



**Vulnerable young people accessing and
sustaining vocational training and
apprenticeships (VYPASVTA):**

**Analysis of current policy and approaches
Summary report (Output 1)**

Morag MacDonald, David Kane and James Williams

Grant Agreement Number: 2015-1-UK01-KA202-013612

Coordinator: Professor Morag MacDonald – Birmingham City University

Commencement date: September 2015



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About the Erasmus+ VYPASVTA project

The ‘Vulnerable Young People Accessing and Sustaining Vocational Training and Apprenticeships’ project (VYPASVTA) has been funded with the support from the European Commission, ERASMUS+ Program. (identifier code: 2015-1-UK01-KA202-013612).

Aims, objectives and beneficiaries:

The ‘Vulnerable young people accessing and sustaining vocational training and apprenticeships’ (VYPASVTA) project was conducted to promote partnership working amongst public and private organisations to support the most vulnerable young people to succeed and build their own social and cultural capital. The aim of the project was to provide resources for current VET providers and employers who are interested in implementing apprenticeships and other training placements for the most vulnerable young people in our society.

The key project objectives were:

1. To explore the experiences of young people
2. To identify the needs of employers;
3. To identify the needs of schools and VET trainers;
4. To map good practice;
5. To bring together practitioners;
6. To provide a model of evidence based social support requirements;
7. To share good practice beyond the immediate partnership.

The direct beneficiaries of the VYPASVTA project were:

- VET providers, including trainers/colleges and employers that provide apprenticeships and work placements for young people;
- Private companies; public bodies;
- social enterprises that aim to improve the lives of the vulnerable;
- NGOs that provide VET for their clients; schools that provide VET;
- prisons that provide VET to young offenders;
- local authorities who are often responsible for co-ordinating and providing VET.

The indirect beneficiaries of the VYPASVTA project were the most vulnerable young people in society. The project used a broad age range: 16 to 25 years of age, capturing different definitions of ‘young people’ that are used across Europe. Vulnerabilities relate to a wide range of often inter-related issues such as histories of violence and abuse, problematic drug and alcohol use, serious undiagnosed mental health issues, problematic family relationships, experience of offending and prison.

Key methods and outputs

The project used a mixed methods approach. An initial evidence-base phase collected data from a range of sources to inform further elements in the project. A network was established concurrently to share practice and experience. Online educational resources were then developed using material derived from all the previous activities:

1) Evidence base

This was divided into two consecutive stages. i), baseline research was carried out by each partner to identify issues and current policy and practice within their countries. This also identified examples of practice. This involved a range of instruments and processes, including document analysis, face-to-face, telephone and e-mail interviews of key informants. Each partner identified and reported on key issues, policy and practice. The following, overall and comprehensive report will be drawn. ii) Case studies. This stage was an attempt to focus on what works and what does not work in developing apprenticeships for particularly vulnerable young people. In general, this looked at apprenticeships and the experiences of vulnerable young people, both positive and negative. It included examples of apprenticeships set up for particularly vulnerable young people where they could be found. Each partner undertook a case study involving identification of case study, interviews of key personnel, interviews of individual apprentices.

2) Sharing Practice Visits

Each partner country had an opportunity to visit existing initiatives in other partner countries. To facilitate this, partners were asked to provide examples of current practice that could be offered as potential visits. The visits were intended to facilitate interaction between project partners, staff and young people. The visits stimulated discussion of appropriate interventions in respect of the project beneficiaries and will enable partners to gain first-hand experience of work on-going in other countries. The visits fed into the formulation of project recommendations and informed the development of the online educational resource and project recommendations.

3) Developing a Network

A key element in sharing good practice was the provision of forums for discussion and a wider network of people and organisations interested in the field. The project therefore established a network of professionals working in the field, policy makers and employers with opportunities to meet during the course of the project. The evidence base began a process of identifying individuals and organisations interested in being part of the network. Clear links were made with the European Alliance of VET providers, especially through their Ambassadors, in order to both gain contacts and promote the issue of support for the most vulnerable young people. A database of interested parties was developed.

4) Development of online educational resources

The work of the project was drawn together in a series of online educational resources. The central element of the OER was a handbook for VET providers, including both trainers/colleges and employers that outlined steps in developing and implementing sustainable VET and apprenticeships. In addition, an additional resources pack was developed comprising useful information to support the Handbook. Additional resources included material identified in the evidence base and information identified in the network events and from members of the network. Material from the case studies was also included. Partners were all involved in developing material in the handbook and the additional resources pack, which were generic and broad enough to relate to all member states.

5) Piloting the OER; production of final OER; and dissemination of OER

In order to ensure that the OER are valid, it was necessary to pilot the resource with potential users. VET providers within the partner countries were invited to use the OER. The pilot was evaluated using a range of approaches. Organisations that are involved in the pilot completed a pre- and post-

test evaluation sheet, devised by the partnership on key evaluation principles. This identified strengths and weaknesses of the OER. A Wheel of Learning was used, identifying what was actually learnt. The key outcomes were understanding and learning about what worked and worked less well. As a result of this exercise, the OER were revised, refined and made publicly available for use.

The partnership:

The partnership brought together a small, international team, led by SREU at Birmingham City University:

- Birmingham City University, United Kingdom;
- Amical Limited, United Kingdom;
- Avidity Training Limited, United Kingdom;
- Die Berater, Austria;
- Langhe Monferrato e Roero Società Consortile a r.l. (LAMORO), Italy;
- Association of Varna Organizations for Drug Prevention (AVODP), Bulgaria;
- Centrul Pentru Promovarea Invatarii Permanente (CPIP), Romania;
- Administratia Nationala a Penitenciarelor, Romania.

The partnership was designed to reflect different aspects of the current European economic and socio-political situation. With large-scale migration and high youth unemployment (Italy), particularly vulnerable ethnic groups and relatively high levels of youth unemployment (Bulgaria, Romania); or differing approaches to unemployment, where the UK places responsibility for training and employment on the individual whereas Austria places responsibility on the state.

AVODP works with young offenders and the Roma community. Usually, young offenders from Roma community have different needs. AVODP uses cultural mediators when engaging with the Roma community. AVODP works with vulnerable young people - young offenders and those from the Roma community, including prostitutes and drug users. AVODP runs programs in the Roma community and in the prison. In both, AVODP provides services and social support for young people.

The Bulgarian partner is a leading expert on vulnerable communities, particularly the Roma. The Romanian partner works in the education of young people in the criminal justice system; the Austrian partner.....; the Italian partner.....; the UK partner is a multifaceted team, led by BCU, which has vast experience of researching issues relating to the most vulnerable people in our society and has led many European projects. In particular, the team includes representatives of local employers, VET organisations, local schools (the Albion Foundation) and the local authority to ensure that key perspectives are captured.

Analysis of current policy and approaches: Executive Summary

This report summarises the contributions from the VYPASVTA project partners (Die Beräter, Austria; AVODP, Bulgaria; LAMORO, Italy; CPIP and the National Prison Administration, Romania) who were tasked with analysing the current policies and approaches to vocational training and apprenticeships in their respective countries. Of particular concern is an examination of how accessible are vocational training and apprenticeships to vulnerable young people.

1. Background to National Policies and Practices

The national reports indicate that there are discrepancies in both provision and access to vocational training and apprenticeship opportunities. There is still much too to be done, even where the issue is being addressed.

The introduction of the Youth Guarantee¹ is cited by both the Romanian and Italian partners as impacting on the drive to address vocational education and training and apprenticeships. The goals of the EU's Youth Guarantee to promote a comprehensive approach that combines education, employment and vocational training.

There is a concern at high youth unemployment across the partnership, vocational guidance, prevent early exit from education and training, increase education and training offers and to promote apprenticeships and internships. The research indicates that there are barriers to employers, such as bureaucracy for enterprises and to promote the need to link education and training with the labour market.

There is some concern over the fluidity of the laws on VET within the partner countries. Frequent changes in government policies are highlighted as causes of confusion and anxiety.

2. Vulnerability

Vulnerability is a term that covers a huge range of issues and different groups. This project focuses on young people who can be generally referred to as Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETS): this includes young people who have been in prison or had other contact with the criminal justice system. The main definitions take account of socio-economic environment, family context, education, gender, ethnicity and cultural contexts. They might include the following: parental unemployment; poor school attendance; a history of violence and crime; drug and alcohol abuse; and being in care. However, the different countries in the partnership have different perspectives and some have no formal definition of vulnerability. Each of the countries has particular groups that are considered 'disadvantaged', such as Roma in Bulgaria, prisoners in Romania. In all the countries, however, migrants rank highly amongst the 'vulnerable'.

3. Current Approaches and Examples of Best practice

Despite the somewhat gloomy overview of VET provision emanating from some of the partners, it is evident that attempts are being made to address perceived problems. Each of the partner countries provide examples of good practice and positive developments, although they emanate from a range of different public and private sources. In Bulgaria, Austria, Romania and Italy, the highlighted initiatives are managed by national public organisations whereas those in the UK tend to be private charities and corporations.

¹ See: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1079>

4. Summarising the Current Situation

The national reports indicate that VET provision in the majority of partner countries is a process that is characterised by change. This is in response to a number of factors including perceived skills shortages in the labour market, failure of previous schemes and initiatives to provide VET and the unique challenges posed by population mobility across Europe. The reports show an enormous variety in the responses. In the UK, a new system is being developed that places the emphasis on employers: apprenticeships will be based on standards designed by employers and initially known as trailblazers, will ensure they are more relevant and intrinsically attractive to existing and new employers. However, the current policy framework for youth education and employment still fails to fully acknowledge the complex lives of the vulnerable and disadvantaged 16-24 year olds. This, combined with fewer local specialist training providers, together with on-going public sector austerity, has all the ingredients to create a potential cocktail of disaster.

Other partners are a little more optimistic about the future. In Romania, it is recognised that authorities are trying to improve the conditions and the situations of NEETs, by accessing and using European Programmes, such as the Guarantee Scheme for Youth, together with the European Social Fund. It is also noted, however, that although there are positive initiatives, the authorities should collaborate more with local youth organizations which are in direct contact with the representatives of the target groups, become aware of what their real needs are, what motivates them and what activities are suited to them.

5. Conclusions

It is clear from the work undertaken by partner countries that provision of VET is in a varying state of development. Consequently, it is problematic to formulate conclusions that are generally applicable and reference should be made to the individual country reports to ascertain the issues that are currently (2016) of primary concern to partner countries. However, a number of consistent themes have emerged.

- Partners are clear that more needs to be done to establish structures and measures that aim to raise the opportunities for training and employment for disadvantaged young people. These vary among partner countries due to combinations of both economic development and concomitant systems that act to maximise training and employment opportunities.
- There are no agreed definitions of what constitutes vulnerability. Similarly, how apprenticeships are defined is open to interpretation.
- It is also evident in the majority of partner countries that there needs to be more transparency and a higher level of clarity both in terms of government policy and in provision of training schemes: this will help to facilitate young people's access to programmes.
- Unless employers can understand the need to open up their workplaces to offer apprenticeships to a wider range of young people, including vulnerable young people, then all initiatives and tweaks to the system run the risk of being repeated over time and never quite solving the problem of vulnerable young people accessing and participating in VET and apprenticeships.

1. Introduction

This report summarises the contributions from project partners who were tasked with analysing the current policies and approaches to vocational training and apprenticeships in their respective countries. Of particular concern is an examination of how accessible vocational training and apprenticeships are to vulnerable young people.

To facilitate reporting, partners were asked to situate the project within a national context and consider a number of specific areas. This summary report will draw upon partner responses to these prompts while also considering the similarities and differences in current provision across the partnership. This output will form the foundation for subsequent deliverables culminating in the production of resources that aim to facilitate increased awareness of the needs of vulnerable young people looking to access and maintain vocational training and apprenticeships.

It should be noted that the purpose of this report is to summarise national contributions and identify themes for further exploration. Reference should be made to the five individual reports for detailed country-specific information.

This report will concentrate on the following areas:

1. Background to National Policies and Practices
2. Vulnerability
3. Current Approaches and Examples of Best practice
4. Summarising the Current Situation
5. Conclusions and Recommendations

2. Background to National Policies and Practices

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the individual country reports illustrated the discrepancies in both provision and access to vocational training and apprenticeship opportunities that exist across the partnership. A number of partner countries, Austria and the UK for example, reported that approaches to vocational training, particularly apprenticeships, were well established and recognised. This is not to suggest that these countries have perfect systems that are serving the needs of all those interested in vocational training, simply that strategies have been introduced over a number of years to cater for those seeking vocational training and apprenticeships. The difficulties experienced by partner countries with established systems will be explored later in this report. Other partners observed that although initiatives were beginning to address the situation, there was still much that needs to be done. Romania, for example, reported that in 2012, 'only around 100 apprenticeship contracts were concluded (Cedefop, ND). One of the principle causes leading to this small take-up is thought to be the restrictive nature of the Apprenticeship Act in Romania, which creates a number of obligations for employers while offering little support to those willing to recruit apprentices (ibid).

The introduction of the Youth Guarantee² is cited by both the Romanian and Italian partners as impacting on the drive to address vocational education and training and apprenticeships. The Romanian partner indicates that as of March 2015, the country had not begun the Implementation Plan in respect of the Youth Guarantee. However, a number of programmes funded by the national budget have been implemented to address concerns relating to young people's employment

² See: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1079>

prospects. It concedes, however, that other initiatives, including those funded by the European Social Fund, are not specifically addressed at NEETS (those not in education, employment or training). It is also noted that the Romanian Youth Council aims to promote the rights of young people, to increase their opportunities and participate in their communities. It also supports the goals of the Youth Guarantee to promote a comprehensive approach that combines education, employment and vocational training.

Similarly, the Italian partner describes that the governmental response to high youth unemployment includes plans to strengthen VET. At the end of 2013, a comprehensive package of measures was approved to improve vocational guidance, prevent early exit from education and training, increase education and training offers and to promote apprenticeships and internships. This will include measures to reduce bureaucracy for enterprises and to promote the need to link education and training with the labour market. Apprenticeship schemes are considered an important pillar of the Youth Guarantee and special attention is to be given to the national plan to implement the programme. Support measures for young people and adults include a reform of the employment services, improved teacher and trainer development, stronger vocational guidance, a citizen's training logbook which resembles the European skills portfolio, and a legal framework for validating learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal contexts.

The Bulgarian partner reports that VET development in the country has been hampered due to constant changes to the VET Act over the last 13 years. Similarly, no uniform system of apprenticeship currently exists. Apprenticeships are mainly available on a project basis and the experiences of those engaged on the programmes has not been positive. Steps are being taken to address current shortcomings however. Analysis of the VET quality Assurance system in 2011 concluded that VET provision was insufficient, inconsistent and not in line with the European Parliament's recommendation on quality assurance. The schools using common national criteria and quality indicators. The primary objective is to develop and implement a single VET management system that will track learners and VET training processes. In addition, at the end of 2014, a Strategy for Developing Vocational Education and Training was adopted for the period of 2015 – 2020. One of the main priorities of the strategy is to ensure quality and efficient vocational education and training and the first objective in this direction is to 'organize vocational education and training through work (dual education). The Austrian Chamber of Commerce has recently started working on introducing dual education into Bulgaria. To this end, the Commercial Representation Office at the Austrian Embassy in Sofia realized the Dual Education in Bulgaria pilot project which started in the 2015/2016 academic year.

The 'dual system' is a characteristic of the Austrian VET system and means that VET takes place in two locations: part-time training in a company and part-time attendance at vocational school. As previously mentioned, Austria has a well-developed VET provision, which is well regarded throughout the country and where the concept of dual training is flexibly adjusted to meet the talents and needs of young people.

The UK also has a long history of providing VET. For much of the twentieth century, apprenticeships were an established part of training in the British industrial sector; apprenticeships in the craft and trade sectors were generally taken up by 15-17 year old boys who had left school as soon as was legally permissible. A third of all male school leavers commenced apprenticeships. In recent times however, in common with other partnership countries, the UK has grappled with a number of challenges including the demands of employers, attempts to address skills shortages in the country and a reduction in numbers of young people entering VET programmes (in 1968, there were 171,000 registered apprentices but by 1990, there were only 34,500).

UK governments during the 1980s and 1990s had to deal with substantial socio-economic issues as a result of major economic down turns across core industries. Globalisation and poor industrial relations added to the impact on employment prospects with youth unemployment a major concern. The political response was to create various vocational education and training schemes such as the Technical and Vocational Enterprise Initiative (TVEI) within schools, The Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP) and Youth Training Scheme (YTS). All were launched with dedicated funding streams, advertising, resources and great optimism but were subsequently closed when, after only a few years, they had achieved poor outcomes for the users and had developed poor reputations. The appetite for government intervention and continual review of the UK skills strategy and access to vocational routes including apprenticeships showed no signs of slowing down with the change of Government to a Coalition of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats in 2010. The then Secretary of State for Education commissioned Professor Alison Wolf to undertake a comprehensive independent review of pre 19 vocational education known as The Wolf Report in March 2011 (Wolf, 2011). The review set in train a series of far-reaching reforms, which are still progressing through the learning and skills system today. The current situation in the UK will be summarised, along with other partner countries shortly.

Before turning to current initiatives and examples of best practice, it is necessary to examine the second major strand of the project: how vulnerable young people are able to access and sustain VET.

3. Vulnerability

As the UK partner noted, vulnerability is a term that covers a huge range of issues and different groups. This project focuses on young people who can be generally referred to as Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETS): this includes young people who have been in prison or had other contact with the criminal justice system.

Allen et al. (2012) state that NEETs often have problematic backgrounds that might include the following:

- parental unemployment;
- poor school attendance;
- a history of violence and crime;
- drug and alcohol abuse;
- being in care.

An understanding of what identifies a young person as vulnerable and how this impacts on their lives has concerned policy makers over a number of years. In the UK, various schemes and programmes have been launched and relaunched in a range of different guises in an attempt to engage and develop the skills of young people labelled as vulnerable. However, the non-homogeneous nature of vulnerability poses a challenge for policy makers charged with the design of impactful support programmes that address the complexity of issues faced by young people. One national charity for accommodation and support services to homeless young people aged 16-25 commissioned research, which found that only 4% of young people they support had ever started an apprenticeship (Institute for Employment Studies, 2016). They also noted that a range of demand and supply side barriers prevented greater participation in vocational education and apprenticeships by their young people.

One such barrier was linked to the extreme financial pressures experienced by low income families. A further problem identified was that many young people failed to meet the educational entry requirements to access training. Often, this was due to their sporadic educational attendance caused by a number of issues including temporary or permanent homelessness.

In Austria, the term 'disadvantaged youth' is used more commonly than 'vulnerable' (but has similar connotations) and is as an umbrella category, which embraces all young people with fewer opportunities than their peers. In general, it refers to young people with fewer chances to achieve a good education and progress in society. Use of the term 'disadvantaged' in the German speaking research literature can be traced back to 1975 where it was defined as 'social disadvantaged' – relating particularly to young rural people, who were excluded from modern occupational opportunities and decisions. Based on this approach, new concepts were developed which were more focused on specific target groups.

The German Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung (BIBB, 2010) defines five main factors which lead to the status 'social disadvantaged':

1. Disadvantage caused by social environment;
2. Disadvantage caused by economic environment;
3. Disadvantage caused by family constellation /environment;
4. Disadvantage caused by educational deficit;
5. Disadvantage caused by gender, ethnic or cultural environment.

Bisler (2001) describes the difference between social disadvantage (e.g. early school leavers, long term-unemployed youngsters, young migrants with language barriers) and individual disadvantage (e.g. mental or physical restrictions on the individual level like addiction, disability or economical disadvantaged) which can both be a restriction to be included into the education, training and the labour market.

In Austria, youth from social /economic weak groups are more of risk for a drop out from VET. Youth from families with a lower educational level show a higher risk for drop out than youth from families with a higher educational level. Studies in Austria indicate that 25.4% of young people who drop out have parents with low education, but only 3.4 % drop out and have parents with a school leaving examination. Another influencing factor is migration background. The disadvantage of a young person with migrant background is higher, the dropout rate among young people belonging to the first generation of immigrants in Austria is about 18.8%. The risk for the 2nd and 3rd generation has increased by 3.6%, which indicates that the largest inequalities are to be found by youth with a migrant background.

Interestingly, the Romania partner points out that there is no formal definition of vulnerable groups in the official documents of the European Union, noting that the term is often used in relation to the concept of social inclusion, which includes the right of individuals to opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in the economic, social and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living considered normal in the society they live in. They continue by observing that in Romania, vulnerable groups are defined by different categories, such as elderly people, large families and single parent families, children and youth, persons with disabilities and people belonging to ethnic minorities (with emphasis on the Roma minority). Vulnerable groups are characterised, compared to

the general population, as having difficult living conditions: poor housing or homelessness, unemployment, low educational level and a lack of income. Women are considered to be more at risk of poverty and social exclusion than men.

In the Romanian prison system, minors and youngsters (18 – 21 years old) are considered a special category of inmates and the social and moral recovery of minors within the prison system differs from the one for adults having the following key objectives: providing a human climate with an educational potential in the prison units, making imprisonment more useful, reducing the psychological and social vulnerability of those who are in prisons, as well as involving them in activities aiming at increasing their chances to social inclusion after the end of the prison sentence. These objectives are based on the premise that a minor committing a crime does not belong in prison. If they are also victims of educational and emotional deficiencies caused by the negligence and lack of involvement from their families and society, their imprisonment does not stand for an adapted and viable solution to behavioural correction.

The theme of social inclusion is continued in observations by the Italian partner. They note that Regional Decree no. 28-2527 of 30/11/2015 introduced the so called 'Social Inclusion Internship': guidance internships, internships for the social integration/reintegration, internships to encourage independent living and rehabilitation of people taken in charge by the relevant social and health services. This Regional Act favoured the creation of particular paths: the Sustainable Social Activation Paths (in Italian 'P.A.S.S. Percorsi Di Attivazione Sociale Sostenibile'), an innovative educational measure with a social and health added value. The beneficiaries are disabled, disadvantaged and particularly disadvantaged people (Regional Decree no. 42-7397 of 7/4/2014) with an important innovative element: the potential beneficiaries are also disadvantaged people who need individual training and educational measures to promote their social and labour inclusion.

In addition, internships have been set up under Regional Decree that are geared towards social rehabilitation, educational and guidance, integration or reintegration paths. Beneficiaries include:

- Disabled people;
- Disadvantaged people (including sentenced people in condition of detention or admitted to alternative measures of detention);
- People included in assistance programmes on behalf of trafficking victims;
- Violence and over-exploitation victims in assistance programmes and social integration;
- Romani, Travellers
- Homeless people;
- Former prisoners who have served a sentence of no more than 5 years;
- Holders of a residence permit for humanitarian reasons;
- Asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection.

In Bulgaria, one of the most identifiable vulnerable groups is the Roma population, particular unemployed Roma. Steps are been taken to address the problems associated with long periods of dependency on social benefits including training Roma mediators to promote employment among Roma (Council of Ministers, 2012). As noted by other partners, one of the main contributory factors to Roma vulnerability stems from their level and quality of education and vocational qualifications.

4. Current Approaches and Examples of Best practice

Despite the somewhat gloomy overview of VET provision emanating from some of the partners, it is evident that attempts are being made to address perceived problems. In Bulgaria, for example, the implementation of the National Programme 'Activating the Inactive', initiated in 2008 sought to attract inactive and discouraged persons to the labour market. As a direct result of the implementation of the programme, 8,248 inactive and discouraged Roma were registered in the Local Labour Offices, of which 86 enrolled in training and 1,298 found employment by the end of 2011. The National Employment Agency (NEA) also occasionally organises specialised job fairs targeted at the Roma community. In 2011, six fairs were held, attended by 778 jobseekers, while 47 employers announced 325 vacancies. As a result, a total of 309 Roma found employment. In 2011, within the framework of social dialogue and cooperation, 143 meetings were held with Roma NGOs aimed at supporting the employment of unemployed Roma. The NEA also established two schemes for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in the labour market. The first scheme, Take your life in your hands, identified, motivated and supported people belonging to vulnerable groups, including Roma, whilst they secured employment. Candidates were given training and had internships with potential employers for a fixed period of 3 months. Over the January - September period in 2013, 705 people found employment, while another 2,282 were given training. The second scheme - Improving the quality of the services provided by the NEA for citizens and businesses with a focus on the vulnerable groups on the labour market - as of 31 December 2012, 350 labour mediators were appointed in the Local Labour Offices to work with representatives of disadvantaged groups in the labour market, including Roma. 38 specialised job fairs aimed at different disadvantaged groups in the labour market were organised between January and September 2013, two of them solely targeting unemployed Roma (Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, 2014).

In Austria, the concept of Integrative Vocational education and Training (IVET) provides the basic framework for specific projects and initiatives including those aimed at the more vulnerable groups. Already in existence are a number of occupational project initiatives for disadvantaged youngsters who have problems finding jobs in the primary job market. The Austrian labour market service offers programmes for specific vulnerable groups such as persons with physical or mental handicaps or young people who are involved in alcohol or drug therapy, etc. These initiatives do not offer formal VET education or qualification but do offer a kind of starting point to bring people closer to the labour market and to give them the chance to collect experiences and practice in a field. The initiatives are accompanied by social work and their main aim is it to support people for a certain period of time and them to help them to find a job in a company or factory, etc.

The Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social affairs and consumer protection acts as the central coordinators of the Austrian Network for Professional Assistance (NEBA), which is a system to support people with special needs and youth at risk of exclusion. Institutions all over Austria provide different offers of this network, which is an important aspect of the labour market policy. The main aim of the services of this network is to establish on the one hand equal labour market opportunities for persons with special needs on the other hand to prevent exclusion through the support of young people at risk. (NEBA) currently offers:

- Youth Coaching
- Productions school (Produktionsschule)
- Vocational Training Assistance (Berufsausbildungsassistenz)

- Working Assistance (Arbeitsassistentz)
- Jobcoaching

Another opportunity to involve disadvantaged young people in vocational education and training is the so called 'Supra-company training' (refer to the Austrian country report for full details).

In the UK, recent reports highlight a range of companies that are already considering or implementing ways in which the marginalised can be included in their work. The Guardian newspaper has reported that a range of well-known companies are engaging with such initiatives. Veolia, a conglomerate specialising in energy services, water and waste management, promised to employ 10% of staff from marginalised groups, specifically army veterans, ex-offenders, long-term unemployed and homeless people (see Kollwe, 2016). The homeless charity Crisis offers on-the-job training for homeless people and ex-offenders in its cafes and shops.

Marks and Spencers, a long established retail chain, runs a four-week employability programme called Marks & Start for single parents, people with disabilities and the homeless, providing pre-employment training as well as work experience placements. It includes a scheme for young people run in partnership with the Prince's Trust to teach them interview and telephone skills. More than 15,000 people, including former members of the armed services and ex-offenders, have participated in the Marks & Start programme since 2004 and about half of them found work within three months – with the retailer or other companies.

Timpson – a shoe repairs, key-cutting and dry-cleaning chain – has been hiring ex-offenders and people from other marginalised groups for some time. Sir Richard Branson has championed the employment of ex-offenders, encouraging his Virgin group of companies to hire people just out of prison, and some who are still inside but close to being released. The charity Working Chance, which provides training and helps female ex-offenders to find work, has placed six women with Virgin Trains and Branson's water purifier firm, Virgin Pure, mainly in customer services roles.

Working Chance has also helped people find jobs in the NHS, the law firm Freshfields, the frozen food firm Cook and placed someone in a Conservative MP's office. Working Chance was set up in 2009 by Jocelyn Hillman, who used to support women in Holloway prison preparing for job interviews (Kollwe, 2016).

The European Social Fund: Giving Young People a Better Start in Life, published by the European Commission in December 2011, presents a selection of best practice examples implemented in Romania. One such example is 'The Train of Hope – a Chance for Everyone', from Timisoara, Romania. This project involves the provision of a range of psycho-social, educational and material services aimed at preventing school dropout and increasing the chances of social and school integration for students at risk of early school leaving. The main project activities are focused on specific training courses for teachers who work with the students at risk or those who have already left school. A further project 'Student – Practice – Economist', implemented in Eftimie Murgu, Romania, aimed to develop human capital and increase competitiveness by linking students' training in economics with labour market demands through workplace learning programmes. This is in an effort to combine theoretical and practical training. Partnerships are developed between universities and enterprises, in order to improve the transition from school to active life, and to increase the quality of the services offered to the students (ibid).

The Romanian partner observes that in recent years, a strategic planning model has been developed and implemented by the National Centre for Development of Technical and Vocational Education.

Drafted at regional, local and school level, the planning is based on a medium-term forecast of 5-7 years in order to ensure a relevant delivery of the expected needs of the labour market and take into account a quantitative and also qualitative approach. The first step in the planning process is the phase of early identification of training needs. The planning tools were recently updated in the framework of an ESF project managed by National Centre for Development of Technical and Vocational Education. The last forecast study on the future training needs was drafted in 2005 for 2013 and a new forecast study for 2020 is under preparation.

In Italy, reforms carried out in recent years to VET and apprenticeship programmes emphasise the need for synergy between training and work – a dual approach. In addition, a significant change is that some key elements of the apprenticeship system are now regulated directly by law and are no longer delegated to negotiations between social partners within the framework of collective agreements. The Italian partner, while noting that it is still too early to assess the impact of recent reforms, observes that further action might improve the apprenticeship programme. This could include:

- making apprenticeships simpler for firms, introducing less muddled procedures;
- other types of insertion contracts – stages, internships, short term contracts and so on – should be either eliminated or made more costly for firms;
- collaboration between the regional government and firms to provide adequate training courses;
- some financial incentives should be provided to the firms which prefer apprenticeship to temporary contracts;
- the educational system should be involved in the programme, and apprenticeships should be offered to all those interested at the technical and professional high school.

5. Summarising the Current Situation

The reports produced by indicate that VET provision in the majority of partner countries is a process that is characterised by change. This is in response to a number of factors including perceived skills shortages in the labour market, failure of previous schemes and initiatives to provide VET and the unique challenges posed by population mobility across Europe. Responses to these issues are illustrated by changes taking place in the UK where radical reform of apprenticeships from March 2013 has involved numerous reports, consultations, reviews and other evidence, which in essence, set out the direction of travel to what has been called a bold and far reaching strategy. For the UK, this means a system that is employer-based: apprenticeships will be based on standards designed by employers and initially known as trailblazers, will ensure they are more relevant and intrinsically attractive to existing and new employers. It also seeks to increase the quality of apprenticeships: A rigorous and all-inclusive assessment regime will ensure an apprentice can demonstrate their competence. The new model of standards will focus competence tests at the end of the apprenticeship which could be used as the signal for progression. It also seeks to simplify the system: the new employer-designed standards will be short and easy to understand. They will give details of the knowledge, skills and behaviour (KSBs) required by the individual to be fully competent in an occupation (Skills Funding Agency, 2015).

However, it could be argued that the current policy framework for youth education and employment still fails to fully acknowledge the complex lives of the vulnerable and disadvantaged 16-24 year olds described in a recent paper (Walters, 2015). This portrays vulnerable young people with multiple

disadvantages existing outside of mainstream society and living in a 'weave of cultural, social, legal and economic factors'.

Today, additional factors impacting on the numbers of vulnerable and multiple disadvantaged young people are emerging particularly in the inner cities. These include high levels of migration from conflict zones, lone asylum seekers, lack of social housing, personal care budgets and even the evolution of a new landscape of education and training opportunities including Academy chains, Free Schools, University Technical Colleges and Super Colleges. This, combined with fewer local specialist training providers, together with on-going public sector austerity, has all the ingredients to create a potential cocktail of disaster.

Other partners are a little more optimistic about the future. In Romania, it is recognised that authorities are trying to improve the conditions and the situations of NEETs, by accessing and using European Programs, such as the Guarantee Scheme for Youth, together with the European Social Fund. It is also noted, however, that although there are positive initiatives, the authorities should collaborate more with local youth organizations which are in direct contact with the representatives of the target groups, become aware of what their real needs are, what motivates them and what activities are suited to them.

Similarly, in Italy, positives and negatives can be taken from the reforms currently taking place.

Positives include:

- The new Laws signal a change and a new innovative approach, required by Europe2020 Strategies.
- The dual approach is reinforced.
- The apprenticeship combines study and work, allowing people to acquire work experience while improving their skills in line with employers' requirements.

Negatives include:

- Low participation in dual training programmes
- Many reforms and new Laws have been introduced in a small timeframe: the application needs more time and the impacts will be analysed in a few years.
- The European Youth Scheme is not a legal obligation but a moral obligation that the public sector will pay a more active role in the labour market.
- The apprenticeship, which is a tool to prevent school drop-out, is mainly used as a post-school, post-university programme for young people up to the age of 29.

There are also a number of Gaps and Opportunities:

- Vocational school programmes qualify young people for higher industrial professions in the manufacturing trade. Unfortunately, this educational branch has a very high level of school drop-out (about 50% in some Italian regions). The causes are the type of school more oriented to the traditional approach of the high schools and not to the pedagogic approach typical of the Vocational Educational Training schools.
- Apprenticeships could not be transformed in a defined contract in the enterprise where the apprenticeship has been carried out.
- Despite Law reforms and new approaches, the school-to-work transition takes a long time in Italy.

- The unemployment and NEET rates are so high that it is necessary to foster some interaction between labour market institutions, the educational system and recent Laws.
- Italy has an internal division (south and north of Italy): in the South a lower share of contracts are signed after the official conclusion of apprenticeships, because informal work is a better strategy in terms of cost-saving for firms located there.

In Bulgaria, it appears as though there is still much work to be done. The quality of Bulgarian education, professional education and training is not improving despite the measures taken during recent years. The VET Act has changed 22 times over the past 13 years. These constant changes have impeded consistency in VET development and testify to a lack of relevance between the model set out in 1999 and reality of the VET system. None of the changes in legislation have targeted improving VET's quality. Analysis of the quality assurance system in VET in 2011, commissioned by the Ministry of Education, concluded that VET provision was insufficient and inconsistent.

In addition, the educational legal framework continuously fails to provide effective protection against the impairment of the rights of young people belonging to ethnic minorities, including Roma. The reason for this is that Bulgarian educational legislation is still not fully synchronised with the international standards and mechanisms for the protection of the educational rights of these children and young people. Despite the Bulgarian government defining support for educational integration as a major priority area, no strategic or long-term results have been achieved apart from very few financial interventions (primarily supported by the EU).

Apprenticeships are currently mainly available on a project basis and do not generally result in positive experiences. The education level or employability of the participants, especially those from the Roma community, has not improved as a result of such projects. Despite the presence of many documents concerned with the integration of the Roma and guaranteeing their equal rights and opportunities to participate in various programmes for professional training, qualification and employment, this population group remains isolated and has a limited access to education and to the labour market.

Austria has a well-developed system that currently has both a strong offer and content. There is also a good network that works to integrate vulnerable target groups into VET and the labour market in Austria in the long term. In addition, all supporting measures seem to reach the target group. The primary challenge is the NEET group, which cannot be reached in an institutional context. Here, more activity in the field of open youth work will be necessary in the future.

Weaknesses can often be identified at the interface of cooperation between the institutions involved in the VET and supporting process. Often participants transfer into a company at the very end of the training process, which is a benefit for companies as the costs for apprenticeship and training are covered by the state. This might lead to a decrease of companies to offer apprenticeships for youngsters. In addition, the transition from the relatively safe and sheltered training setting into the primary labour market is still a challenge. This is especially so for youngsters with a higher need of additional support who often fail at this stage of the job seeking process.

6. Conclusions

It is clear from the work undertaken by partner countries that provision of VET is in a varying state of development: Austria for example has a mature system that appears to be working well for the majority of young people seeking opportunities via the VET pathway. Despite this, there is also

recognition that work needs to be done to reach those requiring the most help – the most vulnerable. In Bulgaria, it is evident that the first tentative steps are being taken to address problems with provision and that much needs to be achieved. This is particularly true for in respect of the Roma population within Bulgaria.

For these reasons, it is problematic to formulate conclusions that are generally applicable and reference should be made to the individual country reports to ascertain the issues that are of primary concern to partner countries at this moment in time and the recommendations currently formulated. However, a number of consistent themes have emerged.

One of the primary constant themes is recognition that more needs to be done to establish structures and measures that aim to raise the opportunities for training and employment for disadvantaged young people. These vary among partner countries due to combinations of both economic development and concomitant systems that act to maximise training and employment opportunities. In Austria, for example, the system is looking to adapt to the challenges posed by migrant populations. One solution is to invest in language skills, as an understanding of the national language is regarded as key to both a good educational foundation and the ability to maximise employment opportunities. In Bulgaria, more work clearly needs to be done to provide more opportunities for under-represented groups, which includes such young people from ethnic minorities and also women.

At a more basic level, it is evident that there are no agreed definitions of what constitutes vulnerability – this is evidenced in the reports produced by partners. Similarly, how apprenticeships are defined is open to interpretation. Addressing these two fundamental points is perhaps the jumping-off point for engagement with the wider issues raised in the partner reports.

It is also evident in the majority of partner countries that there needs to be more transparency and a higher level of clarity both in terms of government policy and in provision of training schemes: this will help to facilitate young people's access to programmes. The desire for clarity also extends to employers, who as one partner noted, are the key to apprenticeships. Unless employers can understand the need to open up their workplaces to offer apprenticeships to a wider range of young people, including vulnerable young people, then all initiatives and tweaks to the system run the risk of being repeated over time and never quite solving the problem of vulnerable young people accessing and participating in VET and apprenticeships.

As noted in the introduction to this report, work undertaken by partners to date represents a summary of the current position. It is anticipated that the subsequent stages of the project will flesh out the requirements, concerns and needs of the various stakeholders and contribute to the formulation of evidence-based recommendations that have the potential to make a real difference.

7. Recommendations

A range of broad recommendations can be drawn from this report:

- There is a need for an EU-wide formulation of the term 'vulnerability'. There is currently no generally accepted definition of the term when applied to young people. It needs to be wide enough to cover different member states' experiences.
- There is a need for continuing support for vulnerable young people into, through and out of apprenticeships. Even where there are examples of good practice, these are largely limited in the support they can give.
- There is a need for the development of structures and measures that aim to raise the opportunities for training and employment for disadvantaged young people. Such structures need to be flexible in order to take account of different member states' contexts.
- There is a need for more information and support for employers about the needs of vulnerable young people. Engaging employers is vital for the success of any apprenticeship.

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