was acknowledged that in order to move forward it is required to achieve consistency between the policies and activities targeting young people through a new level of cooperation between social partners, most notably educational and training bodies, youth organisations and regional and local authorities ⁽⁴⁾. In their search for convergence, EU policies apply a model of mutual learning where best practices from single countries are meant to guide other countries. The important question in this respect is whether and how practices and policies can be transferred to other contexts. One often

(1)
European Commission (EC),
2005a

(2)
EC, 2005b

(3)
EC, 2001

(4)
EC, 2005c

overlooked factor in this exercise is the definition of success. What means successful policies for disadvantaged young people? Do we measure success only in terms of labour market outcomes? Is it the most cost-efficient measures? Or do we need to define success in a broader way?

This contribution draws on the results of a Thematic Study, the DG Employment and Social Affairs commissioned in 2004 (5). This study aimed at enhancing the understanding of disadvantage in young people's transitions from school to work and the policy approaches developed, applied and evaluated within the enlarged EU context. It provided a comparative analysis of risks in youth transitions and policy interventions for social inclusion in 13 countries. From the countries involved Bulgaria, Finland, Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and the UK display noticeable problems with the inclusion of either unemployed youth or early school leavers while Austria, Denmark and Slovenia are referred to as contrast countries with a better performance. The study made use of three main sources: national reports devised along a standardised questionnaire by national experts following policy seminars and consultations with representatives from the academic community, policy makers and stake holders in each country, Eurostat data mainly from the Labour Force Survey in 2004, and descriptions of policies presenting good practices according to a common structure. A wealth of comparative and contextualised information was gathered about the multiple forms of barriers blocking the social integration of young people. Over thirty models of policy interventions were evaluated as good practice and analysed in more detail by the national experts from the thirteen countries participating in the study. The Thematic Study first identified and clustered key problem constellations in the countries involved; second, assessed current policies and their (mis-)match with problems in each of the countries; third, analysed factors of success or failure of policies for disadvantaged youth; finally, developed recommendations of how the processes of decision making and policy implementation may profit from 'good practice' while considering context-bound specificities. This paper focuses on three issues: the constellations of disadvantage in youth transitions from education to employment, an overview of policies applied in the countries involved and the conclusions to be drawn from a cross-national analysis.

(5) see Walther, Andreas and Pohl, Axel: Thematic Study on Policy Measures concerning Disadvantaged Youth, Tübingen 2005. The study was coordinated by the authors on behalf of IRIS e.V., Institute for regional Innovation and Social Research, Tübingen/Germany. More information on the study can be found at: <http://www.iris-egris.de/projekte/disyouth>.

(6) Eurostat definitions were applied according to which early school leavers means the 18-24 year olds without upper secondary qualifications while the youth unemployment rate refers to young people out of work who actively seek a job (whether registered or not). The youth unemployment rate refers to the share of unemployed among the 15-24 year old labour force (www.eu.int/eurostat).

Objectives and key concepts

The study focuses on two key issues for young people in Europe: youth unemployment and early school leaving. (6) Figure 1 lists the countries involved in the study according to their levels of unemployment and early school leaving in 2004 with youth unemployment ratios ranging between of 5.6% in Austria and Denmark and 14.2% in Poland. Rates of early school leaving range between 4.2% in Slovenia and 39.4% in Portugal (Eurostat data).

The objective to investigate social disadvantage with regard to the phenomena of youth unemployment and early school leaving was broken down into four key questions:

1. What are the socio-economic characteristics of disadvantaged youth?
2. What are the key problems of the transition of disadvantaged youth from school to work?
3. What impact do both inclusion and active labour market policies have?
4. What are the causes of success or failure of policies to support disadvantaged youth?

The analysis was based on an understanding of disadvantage in youth transitions that can be summarised as follows:

- Sociology of youth (7) has established that youth transitions in the countries members of the EU are becoming prolonged, more complex and individualised, without clear-cut trajectories. Even more dramatic has been the shift from the orderly and strictly controlled passages typical for large groups of young people living under the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe into the flexible and diversified trails in the developing market societies (8). Young people in present day European societies face more choices and greater risks under the influence of globalisation which destroys the clear markers of the past and creates insecurity and changeability. In the situation of uncertainty and growing individualisation, young people can no longer rely on collective patterns and need counselling and advice that take into consideration the complexity of (post)modern life.
- As a consequence *social inclusion* needs to be analysed in a holistic way as the relationship between social structure and individual agency and is broader than labour market integration. *Disadvantage* is conceptualised in the study as a result of the interplay of socio-economic structures, institutional measures and individual strategies. The analysis of the national reports in the present study reveals that problems leading to disadvantage arise at various points of youth transitions such as school problems, leaving school before the obligatory age or without qualifications, meeting with a lack of access to training or mismatch between qualifications and labour demand, lack of entry routes into the labour market, falling into poverty, losing housing security, breaking partnerships, and as a result limited citizenship. All these barriers to social inclusion are produced and reproduced by individual, structural and institutional deficits. Disability and type of motivation feature most prominently among individual factors. Socio-economic inequality, poverty rates, labour market situation and economic development more generally, rates of unemployment and long-term unemployment, gender and ethnic inequalities, migration status are all structural factors that affect the social integration of young people. Institutions such as school and training systems, employment offices and social security systems themselves can create barriers or enforce misleading trajectories (9).

(7)
Furlong and Cartmel, 1997;
Walther, Stauber et al, 2002;
López Blasco et al, 2003;
Catan, 2004

(8)
Ule and Renner, 1998; Machacek,
2001; Kovacheva, 2001

(9)
Walther, Stauber et al, 2002

Constellations of disadvantage

The study's perspective on constellations of disadvantage means that prevalent clusters of unemployment and early school leaving are examined – including also crosscutting aspects of precariousness – in the different countries. 'Old' structural categories of inequality according to class, education, ethnicity and gender need to be analysed according to new lines of segmentation and transition structures that lead to 'new' forms of disadvantage. It is therefore important to relate socio-economic indicators with the variety of forms of disadvantage. The most important aspects in this respect are as follows:

Social inequality influences the way in which parents can support their children's educational careers; high social inequality (measured by the Gini-coefficient) correlates with high early school leaving in particular in Italy, Portugal, Romania, Spain while in Austria, Bulgaria, Greece and UK the relationship is weaker; these findings correspond to the recent PISA studies of the OECD.

Structures of education and training differ in the following respects:

- in the way social inequality is reinforced or balanced;
- how early school leaving is distributed according to different routes;
- whether integrated national qualification systems allow for transfer between general, vocational and higher education; how individual learning needs are acknowledged;
- and to what extent vocational routes are school- or company-based.

This relates to general *labour market structures* and employment prospects according to which pupils and school leavers assess the use and value of investment in education; however, contracted labour markets and structures of mismatch between education and the labour market – reinforced by age-related segmentation due to young job seekers' lack of experience – have different effects. While in Slovakia and Poland young people stay in education to avoid unemployment ('discouraged workers' effect also relevant in the UK), in Italy or Spain (as well in Portugal) they prefer to leave education as soon as job opportunities arise even if they are precarious and/or in the informal economy. Correspondingly, in some countries early school leavers display well above-average levels of unemployment (Austria, Bulgaria, Finland, Slovakia, Slovenia, UK) whilst in other contexts particularly in Southern Europe but also in Denmark, Poland and Romania they are not over-represented among the unemployed. In most cases higher education is a worthwhile investment at least in the long-term, school leavers with post-compulsory education but weak family resources are more likely to become disadvantage the longer their job search fails.

Ethnic minority and *immigrant youth* are particularly affected by early school leaving although the picture is highly differentiated across Europe which makes comparison difficult. In many cases disadvantage is mainly ascribed to cultural factors (e.g. language, values) although it should also

be taken into account that most immigrants and ethnic minorities have a lower socio-economic status and institutionalised discrimination includes a higher risk of school failure (or being placed in special schools where these exist for those with learning difficulties). In terms of labour market opportunities the effects of educational disadvantage are multiplied by discriminatory practices from employers and also by barriers to benefit from active labour market policies. Unclear legal status increases risks of being trapped in precarious jobs.

The role of *gender* is another determinant which requires differentiation: across Europe early school leaving is primarily a male problem; in terms of youth unemployment the picture varies between Southern European countries (as well as in Austria, Poland, and Slovenia) where females are disadvantaged and Northern European countries (plus Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia) where unemployment rates of young men and women have been reversed, partly due to the economic shift towards the service sector. Young women are in general more likely to experience disadvantage resulting from precarious work arrangements. Inactivity rates also remain higher for young women while gender pay gaps and restricted upward mobility continue to persist.

Regional disparities are less pronounced in terms of early school leaving than in the case of youth unemployment. This relates to rural-urban divides but also to the imbalance between dynamic centres and stagnant peripheries, the most striking example being the South of Italy where youth unemployment rates exceed 60%. In addition, regional or spatial differences also affect access to infrastructures such as access to education and labour market services.

Contexts differ with regard to the *duration* of unemployment; in opposition to widely held belief that youth unemployment is normally of a shorter duration in most countries more than one third of the unemployed young people have durations exceeding 12 months (Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia).

Social disadvantage is not limited to early school leaving or unemployment. Various forms of non-standard work can serve to extend disadvantage after labour market entry and into later stages of the life course. The Labour Force Survey established high precariousness of youth employment although in different patterns in different countries. Risky employment among youth takes the form of temporary contracts in Spain, Poland, Finland and Slovenia. It takes the form of part-time work in Denmark and undeclared work in Greece, Italy and the two accession countries. The dominant patterns of non-standard work are related in no linear way to the poverty rate among youth in each country which is low in the Nordic countries and Slovenia, medium in Austria, Bulgaria and Poland and high in the rest of the countries in the study. The study shows that disadvantage increasingly includes working young people when they are accompanied with restricted access to social security which causes precariousness in the later stages of the life course. The deregulation of the labour market does not mean automatically increasing chances of social integration when not linked to quality employment.

The study identified one group at particular risk of social exclusion in most European countries. It is formed by young people not in education, training or employment and not registered as unemployed in the labour offices, often referred to as 'status zero' group (10). Whilst it is difficult to assess methodologically, one approximate indicator may be the difference between those recorded as 'inactive' (excluding those in education or training) with high rates particularly in Bulgaria, Romania, Spain and the UK. Potential reasons for disengaging from the transition system are limited benefit entitlements, lack of trust in public employment services, pressure and degrading treatment by institutional actors, alternative options such as informal work. Potential factors are a limited access to benefit entitlements, low trust in the effectiveness and integrity of public employment service, experience of bad treatment by institutional actors, and alternative options such as informal work. There is no reliable data about this group in many of the countries and one of the recommendations of the Disadvantaged Youth study is the creation of a joint data set on European level about the status of young people, including inactivity and non-registered work.

For a smaller group of young people, unemployment can be seen as part of a wider context of 'multiple disadvantage'. Causalities are difficult to determine in so far risk-laden lifestyles (e.g. drug use) can be strategies of coping with limited life perspectives, while contributing further to the dynamics of marginalisation (e.g. bad health, homelessness). However, constellations of poverty and segregation as experienced by Roma communities especially in Bulgaria, Romania or Slovakia also nurture vicious circles of deprivation.

Poverty does not only concern those without work – depending on access to benefit entitlements – but increasingly also the employed. According to the European average the poverty rate among young people is higher than the overall average (19% compared to 16% in 2001), differing between 10% in Slovenia and 25% in Italy. In particular among young people, atypical employment – mainly *fixed-term contracts* and *part-time work* – has increased in some contexts to well over half of the youth labour force (especially in Finland, Poland, Slovenia, and Spain). In Northern European countries in particular this most often coincides with young people's choices, whilst in Central, Eastern and Southern Europe young people are more often forced to accept these jobs as the only opportunities available; undeclared work also plays an important role in Greece and Italy and is also gaining importance in Central and Eastern Europe.

There are clear links between social inequality, educational level and (un)employment, but the situation is more diverse and complex than expected with regard to education and unemployment or between unemployment, employment and precariousness. In fact, structural, individual and institutional factors act together in the reproduction of disadvantage.

(10)
Williamson, 1997

Policy approaches across Europe

What policies are being put into practice to tackle disadvantage in youth transitions and to what extent are they successful? How do they interpret the task of renewing employment pathways for young people and how are they compatible with the need to become broader and more diverse? A systematic overview of policies needs to distinguish between structural, institutional and individual levels of intervention in order to avoid that disadvantage is ascribed to young people's individual deficits and the individuals are held personally responsible. A first level of differentiation therefore is between

- structural versus individualised measures; and between
- preventative and compensatory measures.

A second level differentiates sectors of intervention: school, training, and active labour market policies, which refer to two main policy discourses: lifelong learning and activation. These discourses stand for a shift from policies oriented towards a standard life course that was sustained by the State, especially through the regulation of education, work and welfare. Arguably, structural unemployment has caused a shift towards labour market flexibilisation while responsibility for learning and finding work are being shifted to the individual's responsibility. This trend means that disadvantage is primarily addressed at the individual level while the distinction between prevention and compensatory intervention is becoming increasingly blurred.

School-related measures

Among policies aimed at *preventing* early school leaving, first of all *school reforms* need to be highlighted. A minimal reform is to simply extend the duration of compulsory education (Bulgaria, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Spain), whilst making general and vocational curricula more relevant to labour market demands is an issue in all countries. Other countries aim to make school, training and university in general more inclusive by increasing permeability between routes (Denmark, Finland) and developing national qualification frameworks (Slovenia, UK).

Educational allowances are aimed at reducing the impact of social inequality. Entitlements are universal in Denmark and Finland where education is an element of citizenship; they can be means-tested (especially in the UK but also in most other countries, albeit at very low levels) or, as a negative incentive, tying family benefits to children's school attendance (Portugal, Slovakia). Another very basic approach is the provision of free meals and school books for disadvantaged groups like the Roma (Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Slovakia).

Within regular school a low-threshold approach to inclusive education is *counselling* to identify problems and influence individual educational decisions. Quantitative coverage and quality differ between teachers with an advisory function, social work in schools, and specialised school staff providing counselling for all pupils as a means of coping with learning

demands; good practice are the municipal counselling system in Denmark or the total counselling network in Slovenia because they start from the individual's needs.

Increasingly special needs pupils are given more *support teaching* in terms of personalised education, additional (specialised) staff and flexible classroom procedures. In the case of ethnic minorities *assistant teachers* from the same community are trained and employed (Romania, Slovakia) or methods of intercultural education are applied as in the Austrian practice of 'Team teaching' in commercial schools. Inclusive education however also needs to be included into general teacher training (examples relate to including the Roma in Romania and Slovenia). At the same time it needs to be highlighted that in some countries special education still relies on a segregated system of special schools where often ethnic minority youth are over-represented (especially Slovakia but also Austria, Finland, Poland).

Second chance and *evening schools* address those who have already left school in a compensatory way. Programmes have to be compatible with work or family and they often apply formal teaching and non-formal learning as well as vocational practice.

Among those countries with low levels of early school leaving such as *Denmark, Finland* and *Slovenia*, approaches can be characterised as structural and preventative. The main policies are reforms increasing the permeability of qualifications and the design of national qualification frameworks, educational allowances and personalised counselling also play a key role. Among the countries showing the largest decline *Greece* applies primarily individualised support teaching and compensatory approaches, with 6% of the 14-24 year olds enrolled in evening schools; the *UK* combines diversity within upper secondary educational provision, education allowances and intensified counselling. In *Poland* and *Slovakia* low levels are the result of widening access to higher education, although limited access to labour market entry may have adverse effects in the near future.

Training

The case of *Austria* is explained by reference to *training* which is a policy area that relates both to early school leaving and youth unemployment. The dual system of apprenticeship system provides a high share of school leavers with access to upper secondary qualifications, which provide direct links to the labour market. While such a system has developed historically, and is embedded within the national economy and culture, and in this respect it cannot easily be transferred to other contexts, however most countries aim to increase and upgrade vocational routes. Four main types of measures can be discerned:

All countries try to modernise and upgrade *vocational education and training (VET)* to overcome low qualification levels and labour market mismatch. While some countries have introduced small-scale *apprenticeship systems* (only in Portugal and UK this extends to upper secondary qualifications), others aim to modernise *school-based VET*. In

fact, the case of Denmark shows that this does not exclude work practice and the involvement of employers in the steering and delivery of VET.

In contrast, *preparatory and pre-vocational measures* aim to compensate for socialisation and learning deficits; only some measures provide certification, whilst others focus on personal competencies and practical learning with an inherent risk of becoming mere holding patterns. Good practice are 'Getting Connected' (UK) and the 'Production Schools' (Denmark) as they leave young people with the space to experiment and to learn by doing; the 'Vocational Preparation Courses' (Austria) are good practice in accrediting pre-vocational education which leads to later apprenticeship training.

Labour market training is distinguished from VET as it primarily addresses the unemployed in a compensatory perspective. It is often steered by employment services and does not always lead to regular qualifications. In fact, in some cases their scope is limited to the provision of work experience and the creation of a subsidised low wage youth labour market. Whilst this can be a first step towards creating a training "culture", quality standards need to be monitored as well as the extent to which they provide actual bridges into regular work (Bulgaria, Greece, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, UK).

Recognition of informal skills can balance a lack of formal qualifications and provide access to further education or employment; good practice are national qualification systems (see above) and the Portuguese 'Recognition, Validation and Certification Centres'.

There is an apparent contradiction between the increase of vocational routes and the fact that the phenomenon of dropping out is more common in vocational than in general education. Apart from the differing quality of vocational routes also the fact needs to be considered that weaker pupils tend to vocational rather than general or academic routes. Measures have to ensure that training schemes provides individuals with relevant skills rather than being simply 'more of the same'. This can be reached through a combination of counselling, job creation or work experience as well as by extending provision beyond the manufacturing sector to include the service sector.

Active labour market policies

Policies that address youth unemployment have undergone a dramatic shift from passive to active labour market policies (ALMP). However, assessment of long-term effects is difficult and there is a lack of research which considers non-labour market related factors, in particular for young people with multiple disadvantages. An indicator that at least highlights how efficient ALMP's are in reaching unemployed youth (without assessing the quality of outcomes) is the development of long-term youth unemployment over time (see Figure 2).

Activation combines approaches of personalised counselling with incentives for active job search and/or training. Incentives can be negative in terms of reducing benefit levels and applying sanctions such as cutting

or suspending benefits in the case of non-compliance or positive in terms of choice between different options or activation allowances exceeding benefit levels. Individualised action plans are the operative basis of activation policies. Here, approaches can be distinguished in terms of coverage, but also in quality, whether they primarily aim to recruit young unemployed for ALMP measures or aim to counsel and empower individuals to become reflexive actors of their own biographies. Relating the dimensions of incentives and counselling together five different models of activation are evident:

- supportive activation based on universal benefit entitlements and counselling aimed at personal development in a holistic perspective; priority on education (Denmark, Finland);
- workfare (coercive activation) characterised by a priority of employment; counselling aimed at recruitment and controlling compliance by sanctions (UK, partly Slovakia);
- limited activation due to limited benefit entitlements; counselling primarily as means of recruitment, partly complemented by multi-disciplinary and coordinated services (Austria, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Slovakia; in Bulgaria and Romania low coverage of PES);
- no basis for activation due to low coverage of PES and virtual lack of benefit entitlements of young people (Greece, Italy).

In all models, the success of counselling depends on the options of progression available.

Apart from education and training (see above) important measures in this respect are *subsidies* for employers. A first type is aimed at school graduates (first time job seekers), often with upper secondary and higher education, which play a key role in Central, Eastern and Southern Europe (but also the New Deal in UK) to compensate problems of mismatch and age and gender segmented labour markets. A second type aims to provide long-term unemployed with work experience (Denmark, Finland, UK, Greece, Portugal). A negative side effect of subsidies is that regular jobs may be replaced and displaced thereby contributing to a hidden deregulation of youth labour markets (see below).

Job creation is aimed at making young people's transitions more independent from the demand side of the labour market by creating additional work opportunities. While job creation in the public sector is decreasing, *self-employment* programmes have increased especially in contexts structured by age and gender segmented labour markets (e.g. Greece and Italy). *Job creation in the third sector* is regarded as a successful way to engage with the more hard-to-reach groups and those with disabilities, health or psychosocial problems (Austria, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Italy, Poland).

Deregulation of labour market entrance through a reduction of labour protection and the promotion of atypical work may be seen as a structural and preventative way of increasing access to the labour market. However,

except for some countries where this has been accompanied by social rights (Denmark, Finland, Slovenia) this is closely related to an increase in precariousness, especially in the case of Portugal and Spain where although youth unemployment has fallen poverty rates have increased.

Success factors: an integrated approach

The overall focus of the Thematic Study was to provide evidence for a youth based approach to inclusion and active labour market policies, therefore contributing to the objectives of the European Youth Pact. In the following a comprehensive policy model for the sustainable inclusion of disadvantaged young people is outlined starting from the normative and conceptual level and ending with specific factors of policy implementation and delivery.

Both the life-cycle perspective on youth transitions and the constellations of disadvantage in which structural and individual factors are interlinked require a holistic approach that coordinates different policies within a framework of *Integrated Transition Policies* (11). A policy perspective may speak of 'mainstreaming youth', however, lessons learned from gender mainstreaming imply the risk of standards and awareness developed through positive action fading away. Is 'youth everywhere' really better than 'youth nowhere'? Or under what conditions? This means that mainstreaming youth requires both: specific approaches as well as mainstreaming mechanisms. According to the White Paper on Youth the key to such an approach is the principle of citizenship and one that is based on individual entitlement to support that allows for autonomy, meaningful education, training and employment and active participation. Relating participation to the transition from school to work requires that firstly young people are involved in the process of policy-making (not only restricted to leisure time facilities); second, young people need to be endowed with negotiation rights towards institutions, an aspect that is not covered in most countries' interpretation of activation.

Integrated Transition Policies require a cross-sector perspective that starts on the macro-level. Inclusion and active labour market policies can only improve young people's lives if

- *school systems* share accountability for the life chances of young people as well as for social disadvantage;
- *social policies* enable families to assist their children in achieving relevant skills and qualification;
- *economic development* includes binding social criteria as regards training and employment for young people affected by social disadvantage.

More specific, five key success factors of policies for disadvantaged youth can be identified:

Funding: Sustainable inclusion measures require sufficient funding to cover all those who need support in their transitions from school to work, as well

(11)
cf. López Blasco et al, 2003

as providing quality services in terms of sufficient, trained staff, accessible premises and allowances as positive incentives. A comparison of national expenditure on education and (overall) ALMP as a percentage of GDP shows significant differences. Table 1 shows a clear relationship between expenditure for education and early school leaving, both in positive and negative terms, which also has consequences for unemployment. While this is less obvious with regard to ALMP expenditure, expenditure on social protection also needs to be taken into consideration, especially in relation to families, child and individual (not insurance-based) benefits.

Coordination: To allow mainstreaming Integrated Transition for youth policies need to be implemented and delivery coordination among different policy levels as well as the state, market and civil society. In this respect, the balancing of power differentials among national policies on the one hand and youth organisations on the other are crucial, because they give young people a voice (here also trade unions need to play a greater role) and provide them with opportunities for non-formal learning (12). Trust among partners also depends on partnership not merely being imposed as a condition for access to funding. In contrast, training policies reveal the necessity of positive incentives to increase the engagement of economic actors and effective coordination requires flexibility both on the policy level and within measures.

Access: Inclusion and active labour market policies are only effective if they actually reach their target groups. Especially immigrant and ethnic minority youth as well as young women both are often under-represented in measures – or they profit less in terms of meaningful outcomes. Access depends first on the coverage of measures, which itself is dependent on funding. Second, it requires the decentralised distribution of measures that allows for low-threshold access. Third, access requires reliable communication networks between institutions as well as between young people and institutions. Fourth, access depends on the conditions of attendance: flexible or unconditional access helps to ensure that individuals do not remain excluded from meaningful support due to bureaucratic rules. Fifth, anti-discrimination policies may be a tool to claim improved access (and supply) for immigrant and minority youth, as well as according to gender and age. Finally, the persistence of the phenomena of status zero suggest that limitations are not only structural and administrative, but also related to a lack of perceived value of the measures in the eyes of potential participants.

Reflexivity: If policy implementation and delivery requires higher flexibility as suggested above this also implies different processes and procedures within policy-making, by which the effects and side effects in each individual case are reflected upon rather than simply monitored (and evaluated ex-post). A higher reflexivity of institutional actors first requires changing the mechanisms of evaluation to become more comprehensive and to include qualitative and longitudinal elements as well as being integrated within everyday practice. Second, it requires a higher level of trust in the interaction between young people and institutional actors so that users feel able to give direct feedback whether they find the help offered meaningful or not; rather than resulting in strategic behaviour and

(12)
Walther et al., 2006

in some cases eventual disengagement.

Empowerment: Empowerment in the sense we use the concept is best understood as an approach centred on the motivation of individuals, in this case the motivation of young people to actively engage in their transitions. Motivation requires first the identification with a goal and second a feeling of control in reaching this goal; therefore relating subjective and structural factors. With regard to disadvantaged youth, motivation requires trust towards institutions and professionals, spaces for self-experimentation, (non-formal) learning approaches that start from the individual strengths and interests rather than demanding the compensation of individual deficits (13), and finally and most importantly, the possibility of choice. Active participation within inclusion and active labour market policies in this respect is a paraphrase of empowerment. Empowerment therefore cannot be restricted to including young people in any kind of measure but implies that they are provided with rights and resources that enable them to take over responsibility for their transitions.

Conclusions

In so far as the Thematic Study is embedded in the context of the Open Method of Coordination of the EU Social Inclusion Process concluding remarks need to be made with respect to the possibilities of mutual learning that arise from comparative policy assessment. On the one hand, it is obvious that mechanisms of path dependency set clear limits to the potential to learn from good practice from a different national context. On the other hand, mutual learning creates a space in which national policies both are influenced by alternative concepts and approaches and also come under the pressure of legitimacy in cases where performance is poor. Such spaces may be further developed in terms of assisting single countries in the search for functional equivalents for good practice that is being successful in other contexts. In order to increase institutional reflexivity however, this implies that mutual learning is not organised top-down only, but also involves national as well as local, public, private and NGO actors.

The presented study has clearly shown that a key factor for the success of policies is defining policy objectives by starting from the individual's life perspective and needs – instead of from an institutional perspective and narrow institutional considerations – with sustainable social integration as the key objective. Acknowledging the structural barriers in front of youth integration, the programmes and measures in support of disadvantaged youth should build upon the biographical perspective of the young person, their subjective orientations, values and skills and allow them to act as key actors in their own transitions, their own social integration. Individual motivation to participate or drop out of counselling, education, training or employment determines the sustainability of policy initiatives. The focus on the individual does not mean to put the blame for failures upon the young person but employing the resources of the individual in the changeable and de-standardised process of growing up and achieving autonomy. When setting the objectives and assessing the implementation of measures, it is important that the possible 'side effects' (14) are taken

(13)
Pais and Pohl, 2004

(14)
see Biggart et al, 2002 and
Mørch et al, 2002

into consideration and policies across sectors are coordinated. A sustainable labour market and social integration of an individual requires the individual support measures such as psychological stabilisation, health-related interventions, solving of housing problems and others besides and often prior to the job search. A highly effective tool for the individualised approach is the face-to-face counselling, acknowledging the perspective of the individual in coping with transition problems not only in the school-to-work passage but also in wider life. Successful social inclusion implies not only fulfilling institutional criteria of placing individuals into training or jobs but also giving access to subjectively meaningful life.

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Figure 1: Early school leaving and youth unemployment in 2004
(Source: Eurostat, LFS)

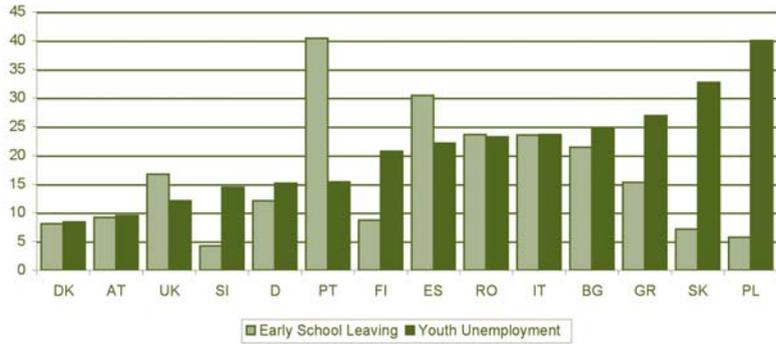


Figure 2: Long-term unemployment (>1 year) among young unemployed under 25 years in 2000 and 2004 (Source: Eurostat LFS)

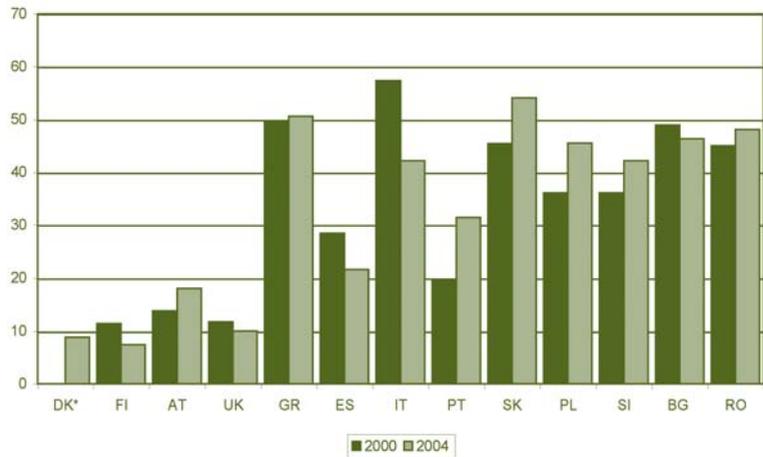


Table 1. Expenditures on education and ALMP 2002 as % of GDP (Eurostat, OECD)

Education ALMP	Low (< 5%)	Medium (5 - 6%)	High (> 6%)
Low (< 0,5 %)	GR, RO, SK	AT, PL, PT, UK	SI
Medium (0,5 - 1%)	BG, ES, IT		FI
High (> 1%)			DK