Summary Report

ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform

Community of Practice on Employment, Education and Skills

Peer-to-peer training on creating pathways of support for vulnerable young people to enter training and the labour market

3 - 4 February 2021, online event

The peer-to-peer training explored the question 'How can the ESF create pathways of support vulnerable young people to enter training and the labour market?'

The peer-to-peer training, organised by the Transnationality Team (ICF) on behalf of the European Commission, was attended by 24 participants who represented managing authorities (MA), intermediate bodies (IB) as well as EU-level stakeholders.

MAs and IBs from Belgium, Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Spain, Italy, Poland, Portugal and Slovakia joined the meeting, as well as ESF project representatives from Germany, Sweden and the UK. The aim of the peer-to-peer training was to develop participants' knowledge and competencies for ESF+ programming to effectively support the integration of young people in vulnerable situations. The Peer-to-peer training explored three key questions:

- How can the ESF+ support effective measures to address the complex needs that affect young people in vulnerable situations; how and when different interventions can be used;

- How can the ESF+ build effective partnerships to improve early intervention, outreach, activation and facilitate successful transitions; and

- How can Member States monitor and assess performance to ensure that measures targeting those young people at risk have a lasting positive impact on the participants.

The first day of the peer-to-peer training was opened by the Chair of this CoP Employment, Education and Skills, Caroline Meyers from the ESF Managing Authority in Belgium-Flanders, who introduced the objectives of the CoP, as well as the format and aims of the peer-to-peer training.

Lyubomira Derelieva from the European Commission emphasised that supporting vulnerable young people to enter training and the labour market remains a central issue for the EU. On 29 January 2021 the European Parliament and Council reached a final agreement in terms of ESF+ support for young people. It was agreed that in countries where the number of young people currently not in education, employment or training (NEET) is above the EU average for the years 2017-2019, at least 12.5% of the ESF+ will be dedicated to addressing youth unemployment in line with the reinforced Youth Guarantee. All other Member States need to allocate an appropriate amount to supporting youth. The COVID-19 crisis has had a big impact on the level of youth unemployment and vulnerable young people have been among those who have suffered the most in the current crisis.

In order to learn about effective measures that address the complex needs of young people in vulnerable situations, CoP members heard from two successful ESF projects. Stefan Dükomy, GSM Training, presented the ESF-funded 'Catch Up' project (delivered in Hamburg, Germany) presented how the project delivers psychological support to vulnerable young people with mental health issues, based on voluntary participation from each young person. The team work closely with the Youth Employment Agency and other institutions to build their capacity and give them the knowledge so that they are better equipped to deal with vulnerable young people with mental health issues. Susan Russam and Anne Downs, from GEMS NI, presented the ESF-funded 'CO-MENT' project (delivered in Belfast, Northern Ireland, UK). The project uses a mentoring approach to work with NEETs aged 16 – 24 to help them move towards reintegration into society. The panel discussion explored the young person's journey within each project, the flexibility needed for working with this target group, outreach approaches, and motivation of young people to participate.

On the second day, Anna Byström and Inger Jayakoddy from the ESF-funded 'Young East' project, City of Gothenburg and Susan Russam and Anne Downs from the 'CO-MENT' project, GEMS NI, presented examples of interventions that have created effective partnerships to facilitate successful transitions. Anna Byström and Inger Jayakoddy explained that the Young East project in Gothenburg has established an operational and strategic platform for partners including the policy, employment services, health care and social services to work together to deliver preventative and outreach work. Susan Russam and Anne Downs highlighted that they have worked with the community to support young people. They highlighted that no one single organisation can meet the needs for vulnerable young people, instead by different organisations working together they can complement each other and add value to each other's work.

Main messages from the event

Initial considerations on vulnerable groups include:

- There is diversity within the young NEETs population

- Some young people, particularly those with low skills, young people with disabilities, mental health issues and family responsibilities, face specific barriers to access the labour market or engage with education and training

- The goal is not only to support vulnerable young people back into education, training or employment but to get them 'back on track' and integrated into society

- It is important to understand the needs of each individual young person and consider the barriers that they face

- One single stakeholder on its own cannot successfully reach and support the different sub-groups of NEETs, nor address the different individual needs of one young person

Challenges working with vulnerable young people include:

- Most vulnerable young people tend to be under-represented among beneficiaries of interventions

- Improving outreach to those who are not within the system

- Ensuring engagement and building trust with those in vulnerable situations

- There is a need for interventions that are adapted to the individual needs of those facing multiple barriers (e.g. poverty, social exclusion, disability, ethnic discrimination)

- Measuring success for those young people who are furthest away from being integrated into education/employment

How can the ESF+ support effective measures to address the complex needs of young people in vulnerable situations; how and when different interventions can be used?

Designing programmes with flexibility built in

- **Flexibility** is important to ensure that organisations have the possibility to adapt to the emerging changes and are able to change course, as required. The journey for vulnerable young people does not follow a traditionally linear pathway. Instead, progression pathways may take different routes and it may take several attempts to successfully engage a young person within an activity, or project. Once engaged the situation of the young person can change quickly.

- Actions should also recognise that young people are not a homogenous group and **each young person's needs and situation is different**. It may take them different lengths of time to progress through different programmes and activities. It is important that sufficient project duration is provided with this in mind.

Importance of outreach activities for those at risk or inactive

- Different tools and strategies might need to be used for different groups. Successful outreach practices **embrace the principles and ethos of youth work** especially what comes to the relationship between counsellors/youth workers and young people, voluntary participation and non-judgemental approach that does not exclude anyone.
- Managing Authorities should be aware that successful outreach activities often involve **intensive one-on-one interaction in a community setting**. For example, a youth worker may need to meet a young person (for example, at a youth centre, or other non-traditional setting where young people meet) and build up trust with them. Building up trust and setting up a 'working' relationship with the young person can be intensive and can take time. As a result, this often means that there is a higher engagement cost per person than other more general recruitment practices. The cost of projects and interventions working with vulnerable young people may therefore be higher than those targeting young people who are facing fewer barriers.

Motivating and empowering young people to participate and take control of their future

- **Empowering young people** requires a shift in professional practices. The young persons' knowledge, aspirations, needs and opinions need to be considered in order to find and agree solutions that work for each young person.

- It is important for projects to highlight the importance of a **young person's role in the design, planning and implementation of interventions**. As such, projects may want to show how they will check the motivation of a young person. A young person's motivation is important in increasing their chances of making a successful transition towards employment, education or training and ensuring that they are ready to participate and fully engage with project activities.

- Projects should also outline how they will actively involve the young person in **creating their own solutions**. The co-creation approach ensures that a vulnerable young person is in charge of their own future and their own success. The role of appropriately trained mentors and youth workers, for example from NGOs or social services, is important in this process.

Activation and follow up

- Managing authorities should encourage projects to reflect on the activation and **follow up support for young people**. It is important for support packages to include the continuation of support once the young person has made a successful transition to education, training or employment, noting that this should be tailored

to their needs and specific situation. By providing follow-on support, projects can help the young person to adjust to their new environment and, more broadly, contribute to better outcomes.

How can the ESF+ build effective partnerships to improve early intervention, outreach, activation and facilitate successful transitions?

Designing calls for proposals

- When considering a call for proposals, Managing Authorities should reflect on the **'need' being addressed by the call for proposals**. For example, this could be whether the call is responding to an identified need on the ground or if it is being targeted to specific challenges or target groups. In connection to this, Managing Authorities should undertake consultations with key stakeholders prior to launching a call for proposals so that they input into a needs analysis, which can help the Managing Authorities to draft an appropriate call for proposals.

- Calls for proposals under ESF+ should encourage projects to demonstrate how the partnership will **take into account the needs of a young person in a holistic way**. In the project application, the project must show how the partnership will deliver all aspects of the work plan, the added value of each partner and how they will work together to produce successful outcomes. Projects should assess if they have the right partnership in place and ensure that this is appropriate and representative within their setting and for their target group. Consideration should be given to smaller organisations and those from the community or voluntary sectors so that they can take part and contribute their expertise, particularly relating to working directly with the target group.

- Creating multi-faceted successful partnerships that are built on **mutual trust** can take time. Therefore, Managing Authorities should encourage applicants to outline in their applications how they will establish working principles, agree on common objectives and how the cooperation will happen in practice. Time should be built into the start of the project to agree how this will work.

- Successful partnerships should involve partners who are relevant for the realities of the local situation to ensure that projects create **community-based solutions**. This may be different for each location. By building partnership around the needs of a local area, this will also shape who leads to the project. Managing Authorities may want applicants to demonstrate if they have done their own needs analysis, and what the outcomes of this show, and if they have mapped out the support that is in place already. Applicants may also be required to detail how they will involve wider stakeholders, at what stage and the expected added value of doing so.

- Working in partnership to create holistic solutions for young people can raise questions around **sharing information and data**. This can be due to different organisations using different systems and data protection regulations. Whilst respecting data protection legislation and ethical standards, some projects have, for instance, developed agreements for a vulnerable young person to sign so that they provide consent for their data to be shared.

Building the capacity of partners

- Projects that address the needs of vulnerable groups should **involve grassroots organisations, such as youth organisations and NGOs.** These types of organisations have relevant, and often direct, contact with the target group and have specialist expertise and experienced staff who can successfully reach out, build trust and secure the engagement of young people. These types of organisations tend to be locally based and of a small-scale and therefore they may lack the resources and experience required to apply for EU funding. Additional training in using EU funding may be useful for grassroots organisations. There are

some interesting examples in certain countries where extra support and coaching is offered to potential project promoters, via 'start sessions', information sessions and thematic workshops.

- Sharing knowledge and approaches between partners can help to **build capacity** in the short, medium and long-term. Building capacity can help other partners, such as the police and employment services, to develop 'know-how' on how best to deal with certain groups of vulnerable young people and how to deal with certain situations.

- Capacity building can help to **increase awareness and trust** between different partners on a broad basis, including between the public sector and civil society. Staff members can develop a greater knowledge of the added value and expertise that lies within other organisations, and where and when different interventions can be used.

How can Member States monitor and assess performance to ensure that measures targeting those young people at risk have a lasting positive impact on the participants?

Measuring soft outcomes and distanced travelled by young people

- It is important to **measure soft outcomes**, such as increased job-readiness, as a vulnerable young person may not be ready to move directly into employment, education or training at the end of a project activity. However, they may make progress towards being ready to make such a step and it is useful to use measures of 'distance travelled' as a measure of success, rather than focusing on the outcome achieved in terms of into employment, education or training.

- Some projects use **simple measures** of success such as a vulnerable young person not missing any appointments and participating in project activities. For a vulnerable young person who may be experiencing multiple barriers, this alone can be a sign of great improvement.

- Managing Authorities can benefit from **further learning and exchange** opportunities around how to measure soft outcomes and to explore further innovative performance indicators. These types of performance indicators can help to guard against the likelihood of NEETs re-entering support programmes, and they can allow for the adjustment of programmes to improve their cost-effectiveness. Importantly, the European Commission will need to support these types of performance indicators.

Using different funding streams to sustain successful approaches

- Managing Authorities may want to collect information via the project application process to find out how organisations, and projects, are **using different funding streams in a strategic way**. For example, it may be useful to see how projects are using different funding streams to make results sustainable beyond the lifetime of the project.