



# Addressing youth unemployment through outreach, activation and service integration

ESF Youth Employment  
Thematic Network

*Technical dossier no. 9*

November 2018

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# 1. INTRODUCTION



This dossier consolidates the content of the three sharing papers published by the ESF Youth Employment Thematic Network, and synthesises its work between 2016 and 2018:

- **Sharing paper 1:** Integrating services to promote youth employment: Lessons from Finland (March 2017)
- **Sharing paper 2:** How can we promote employability amongst the most marginalised young people? Some ESF lessons (December 2017)
- **Sharing paper 3:** Reaching out to build trust and support amongst vulnerable young people (August 2018)

Based on study visits to Finland, Poland, Scotland and the Czech Republic, it focuses on three key issues in the labour market integration of young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs): service integration, activation and outreach.

## 1.1. Transnational collaboration in the ESF

Transnational collaboration is at the heart of the EU project. Across Europe, Member States face similar challenges, and we are better placed to face these when working together.

The European Social Fund (ESF) provides an important resource to build human capital and social cohesion. In the current programming period (2014-2020) there is an emphasis on transnationality within the ESF. This is articulated through a Common Framework, which encourages the launching of Co-ordinated Calls for Proposals, complemented by a flexible approach to transnational co-operation. Youth employment was a key theme in both the Co-ordinated Calls, published in 2016 and 2018.

To support these calls, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion has established nine Thematic Networks, each enabling mutual learning on an important aspect of the ESF. These networks are managed by AEIDL, and facilitated



jointly by Thematic Experts and (in most cases) Managing Authorities. This technical dossier was produced by one of these networks, focused on Youth Employment.

## 1.2 The ESF Youth Employment Thematic Network

The Youth Employment network has a membership of 17 ESF Managing Authorities as well as other stakeholders such as the European Youth Forum, the Erasmus Student Network and the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). An important aspect of the group's work is for its members to support one another in the design, development and management of co-ordinated calls which cover the youth employment theme. Another is the sharing of good practice and effective use of the ESF in promoting youth employment.

To this end, the group decided to prioritise supporting the NEET (young people not in employment, education or training) group. Although a heterogeneous group, NEETs comprise some of the most marginalised and vulnerable young people. To enable the group to focus its work, four important sub-themes were identified, as follows:

- Service integration
- Outreach
- Client activation
- Mobility<sup>1</sup>

These themes were selected because they present common issues and challenges to our members. As a network, we decided that by investigating each of them further, we could learn about ways to optimise the use of the ESF. There was also a hope that a better understanding of such services might help shape the design of future co-ordinated calls.

## 1.3 Background to this dossier

Between 2016 and 2018 the network undertook a series of structured site visits. Each of these focused on an example of good practice relating either to policy, practice or both. Framed a light-touch peer reviews, each centred on an element of policy and practice designed to support marginalised young people into sustainable employment. As already noted, the priority was on effective work to support the NEET group.

<sup>1</sup> The Learning Network on Transnational Mobility Measures for Disadvantaged Youth and Young Adults (TLN Mobility – <http://www.tln-mobility.eu>), co-ordinated by the German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, pre-dated the Youth Employment Group. Its members have already launched a series of calls.

The study visits undertaken prior to this report have been as follows:

- Helsinki, Finland with a focus on the Ohjaamo integrated services guidance model
- Hamburg, Germany with an emphasis on outreach and the role of foundations
- Prague, Czech Republic, focusing on NGOs working with young offenders
- Ghent, Belgium, examining innovation in outreach and the use of sport to engage marginalised youth
- Glasgow, Scotland with a focus on mentoring and on supporting young people with experience of care

As the networks move into their final year, the Youth Employment network will explore ways to put these good practice examples to good use. This will involve examining the potential for transferring them across to other Managing Authority areas. Looking forward, it will also include reflection on how these effective approaches can be adopted more widely in relation to the new programming period, and the structures and priorities of ESF+.



## 2. THE INTEGRATION OF YOUTH SERVICES

### 2.1 Summary

The European Commission's recent three-year review of the Youth Guarantee recommends a stronger emphasis on supporting the most disadvantaged youth. It notes that an integrated approach to service provision can assist with this. Finland, one of the earliest Youth Guarantee pioneers, has established a network of around 40 integrated support centres for young people. Known as Ohjaamo, these centres offer employment/enterprise support, educational guidance and personal budgeting assistance. In addition, they provide housing, health and recreational guidance.

Across Finland, 80,000 young people used the Ohjaamo services in 2016. The Helsinki centre supported around 6,000 people in its first operating period. However, this represents a small fraction of its service users, as one-off drop-in clients are not recorded on the system.

The centres were co-designed with young people. The environment is casual and relaxed, with services delivered by teams of professionals drawn from different public departments. Ohjaamo also has an NGO and employer presence. To date, in the Helsinki office which hosted our visit, 40% of the young people attending employer events have found employment. The latest satisfaction rating from clients was 9.4 out of a maximum 10.

Seven distinctive aspects of the Ohjaamo model are worth underlining:

1. The importance of high-level support
2. The articulation between policy and practice
3. Young people at the heart of service design
4. Effective service integration is more about people than buildings
5. Location matters
6. The need for a coherent monitoring and evaluation approach
7. Clearly align practice with priorities

### 2.2 The Ohjaamo model

#### 2.2.1 The Finnish youth employment context

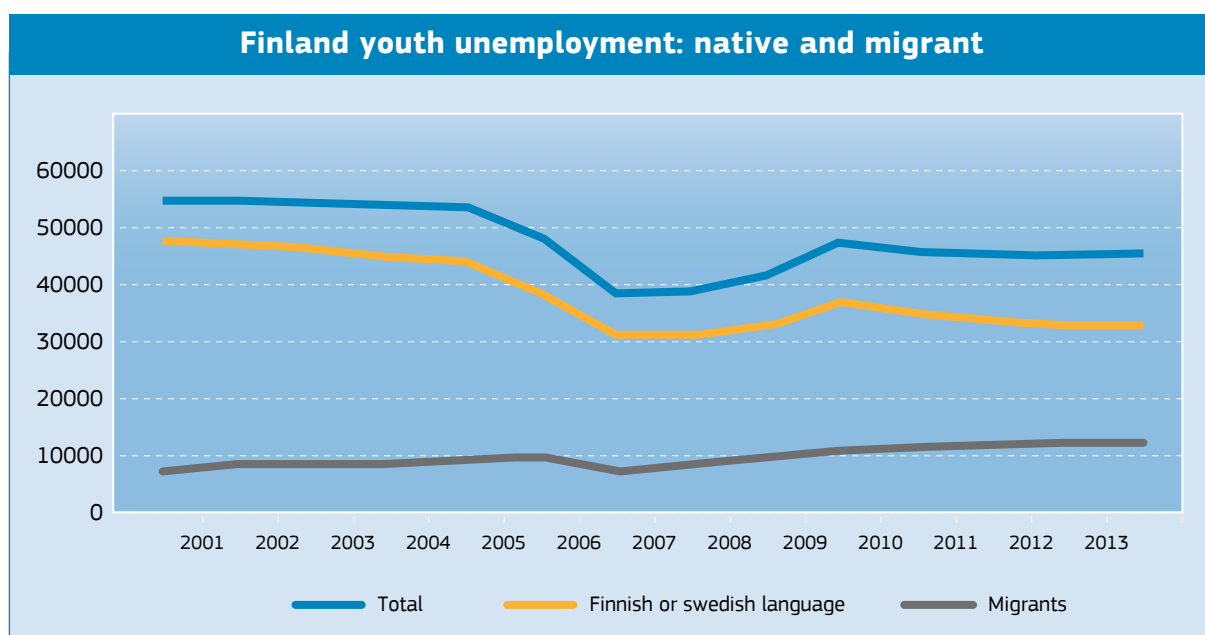
This section describes the context, concept and operation of the Finnish Ohjaamo model. It draws upon material presented during the network's study visit to Helsinki, as well as background papers related to the initiative.

Like many EU countries, Finland faces structural labour market challenges which affect all citizens. Economic growth levels are low. The economy is in transition, with a decline in employment levels in key sectors including advanced manufacturing. Alongside this, the population is ageing. At the other end of the demographic spectrum,



Source: Finnish Government





Source: [www.nuorisotakuu.fi](http://www.nuorisotakuu.fi)

research suggests a growing mismatch between the skills employers want and those the education system provides young people with.

Between 2001 and 2015 there was a year-on-year rise in youth unemployment rates. The latest data,<sup>2</sup> from December 2016, shows that the rate for those aged 18-24 in the labour market fell back to 14.7%. This represents a marked drop from the previous year; however it still remains high by Nordic standards.

As in many places, the profile of the youth unemployed group is diverse. It includes unemployed graduates and between June 2013 and June 2016 the number of unemployed graduates aged 25-29 rose, from 3,458 to 4,144.<sup>3</sup> There is also a growing number of unemployed young people from migrant backgrounds, as the chart below illustrates.

## 2.2.2 The Youth Guarantee in Finland

These youth unemployment figures in Finland are in spite of the country's early and successful introduction of the Youth Guarantee. Finland was in the vanguard of developing the youth guarantee concept, and was one of the pilot Member States for the initiative.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.stat.fi/ti/tyti/2016/12/tyti\\_2016\\_12\\_2017-01-24\\_tie\\_001\\_en.html](https://www.stat.fi/ti/tyti/2016/12/tyti_2016_12_2017-01-24_tie_001_en.html) Statistics Finland data

<sup>3</sup> [www.nuorisotakuu.fi](http://www.nuorisotakuu.fi) Figures cited by Finnish Ministry of Labour presentation to ESF Youth Network, 25 October 2016

An evaluation of the Youth Guarantee in Finland identified a number of early benefits arising which included:

- A sharper focus on the challenge of youth unemployment and the need for further service development
- A higher profile of youth unemployment at the local policy level
- Increased co-operation among the key actors: evidence that more than 50% of agencies working with young people had altered their services

The evaluation also identified some key implications arising from the implementation of the Youth Guarantee. Key among these were that:

- The availability of social and health services was estimated to be less adequate than most other services for young people;
- The greatest challenges were thought to be the lack of a rehabilitation service for those suffering from addiction and the lack of mental health services;
- Finding proper services for the young could be challenging depending on where they live.

Partly in response to these findings, in 2015 the Finnish government implemented the third phase of its approach to delivering the Youth Guarantee by introducing a nationwide network of one-stop shops for young people. This builds on its established 4P approach (Public, Private, People, Partnership) which has been in place since 2013.

### 2.2.3 The rationale for Integrated Service Centres

There are clear benefits of collocating public services. In financial terms, there are savings through fewer buildings, reduced overheads and the sharing of back office functions. But there is a bigger prize far beyond this.

In Finland, the Youth Guarantee evaluation recognised the need to include a wider package of support services for young people. Specifically, the report refers to social and health services. Young people do not always make full use of such services, and there is established evidence that social and health issues, such as mental health, can be a barrier to their progression.<sup>4</sup> Equally, unemployment can exacerbate physical and mental health conditions.

Consequently, the ability to draw upon a wide repertoire of services under one roof is a major asset in tackling the NEET phenomenon. It recognises that support needs extend beyond educational and vocational inputs and, at

<sup>4</sup> Eurofound: *Social Inclusion of Young People*, 2015 page 12: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/social-inclusion-of-young-people>

#### The Ohjaamo centres



***'The location of such services is crucial. They should be concentrated near areas where young people congregate or concentrate a high number of NEETs. Indeed, the key to one-stop shops is awareness among the intended user group.'***

<sup>\*</sup> European Commission, *PES practices for the outreach and activation of NEETs*, March 2015: [http://www.pesboard.eu/EN/pesboard/Service/Documents/documents\\_node.html](http://www.pesboard.eu/EN/pesboard/Service/Documents/documents_node.html)

their best, such facilities provide a comprehensive support package derived from a holistic assessment process. The physical collocation of services in one place can assist this.

There are also practical advantages from the youth perspective. Given that a personalised support package implies a combination of inputs from different agencies, the Integrated Service model makes it easier for them to navigate the system. Collocated service teams, with a clear understanding of one another's roles and remits, are well placed to refer clients to colleagues or to involve colleague in the assessment process. In this way, the young person does not have to go to a myriad of services; those services come to them.

The model can also extend beyond public services. Voluntary sector organisations often play an important role in supporting young people, and there is scope to include them in such structures. Additionally – as we saw in Helsinki – employers often perceive shared service provision favourably, and are happy to use established platforms to reach young job-seekers.

Ideally, this collaborative model also avoids the need for young people to fill in multiple forms, often asking for the same basic information. However, in practice, as we discuss below, sharing data remains a challenge.

### 2.2.4 The Ohjaamo concept – and the Helsinki model

Ohjaamo centres provide one-stop shop guidance for young people. They form a key plank in Finland's delivery of the Youth Guarantee. Promoting the 4P Principle (Public-People-Private-Partnership) at the heart of the national approach, there are now almost 40 centres across the country. These operate in more than 100 municipalities, from the metropolitan capital city to Finland's rural heartlands.

The central concept is a low-threshold service providing guidance and support to young people under the age of 30. Within these services, young people can access a wide range of professional support. As well as careers guidance and training, this includes housing, welfare and social care provision.

The word *Ohjaamo* means 'cockpit' in Finnish. Behind this is the idea that the centres put young people in the driving seat, so that they have greater control over their lives and their futures.

Just as important as the range of services on offer is the way that they are provided. A distinctive feature of the Ohjaamo model is the fact that young people have been involved in the co-design of each local facility. Across the country, groups of young people came forward to contribute to the eventual working model, leading to some interesting features. One is that the Ohjaamo Helsinki environment feels informal and non-institutional. Helsinki staff don't wear uniforms or name badges (although they do in other centres). The layout and design of the interior feels quite unlike a government institution, and more like a large coffee-shop.

Another important feature shaped by the youth input is a reliance on face-to-face relationships between professionals and clients. This insistence on personal support might seem surprising given that the millennial generation are digital natives. It also flies in the face of current public employment service (PES) trends, which increasingly rely upon web-based support services. However, it does confirm a recurring evaluation message about the value of trusted personal relationships as the basis for effective employment support.

As a consequence, entering the Ohjaamo building in Helsinki one is not faced by rows of job-seekers facing banks of computer terminals. The atmosphere is more low-key, with small groups and pairs deep in discussion, in a largely open-plan layout. It is all very relaxed.

Across Finland, each Ohjaamo is located in a town centre, where it is prominent, easy to find and easy to reach.<sup>5</sup> In some respects, this goes against other evidence, which inclines towards neighbourhood-based approaches, linked to higher levels of deprivation.<sup>6</sup> Whatever the decision, in the context of the NEET group, the question of location is widely identified as a key consideration, as noted in the Commission's review of PES practices:

### 2.2.5 Finance

The costs of each Ohjaamo centre vary depending on numerous factors, including the location and scale of the service. Equally, the financial sources also vary across

<sup>5</sup> The rationale for a central location in other cases (such as Glasgow) is that territorial gang warfare restricts youth mobility so neighbourhood facilities are not available to all

<sup>6</sup> Owing to Finnish housing policies, such neighbourhoods are not prevalent



Finland, although constant features are the inputs from the local municipality, the PES and the ESF.

The Helsinki Ohjaamo centre is the largest and best-resourced in the country. Located in the centre of the nation's capital, inevitably the building and service costs are relatively high. It is also one of the largest facilities in terms of numbers, with 27 full-time-equivalent staff.

The Helsinki Ohjaamo centre has an annual operating budget of around €1.8 million. The ESF provides around €1.3 million with the Helsinki City Authority providing co-finance. In relation to the personnel budget, 15 of the 27 staff members have their salaries covered by the ESF. Staffing costs account for around 80% of the total budget.

### 2.2.6 The partnership model

At the national policy level the Ohjaamo model is supported by a number of governmental departments. At its centre is the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, with support from the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. There are no national laws or agreements between the ministries, more a collaborative understanding, with regular high-level meetings to review progress.

A national coordinating project (Kohtaamo) supports the development and implementation of the guidance centres and related web-based guidance. This cross-departmental model is quite new and although there is commitment, there are also challenges. These include the fact that each department operates to different targets, even though there are shared ambitions (set out below) for the Ohjaamo centres.

On the ground, there are local variations of the partnership model. In all cases, the local authority and the PES assume a key role. Across the country, additional partners – including NGOs and employer bodies – contribute as appropriate.

Ohjaamo Helsinki has five combined services staffed by people from 27 different professional backgrounds. Within this, NGO agencies assume a key role in providing guidance and support related to housing, migration and sport. Nurses are also on hand to provide health advice, and the centre director noted that it would also be good to have doctors on site in future. As in many other metropolitan areas, young people in Helsinki do not always make best use of available health and care provision.

### 2.2.7 The operational model

As we have already noted, Ohjaamo adopts a low-threshold multi-agency service model. In practice, this means that the majority of clients drop in to use the wide range of available services. On arrival, they are greeted by a staff member who will deal with their issue or refer them to a colleague if they are unable to help.

A large majority of users (around 90%) drop in and receive support without any further intervention. The remaining 10% are referred on for further support.<sup>7</sup> The shape of this is determined by a light-touch assessment process conducted informally with a guidance professional. This will focus, for example, on education and employment goals, the young person's situation, money, health and social support networks. Throughout, the emphasis remains on the young person being in control, and steering the process in a way that they are comfortable with.

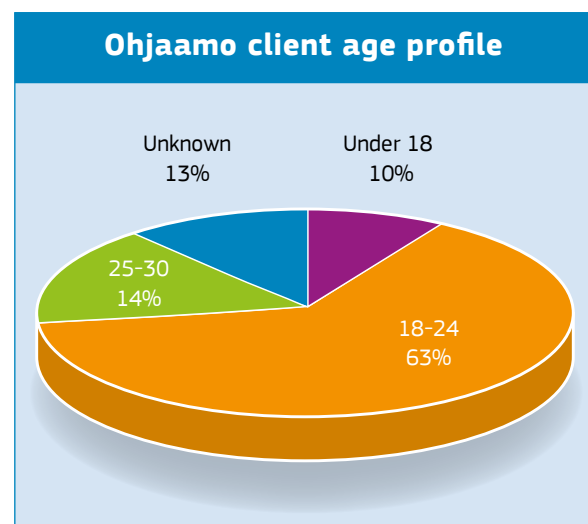
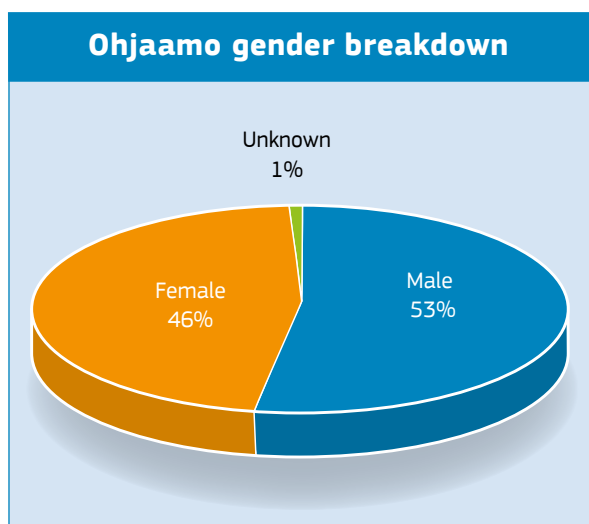
Recent analysis of the service usage identifies the most common support needs in the following order:

1. Employment or entrepreneurship support
2. Educational guidance
3. Personal budgeting and financial support

Across Finland, 80,000 young people used the Ohjaamo services in 2016. The figures below show the patterns of usage by age and gender.

Between opening and September 2016, there have been around 6,000 support interventions through the model in Helsinki. However, Ohjaamo only registers the 10% of clients who draw down the more structured package of support. This reflects the commitment to offering a low-threshold service with easy access and limited red tape for clients. It also reflects a willingness to sacrifice performance data in order to make

<sup>7</sup> The 90/10 split is peculiar to Helsinki. In other centres, the ratio is more balanced. Anecdotally, a reason for this is that there is more service choice in the capital. Elsewhere, the entire local youth support team may be operating out of one shared space.



Source: Kohtaamo

the service as attractive as possible to those deterred by institutional approaches. As these will include the most vulnerable people furthest from the labour market, this is a rational trade off – particularly as it may encourage the development of a trusted relationship with some of the most marginalised. Finland, as elsewhere, struggles to engage these young people in the Youth Guarantee model.<sup>8</sup>

In recognition that some of the most marginalised young people will not willingly walk into any ‘centre’ no matter how informal, Ohjaamo works in collaboration with others to reach out to young people throughout the city. In some cases, this involves close partnership work with the municipal outreach workers who are addressing the risk of early school drop-out and marginalised youth. In other cases it consists of pop-up events in community locations and facilities heavily used by young people. Detached youth workers, operating out of the Ohjaamo centre, bring the skills and experience required to organise such events.

This physical outreach service is complemented by Ohjaamo’s use of social media to develop and maintain connections to young people. Although the young people contributing to the design of the model requested an emphasis on personalised face-to-face support, there remains an important role for social media in reaching out to the target group, particularly the more marginalised.

A good example is a group of young deaf people in Helsinki who are networked on Facebook and who became aware of Ohjaamo through it. On the day of our site visit, we happened to meet one of the group who was attending a workshop for this group being held in the building. A qualified electrician, he was struggling to find work and dismissive of the support he had previously received through the PES. He was optimistic that the Ohjaamo model would be better placed to support him, and others like him, in finding employment.

Another of the key partnerships contributing to the operation is with employers. Ohjaamo is building close relationships with employers in Helsinki. This is done through a proactive outreach service to businesses. The emphasis

is on identifying those with positive attitudes to youth recruitment and where there are employment opportunities. There is a regular forum enabling hiring employers to meet with young people. The Ohjaamo Centre’s Business Coordinator leads this and, to date, 40% of the young people attending these events have found employment. The centre also links in with the established network of start-up support agencies in the city.

### 2.2.8 Some challenges in providing an integrated service

A number of key lessons have already emerged from the Ohjaamo experience.

Collocating staff from a variety of services does not, in itself, create an integrated service. One of the biggest challenges is to support staff from different professional backgrounds to collaborate in a way that benefits young people. This means finding common ground among employees from different professional disciplines, who are used to particular working cultures and established work practices. Ohjaamo recognises that this is an evolving process.

At the outset, staff members had an initial period of sharing and exchange as they contributed to the codesign of the concept. This included the delivery of a support programme, delivered via another ESF-funded programme called TESSU, which was established specifically to support cross-disciplinary collaboration in the centres.

However, it is clear that the real learning begins once inter-disciplinary teams begin working together. As they do, it is evident that across professions there are different expectations and practices. It has also emerged that different professionals use the same terms to mean different things. In short, exposure to other ways of working can be a challenge, in terms of agreeing whose is ‘the right way’. This key question of culture shift is of interest to the Finnish government, and it will be a central point in the overall pilot evaluation.

It is important to note from Ohjaamo that most staff members opt in to work there. That means almost everyone on the team has made a positive decision to be involved, rather than being mandated by their organisation. Given that attitude is such an important part of this collaborative chemistry, this matters.

<sup>8</sup> European Commission: *The Youth Guarantee and Youth Employment Initiative three years on*, October 2016: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1079>

Ohjaamo staff members retain a line manager in their host organisation who deals primarily with administrative issues – payroll, leave and so on. Managers in the Ohjaamo centre take on the day-to-day line management of the services. An important ingredient for success is that the host organisation trusts the Ohjaamo managers to make best use of their resources. As part of the pilot, this matrix management model is under close scrutiny.

One of the biggest challenges to the single service model – as operated by Ohjaamo – relates to data sharing. As we have noted, one of the potential benefits of this approach is that services can avoid young people being asked to provide their basic information multiple times. This, however, assumes that the service providers are able to share their data.

The Helsinki experience indicates that this remains problematic. Data protection laws are carefully designed to protect citizens from third parties abusing their personal data. These rights are important and well-intentioned. However, one of the unintended consequences is that organisations collaborating to support clients cannot share anything more than basic information. Consequently, each agency has to gather and properly maintain its own data.

On the ground, this means that within Ohjaamo Helsinki, eight different data systems are in operation. During the first year of operations, it piloted a common data system but this proved not to be fit for purpose.

Consequently, each provider has fallen back on reliance on their own system, which everyone recognises to be an inefficient way of working. At the national level, work is under way to establish a new, shared data model, but this remains some way off.

### 2.2.9 Measuring impact

Underpinning the shared service approach is an assumption that it provides greater impact for less money. What evidence is there that this is the case?

Gathering a clear picture of impact is rarely easy, and there are a number of difficulties with the Ohjaamo example.

These include the facts that:

- The project in Helsinki has not been running for a long time – the collocated physical space has only been in place since December 2015. A longer operational window is required before a reliable evaluation study can be undertaken;
- Ohjaamo Helsinki only has tracking data for 10% of service interventions. This means that the outcomes related to the vast majority of interventions are – and will remain – unknown.

At the national level, a working group has developed an evaluation framework for the centres across the country. This group identified a number of key considerations which will influence their work. One is that each Ohjaamo centre is different, reflecting the local issues, the partnership configuration and the financial situation.

Domain	Key question	Evidence required
1. Reaches young people in need of guidance	Are we reaching those most in need of support? (defined as? NEET? Meet YG criteria?)	Number of visits Client profiles
2. The service is useful to young people	Do young people trust the service providers? Does Ohjaamo assist in their career progression?	Client satisfaction data Proportion of clients in guidance for 6 months + who elect to remain until reaching positive destination
3. Integration of youth services	Do young people get a multi-actor service when needed? Is there a functioning network of service collaboration and distribution?	Documented scale and distribution of services Survey of contributing organisations and respective functions
4. Supports positive transitions of young people	Is there evidence that the service is supporting the progression of clients?	Documented transitions after service interventions

Source: Kohtaamoi





Related to this is the fact that there are differing levels of local political commitment across the country.

Another issue is that the client group varies for each centre, depending on the existing local service map. Linked to this is the important point about supporting those with multiple and complex needs. This remains a priority; however in practice multiple interventions are often needed to develop and deliver the right support package.

In summary, a comprehensive evaluation of such a diverse service structure is challenging. Although based on established principles, each Ohjaamo centre is distinctive in its service composition. Nevertheless, the national group identified four evaluation domains which are set out in the table below.

In terms of monitoring and evaluation principles, despite local variations, all Ohjaamo centres will gather the information set out in the previous table in a consistent way. As much as possible, they will use existing tools to do this. There are high levels of interest in this pilot initiative, so monitoring data is being shared at national level on a regular basis. There are also regular workshops organised by Kohtaamo to consider particular aspects of the model.

In the meantime, an external evaluation has been commissioned which will report in 2017.

Finally, all Ohjaamo clients are asked to rate the service they receive from the centres. The latest feedback data

from the Helsinki centre resulted in an overall satisfaction score of 9.4 out of a maximum 10. This suggests that, with the clients at least, this model is getting many things right.

## 2.3 The wider landscape of service integration

### 2.3.1 Integrated services – old wine in new bottles, or an idea whose time has come?

This section looks beyond the integrated services model for young people in Finland. It considers the current policy context around service integration and includes some examples of one-stop shop provision relating to young people.

The European Commission's review of the Youth Guarantee and Youth Employment Initiative draws upon the learning from three operational years. The report<sup>9</sup> sets out six key success factors. One is the need for "strong institutional backing and internal coordination." Another is the importance of "a single point of contact helping to provide tailor-made services specific to the young person's needs." Both imply the need for an integrated services approach.

However, as the Eurofound study of social inclusion of young people<sup>10</sup> found, the effectiveness of the partnerships

<sup>9</sup> European Commission: *The Youth Guarantee and Youth Employment Initiative three years on, October 2016*: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1079>

<sup>10</sup> Eurofound: *Social Inclusion of Young People, 2015*, page 77: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/social-inclusion-of-young-people>

required to produce these varies across Europe. It notes that in Member States like Finland, Sweden and Austria major efforts are being made to strengthen meaningful and broad partnership working. However, it notes that this is not universal. Encouraging government departments to collaborate is already regarded as a major advance – even before taking account of NGOs, youth organisations and other key players like the social partners.

The integrated services concept is not new. Nor is it confined to provision for young people. A recent review of integrated support for the long-term unemployed in Europe<sup>11</sup> underlined some of the challenges in developing a colocated service approach in particular:

*“Within the wide range of types of local arrangements, we can identify one group of countries which is very far from a one-stop shop model. This group includes Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Macedonia, Portugal, Serbia and Turkey. Experts from these countries highlight the lack of experience of coordination (Bulgaria, Greece, Portugal, Turkey), overlaps (Italy), rare cooperation (Lithuania), and the lack of decentralisation (Macedonia).”*

The physical collocation of services – the so-called ‘one-stop shop’ model – examined in Finland is only one component of this strategic drive for integrated services. It is possible to have an integrated services approach without colocated services. Conversely, collocating services is not, per se, enough to guarantee an integrated services approach. However, where there is high-level commitment to collaborative service integration, as in Finland, it seems that the effort and investment required to achieve this can catalyse and transform the partnership culture.

### 2.3.2 A snapshot of other approaches to one-stop shop models

We have already noted the distinctiveness of the Finnish model. In the final section we will return to these points. However, across Europe there are several variations of the one-stop approach. Some examples provided by members of the Thematic Network are briefly described below.

<sup>11</sup> European Commission: *Integrated support for the long-term unemployed in Europe 2015*, page 10: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=2271>

#### • Croatia

There are 11 CISOK centres operating in ten Croatian cities. Supported by the Croatian Employment Services (CES), their primary focus is to support a well-functioning labour market. The centres are open to all stakeholders (including parents, teachers, employers and unemployed people of all ages), so are not specifically aimed at youth. However, in 2015 young people under the age of 29 accounted for 58.4% of the 60,833 service users. Consequently, the CISOK services form an important strand of Youth Guarantee delivery.

In addition to these centres, Croatia has two specific youth support centres. One is located in Zagreb, the other in Split. Again, the focus is on supporting employment progression through a range of support services that include counselling, job-search support and access to job-seeking tools. There are plans to extend the number of Youth Centres to other parts of the country.

#### • Sweden

UNGKOMP is a joint project between the Swedish Public Employment Service and 20 municipalities, running between 2015 and 2018. It provides a platform for these public-sector partners to collaborate on tackling youth unemployment. The model comprises multi-disciplinary teams operating out of accessible locations. The model places emphasis on the need to build trusted relationships with young people. It builds on the success of an earlier project, *Unga In*, which stressed the need for involving young people in service design.

62% of *Unga In* clients progressed to positive destinations, half of which were into employment.

#### • Belgium (Brussels and Wallonia)

A network of support facilities is in place. The Public Employment Service for the Brussels region (ACTIRIS) has established a service targeted at young registered job-seekers. However there is no comprehensive support service that covers, for example, health and housing issues. Clients are referred to the appropriate service providers after an initial consultation session. Plans are under way so that the *Cité des Métiers à Bruxelles* will provide information related to employment, training and education in the capital.

Throughout Wallonia, there are the *Maisons de l'Emploi* and the *Carrefours Emploi Formation Orientation* but there is no single point centralising the different streams of information solely dedicated to young people.

### 2.3.3 Some final observations

It is evident that the Finnish Ohjaamo model is a distinctive example of one-stop shop youth provision in a number of ways. Amongst these are the breadth of its service offer, its emphasis on youth co-design and the relaxed non-institutional nature of its facilities. We return to these and other points in the concluding section.

From this work, including the discussion with ESF Managing Authorities, it is clear that a number of them are planning either to start or to augment their one-stop shop provision. Among the members of the Youth Employment Network, interest in this has been expressed by Greece and Andalusia, whilst Croatia and others are in the process of redesigning their existing models.

The evidence suggests that integrated service provision remains an important component of successful youth employment support provision. There are indications that colocated services can make an important contribution to that offer.

## 2.4 Conclusions

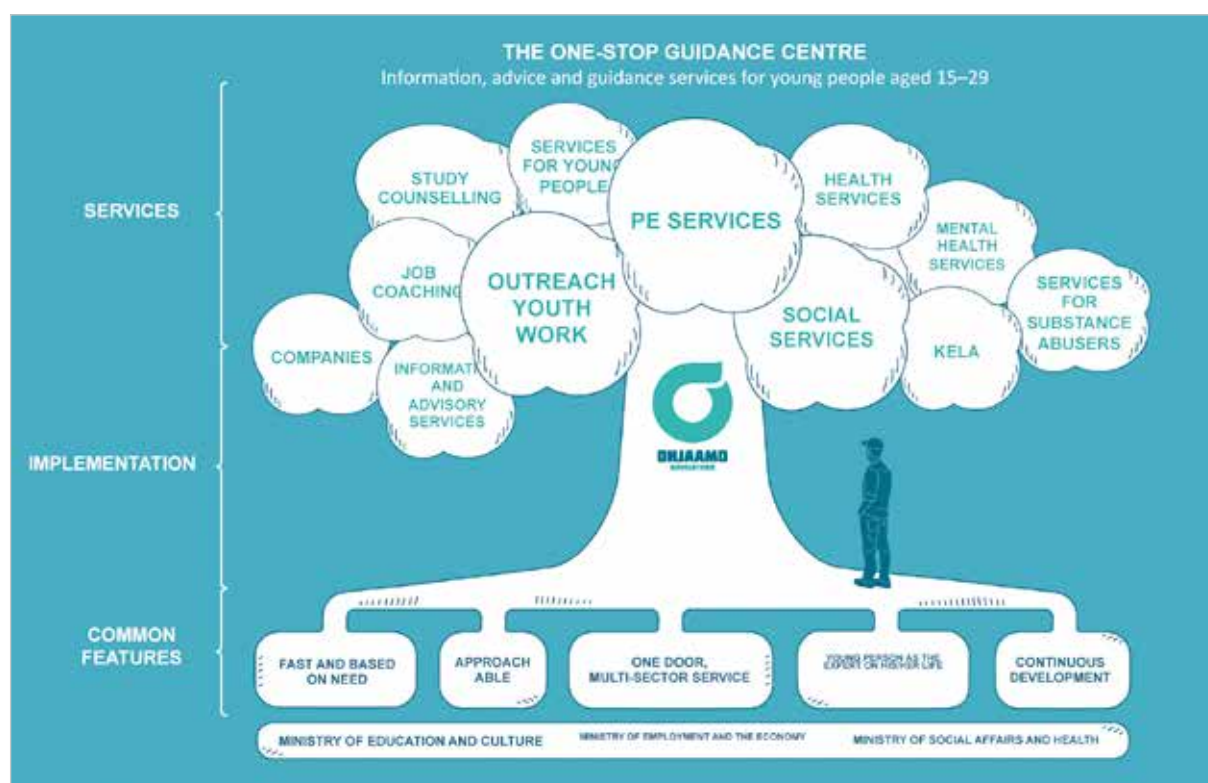
This final section draws together the key learning points from our examination of the Ohjaamo model in Helsinki.

We have identified seven distinctive aspects of the Ohjaamo model that are worth underlining. These are as follows:

### 1. The importance of high-level support

Partnership is easy to say but much harder to do. Effective partnership requires clear leadership, willingness on all sides and clear shared goals. Effective cross-sectoral partnership also needs high-level commitment and investment of resources. Where service integration is primarily driven by a cost-cutting agenda, it is less likely to succeed.

It is evident from our study visit that the Ohjaamo model has support across national government departments at the highest level in Finland. This is reflected in a commitment at the municipal level, which matters in a country with a strong culture of devolved decision-making.





## 2. The articulation between policy and practice

The concept of service integration in Finland – and in the Nordic countries generally – is not new. The Ohjaamo centres build upon earlier waves of shared service activity, which extend back to the LAFOS centres of almost 20 years ago. Consequently, working across departmental silos is not as radical as it would be in other Member States.

What we also see is an ambition to integrate policy and practice goals on the ground, indicating a high degree of sophistication around partnership working. Again, this is not easy, as separate professional disciplines and policy silos have created environments where performance and results are measured in different ways.

In the Ohjaamo model we can see a concerted effort to address this, and to establish a clear link between the high-level policy goals and the operational realities on the ground. This takes time; however the Ohjaamo monitoring and evaluation model represents an important step forward in this alignment process.

## 3. Young people at the heart of service design

We have noted that young people have played an active role in the design of the Ohjaamo centres. This was one of the most surprising findings for some of our network members. Yet there is a growing evidence base that involving customers in product and service design makes sense in all service settings. This includes

examples<sup>12</sup> of ethnographic approaches to ensure that even the hardest to reach youth can help design the services they use.

Service co-production, once again, is relatively well-established in the Nordic countries, as we also saw from the Unga In example from Sweden. In other parts of Europe it is less well developed. To work well it requires the creation of the right conditions, techniques and commitment on behalf of the 'commissioners'. Most importantly, it requires a willingness to listen, and not to assume that 'we' know all the answers.

When we do listen, the results can be surprising. For example, the emphasis on face-to-face contact was perhaps an unexpected finding from a generation so comfortable with technology.

## 4. Effective service integration is more about people than buildings

Collocated services offer an important step towards integrated service provision. However, collocation is not synonymous with service integration.

Again, building on their extensive experience in this field, colleagues in Finland have placed great emphasis on the related human resource and organisational culture challenges. On the HR side, it is notable that Ohjaamo staff are ideally volunteers rather than conscripts. This means that they have a curiosity and interest in working in this collaborative setting. It is also important to recognise the matrix management structure that is in place, where trust is placed in the Ohjaamo line manager to support staff and to drive performance.

Alongside this, the challenge of constructing a hybrid organisational culture is huge. We have seen that this has been given special attention, with a separate, related ESF project in place to support the culture shift process. However, even with this in place, Finnish colleagues noted that much of this culture adaptation takes place on the front line, in the workplace, on a daily basis.

Perhaps the key take away here is the recognition of the scale and complexity of this dimension of the work, and the need to invest appropriately. This reinforces

<sup>12</sup> See the Copenhagen Job Centre case study in *Supporting Youth through Social Innovation*, URBACT, 2013, page 22: <http://urbact.eu/supporting-urban-youth-through-social-innovation>



the earlier message about service integration being an unlikely source of budget savings if conducted effectively.

## 5. Location matters

Ease of access is widely assumed to be a core component of effective one-stop shops. In the Finnish capital, this has been translated into a city-centre shopfront location with good transport links. Elsewhere, the optimum location may vary, depending on the territorial situation and the target client group. For example, elsewhere the most accessible premises are sometimes deemed to be in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

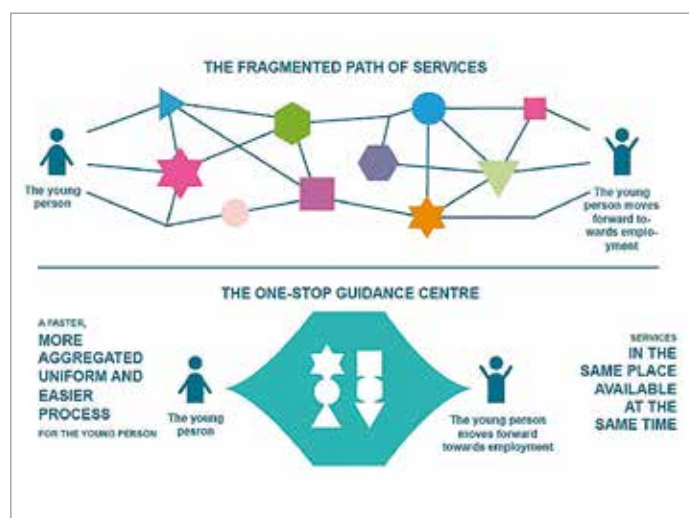
However, a universal conclusion is that location is important, requiring careful consideration at the planning stage.

## 6. The need for a coherent monitoring and evaluation approach

Within the extensive debates around service integration is an inbuilt assumption that they are better for clients – in particular those who are most marginalised in society. However assumptions can be dangerous, so it is important that we gather evidence enabling us to test our hypothesis.

It is evident from the Ohjaamo model that the design and implementation of the monitoring and evaluation framework has been an integral consideration from the start. Overseen by a cross-departmental team, the approach is pragmatic and a good basis for collaboration. However it is also evident that despite a robust and structured framework, a number of practical challenges remain. One of the most important of these relates to data-sharing and difficulties in developing workable systems. Resolving this remains work in progress.

Another important issue relating to monitoring and evaluation pertains to client tracking. Another major surprise for our network members was to hear that a large proportion of Ohjaamo Helsinki clients are not captured in their data. There are clearly some risks associated with this approach, for example an under-reporting of clients may ultimately lead to reduced funding. However, as our next and final point underlines, this risk is calculated and in line with Finland's strategic priorities linked to the Youth Guarantee.



## 7. Clearly align practice with priorities

Although NEET is a relatively new acronym, the group it describes is not. In the past decade our understanding of the group – the profile of such young people, the barriers they face, effective support measures – has improved. What has also become clear is that regardless of the economic cycle, there is a core group of young people who struggle to make a smooth transition from school to sustained employment. The profile of this group includes young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, those with health issues and newly-arrived migrants.

Much evaluation evidence points to the importance of guidance and trusted relationships to support people – of all ages – into employment. Yet many of the young people furthest from the labour market are mistrustful of official services, and reluctant to engage. These are the young people identified as a future priority for the Youth Guarantee both in Finland and in the recent European Commission review.

On the ground, the strategic decision not to record details of drop-in users of the Ohjaamo centre illustrates the Finnish response to this challenge. It acknowledges that continuing to capture data from every client at the outset would be a major deterrent to the most marginalised young people using this service. The gamble is that the low-threshold, light-touch approach will encourage them to come in, providing an opportunity to develop that key trusted relationship. The evaluation will go some way to telling us whether this gamble has paid off.

## 3. CLIENT ACTIVATION

### 3.1 Summary and key messages

This sharing paper focuses on the question of client activation, within the context of the NEET (Young people not in employment, education or training) group. The key lessons come from a study visit to Rubikon Centrum in Prague.

Rubikon is an NGO that works with ex-offenders. Its primary aim is to reduce re-offending rates, and employment is an important factor in this. The organisation works throughout the Czech Republic, which has the lowest youth unemployment rate in the EU, at 10.3%.

In the Czech Republic, the combination of tough social attitudes towards ex-offenders and a buoyant labour market adds to the pressure on young people with offending backgrounds. Employer stigma is another factor, which provides a complex environment for Rubikon's work. The organisation offers a range of services to reintegrate ex-offenders including:

- the Punkt Family Probation programme, a Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) model aimed at young people aged 15-18, which has reduced re-offending rates from 60% to 16%
- the Roma Mentoring Programme, which has supported over 2,200 clients
- the Rubikon Centrum Probation Programme, which provides employment opportunities pre-and post prison release

Rubikon's approach underlines the need for trusted relationships with beneficiaries, a wide and flexible support package, a collaborative service model and close employer links with real work prospects. It also shows the need for stable funding models for NGOs.

Widening the scope to take account of other activation approaches has identified important steps to activate marginalised young people. These include the need to:

- Adopt a talent-based approach
- Consider creative ways to showcase their labour market competencies
- Take account of clients' varied learning styles
- Push clients out of their comfort zones

In Flanders, a number of ESF-funded providers are using sport as part of an activation package. De Sleutel, based in Ghent, has utilised this to work with young people with drug histories. Amongst the benefits are greater levels of self-esteem, tangible progress and higher levels of physical and mental wellbeing.

In Sweden, the city of Gothenburg has used ESF funding to pilot a proactive approach to addressing the issue of radicalisation. Recruiting a diverse team of youth workers with outreach support, *Ung Ost* (Young East) is on the streets connecting with disaffected young people and linking them into existing forms of support.

In Spain, the Red Cross has pioneered an innovative approach to activation, by engaging young NEETs around the issue of self-image. Through studio photography and careers guidance, they are encouraging young people to think about how they come across to others, particularly potential employers. With the growth of digital recruitment tools, this is a new and interesting area.

#### Key messages

This section identifies the following five key messages for **ESF Managing Authorities**:

1. Take risks and encourage non-traditional approaches
2. Support cross-cutting approaches
3. Actively encourage collaboration
4. Promote the development of soft skills
5. Recognise the need for flexibility around timescales

It also sets out the following five key messages for **service providers**:

1. Focus on talent and tap into intrinsic motivation
2. Measure soft skills
3. Build individual trusted relationships
4. Diversify the team
5. Collaborate



## 3.2 The Prague study visit

In May 2017 the ESF Youth Employment Network conducted a study visit to Prague, capital of the Czech Republic. The thematic focus of this event was on client activation, by which we mean the tools and measures used to motivate and support young people to move into or towards the labour market.

The host organisation for the visit was Rubikon Centrum, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) working primarily with people in the justice system. Its target client group comprises ex-offenders, many of whom face significant barriers to employment. Rubikon works with clients of all ages, although our particular interest was in young people. The organisation operates out of a number of locations in the Czech Republic, and is financed by a variety of sources including the ESF.

The study visit took place over two days. It comprised an orientation session from the Czech ESF Managing Authority, which provided important contextual information for the visit. For example, it highlighted the very low rates of youth unemployment in the Czech Republic, and referred to the challenges this brings to those not in work. The presentation also included details of the ESF-funded programmes which are in place to promote youth employment.

On day 1 there was a general introduction to Rubikon. On Day 2 this was complemented by an in-depth ex-

amination of their work, which took place at their premises. During this session network members had the opportunity to speak with Rubikon staff members, as well as with young people who had come through their support programmes.

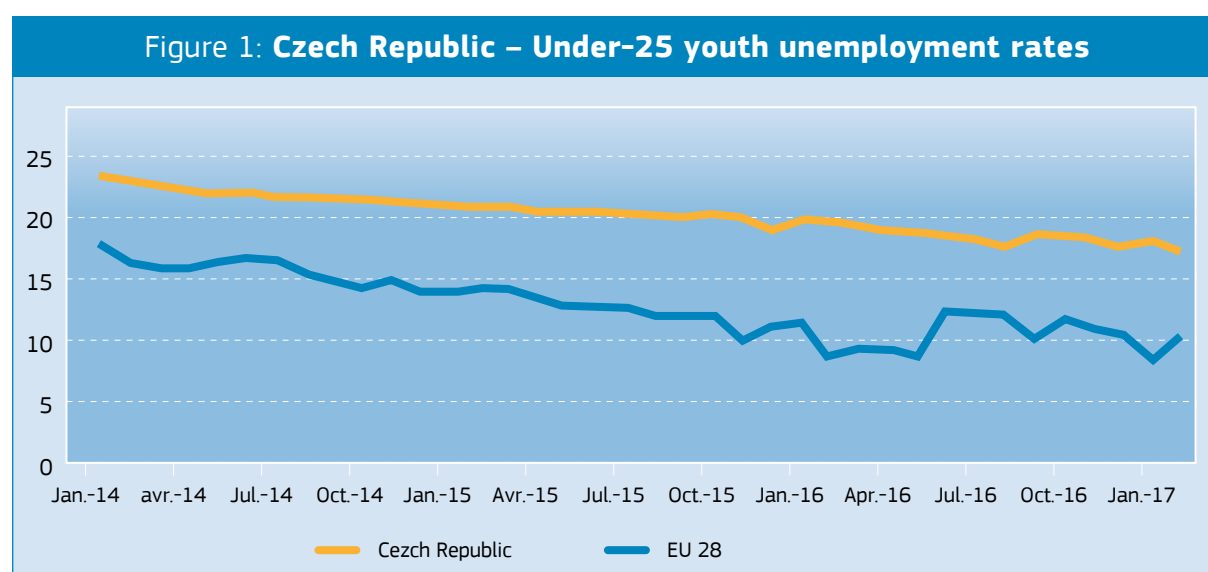
The study visit provided important insights into the way in which NGOs like Rubikon can support young people with troubled backgrounds. Some clear messages were evident, such as the importance of trusted relationships between clients and NGO staff members. The visit also reinforced issues the network had already discussed, including the challenge of gaining sustainable funding for small NGOs engaged in specialist work.

## 3.3 The Rubikon Centrum Model

### 3.3.1 The Czech Republic youth employment context

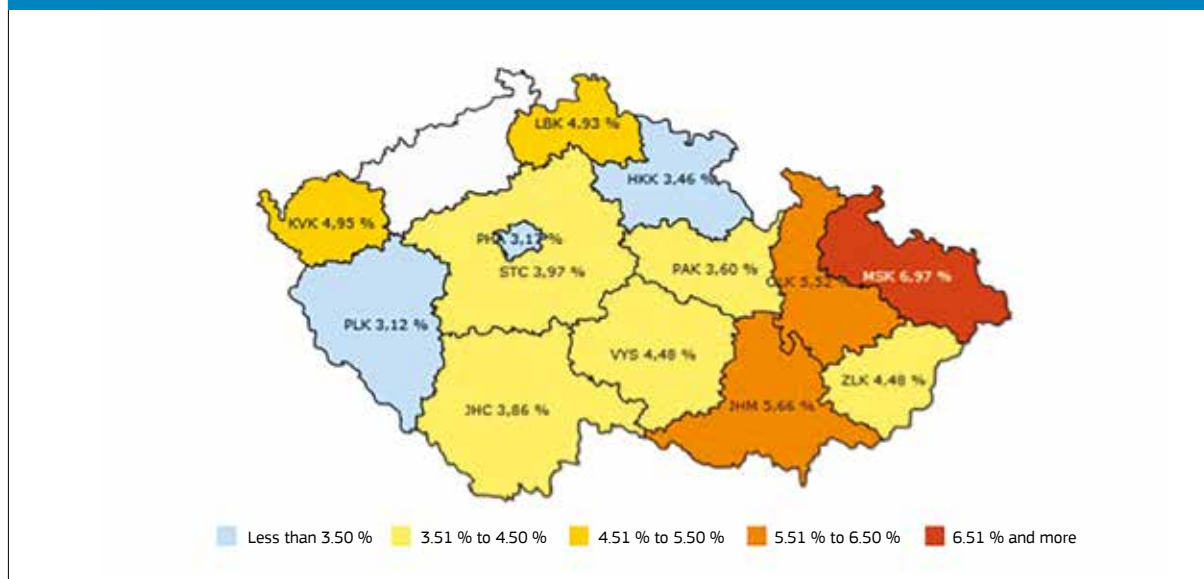
This section describes Rubikon Centrum's work supporting young people with offending backgrounds. It is based on material shared by the project during our study visit, as well as on information provided by the Czech Managing Authority

Like most EU Member States, the Czech Republic's economy was adversely affected by the 2008 global financial crisis and its aftermath. However, the impact was less than that on some other neighbouring countries, and overall the economy has proven to be resilient and solidly structured.



Source: Czech Ministry of Labour

Figure 2: Unemployment rate 15-64 years old in Czech Republic, by region



Source: Czech Ministry of Labour

Manufacturing remains an important part of the overall economy. The automotive sector, particularly Škoda with its 25,000 employees, assumes a key role in this. Given the small domestic market, a high proportion of these products goes to export.

In terms of skills supply, the Czech education system has a good reputation. However, the most recent OECD survey stresses the need for greater flexibility within it. The study also underlines the need to address ongoing structural discrimination faced by Roma pupils. Overall it concludes that:

*"The need for early childhood education, reducing elitism in the school system (including early streaming) and benchmarking schools have been highlighted as ways of reducing the influence of social background on later outcomes."*<sup>13</sup>

Despite these challenges, the system appears to work well, as youth unemployment levels in the Czech Republic are currently the lowest in the EU. In January 2017 the Czech national unemployment rate for under-25s was 10.3% against the EU average of 17.3%, as the figure below shows. In client numbers, this has meant the figures halving from over 90,000 to 45,000 in the three years from January 2014.

Across the country, the rate varies, with those regions with the highest levels of deprivation having correspondingly higher youth unemployment levels. The variations in the youth unemployment rate are shown in the figure below. These less wealthy regions also have higher levels of ethnic minorities, particularly Roma, as identified in the OECD survey.

Within the NEET<sup>14</sup> group, caring responsibilities are cited as the main excluding factor, accounting for 44.9% of the group in 2013. This aligns with conclusions drawn from the OECD economic survey. This noted that although the Czech Republic has relatively low inequality levels, there are growing challenges for women in the labour market:

*Reconciling career and family choices is a growing problem for Czech women, as is now recognised in the government's gender equality agenda. Women are increasingly investing in tertiary education, but their paid employment tends to fall once they have children and begin parental leave, which averages 2½ years. Only 4% of children under two years old were enrolled in childcare and pre-school services in 2013, compared to the OECD average of 33% (OECD Family Database). Accordingly, 82% of women without children have jobs but only 44% of mothers of children under six do, which is one of the largest gaps in the EU.*<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> OECD Economic Survey of the Czech Republic, 2016, <http://www.oecd.org/eco/surveys/Czech-Republic-2016-overview.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Young People Not in Education Employment or Training  
<sup>15</sup> OECD Economic Survey of the Czech Republic, 2016 page 29

### 3.3.2 The distinctive challenge of working with young offenders

It is difficult to generalise about the social and economic reintegration of young ex-offenders across the EU. The age of criminal responsibility varies widely amongst Member States, justice systems are diverse and social attitudes towards young offenders are not consistent. Some societies are more likely to offer them a second chance than others.

Research indicates that there is a close correlation between low educational levels, social exclusion and offending behaviour. Studies also consistently identify an offending background as a factor making a young person more likely to become NEET.

The Czech Republic tends towards a tougher approach to young offenders. Evidence of this is the fact that until relatively recently, there was no non-custodial alternative or probation system in place. This was only introduced in 2001, partly due to the effective lobbying work of Rubikon in its early phase.

The combination of this hard attitude towards young offenders and a buoyant labour market throws up an interesting range of issues for young people leaving the justice system. One is the fundamental question relating to the purpose of prison itself. Over 60% of young Czechs leaving prison go on to reoffend. We must conclude from this that if one of the central aims of system is to reform offending behaviours, then the model is unsuccessful.<sup>16</sup>

Another is the prevalent perception that there is work available for everyone who wants it. This applies a double stigma to those young offenders who cannot find work, even if they are desperate to do it. They can find themselves stuck in a chicken-and-egg situation whereby they can't find work as they have a stigma as ex-offenders, and that lack of employment then leads them back into criminal behaviour patterns.

These labour market barriers for young ex-offenders are not unique to the Czech Republic; however the operational context in which Rubikon is working seems harder than in many other parts of Europe.

<sup>16</sup> The Czech Republic is not alone. Many other member States have similarly high reoffending rates

### 3.3.3 Rubikon Centrum structure and principles

Rubikon is a not-for-profit organisation that has been established since 1994. It works primarily in the criminal justice field, with a focus on the social integration of ex-offenders. The organisation has almost 50 employees and a wider professional network of around 150 people. Headquartered in Prague, it works throughout the Czech Republic and since its inception has delivered more than 70 projects, supporting more than 25,000 clients.

Although Rubikon is not primarily an 'employment' project, it recognises the importance of work in the client rehabilitation process. Many of the organisation's clients have debt problems, and without paid employment it is easy to return to a life of criminal activity. Employment – and related activities such as volunteering – can also provide a structure that assists social rehabilitation. However, finding work is not easy as many clients have poor or fragmented work histories, low skill levels and frequent instances of substance abuse. In addition, there are high levels of prejudice against ex-offenders, which can deter employers.

The Rubikon approach is based on a close trusted relationship between staff members and clients. The model is client-centred, in that the support on offer reflects the agreed needs for each client. This support package extends beyond employability, and will often include other requirements such as assistance with addressing addiction and financial guidance. Rubikon works closely with a network of other organisations specialised in areas like addictions.

As well as providing support services, Rubikon also has a lobbying function. This aims to improve the criminal justice system in the Czech Republic. For example, the organisation was part of the initiative that pressured the national government to introduce probationary and non-custodial sentences. In both the lobbying and client support work, Rubikon's activities have been influenced by overseas organisations, particularly in the state or NGO sector in Switzerland, Denmark and the UK.

### 3.3.4 Rubikon Centrum service offer

Rubikon offers a range of support services to clients. During our study visit, we examined three in some detail, as follows:



#### • “PUNKT Family” Probation Programme

The *PUNKT Rodina* (PUNKT Family) programme<sup>17</sup> targets young people aged 15-18 with a criminal record and a high risk of reoffending. Probation officers select the participants. It is a seven-month intervention combining group work and individual support based on a Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) approach. The model was developed in Switzerland and the Rubikon version has also received financial support from that country.

The groups are small, of between three and five participants. A Rubikon lector leads each group and the organisation has trained over 100 people for this key role. Many of these had previously worked with this client group, either in the probation service or social services. The position requires the ability to empathise with the clients and can be described as a coaching role. Having the right attitude was identified as being the key attribute for effective lectors.

The programme content included exploration of the offence and its consequences. It also considered problem solving, handling provocation, dealing with people and ways to reduce the risk of recurrence. Part of this latter component involved examining the role of the wider family, who were also involved in this work.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.rubikoncentrum.cz/dalsi-projekty/punkt-rodina-prusvihy-uz-nedelam-kamo-tecka/>. PUNKT is an acronym for “I’m not getting into trouble any more, mate. Full stop”.

Of more than 700 juvenile offenders who started the programme, 500 graduated, while 200 failed to complete it, usually due to poor motivation and/or a combination of social problems, drugs and alcohol. Of those who completed the programme, only 16% went on to reoffend within the following year. This was considered to be a major success for a group highly predisposed to reoffending.

The Czech Justice Department provided the post-programme data after 13 months. However due to administrative changes this is no longer available, and due to a lack of systematic financing this programme no longer runs.

#### • Roma Mentoring Programme

The Roma population in the Czech Republic is estimated to be up to 300,000 people. Unemployment rates within the community stand at around 60% and we have already discussed the barriers they face – including within the education system. Roma people are also disproportionately represented within the criminal justice system.<sup>18</sup>

Rubikon’s Roma Mentoring Programme is aimed at Roma clients of the probation and mediation service. It has been operating since 2004 and has supported over 2,200 clients, of all ages. The model is structured around a team of Roma mentors, recruited and trained from within the community, who provide the service.

The Roma mentor role includes motivating clients to fulfil the obligations of an alternative sanction<sup>19</sup> and also referring them to relevant services and providing support around housing, debt and other issues. The keys to this successful model are the trusted relationship between the mentor and the client, built around their shared cultural identity, and a gentle but firm insistence on the rules.

This is another example of a programme adopted by Rubikon Centrum from over-seas, in this case Denmark. Roma Mentoring is delivered across the Czech Republic. It is currently funded through the ESF from 2016-2019 to operate in 19 centres across eight regions. During this period, an additional 30 new Roma mentors will be trained, bringing the total to more than 65. They will

<sup>18</sup> This anecdotal point cannot be evidenced since the Czech Republic does not gather offender data by ethnic origin.

<sup>19</sup> An alternative sanction is a penalty that, instead of imposing custody, involves measures such as daily reporting, electronic monitoring, obligatory training or unpaid community service work.

work and support more than 500 clients and more than 300 people from the clients' social background (including family members).

#### • Rubikon Centrum Probation Programme

Rubikon Centrum's support for offenders includes work prior to their release from prison. This work includes the Probation Programme, which offers a package of pre- and post-release support, combined with a training and employment opportunity. The intervention, running in the prison at Vinařice, 35 km west of Prague, includes a training and employment opportunity in a car seat sewing plant located within the facility. Participants have the chance to continue the same job with the company after they are released.

The prison has the capacity for 40 prisoners to work in a sewing workshop at a time. The format includes an average of three months' (and up to four months') training and employment in prison, supplemented by guidance from Rubikon Centrum staff in preparation for release. Those progressing to employment with the company start work two days after liberation, as part of a package that includes temporary housing. Over the next six months, they receive 50 hours of Rubikon Centrum counselling support.

The model is attractive to clients because it offers a route into paid employment in a manufacturing role with which many are already familiar. The fact that unemployment rates are so low means that Czech employers are keen to identify and recruit potentially loyal employees. Yet the transition can still be challenging for participants. Uncertain release dates, low self-confidence, isolation and the threat of drug relapse are among the significant barriers they face.

Alongside this model, Rubikon Centrum has introduced the concept of the Practical Interview Day (PID), inspired by Working Chance,<sup>20</sup> the UK organisation offering a recruitment service for women ex-offenders. PID is a trial work interview between an employer (a real representative from a business organisation) and the candidate (as a potential employee). It has a speed-dating format, and as well as providing valuable experience for the unemployed person, it can help shift employer prejudices about the value of ex-offenders.

<sup>20</sup> <https://workingchance.org/>

### 3.3.5 Key messages from the Rubikon Centrum study visit

There are some clear and important messages coming from this work about the activation of clients who face major labour market barriers.

#### 1. The need for trusted relationships

Ex-offenders are a challenging client group to work with. They present with a wide range of complex support needs and face high levels of labour market discrimination in their journey back to work. Very often, that journey is not a straight line, as many can relapse along the way for a wide variety of reasons. The high recidivism rates reflect this, so an effective approach to supporting these clients must be firm but at times forgiving.

Providing effective support to this client group is intensive work. Often, clients will need a personally tailored pathway combined with high levels of professional support. Rubikon Centrum's work shows that a trusted relationship with a well-trained professional is at the heart of this partnership between client and staff member. Empathy and mutual-respect are an important part of this. This can come from shared cultural heritage – as in the case of the Roma mentors. Alternatively, it might come from an adviser's professional training, as a probation officer or social worker for example. In some other cases, the adviser may also have had experience of being inside the justice system – as with the New Routes<sup>21</sup> programme in Scotland.

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.thewisegroup.co.uk/helpforyou/prison-to-payslip/>







## 2. Offer of a wide support package

People go to prison because they have committed a criminal offence. However, there are often underlying drivers of their offending behaviour which may include debt, addictions and mental health issues. Supporting clients in breaking their behavioural patterns therefore requires a wide package of support measures.

The outcome of sustained employment is not the end goal for Rubikon, but a means towards it; the end goal being desistance from criminal activity. Within the organisation, Rubikon can offer a wide menu of support – for example in relation to debt, emotional literacy and employability. Unless these fundamental issues are addressed, clients are not yet ready to re-enter the labour market. Figure 3 on page 11 shows the steps that Rubikon has identified in the client's journey back to employment.

## 3. A collaborative service model

Although Rubikon can offer a wide support menu to its clients, as a single NGO this has limits. In particular, in specialist areas such as addictions, mental health and housing, there are points where extensive and detailed support is required.

Rubikon works closely with a network of other organisations – many also funded through the ESF – which offer these specialist services. Where appropriate, Rubikon will refer clients for support elsewhere, as part of a customised support package for clients. A mutual referral mechanism is in place which helps build trusted relationships between providers.

These support frameworks between service providers are important in dealing with beneficiaries with

multiple support needs. However, the ESF does not always encourage a collaborative culture. In fact, often it does the opposite – setting providers in competition against one another with negative consequences. One of these is the likelihood that they will 'hold onto' clients – as they represent an 'output' payment – rather than refer them to agencies which might offer more appropriate support. We return to this point in our conclusions.

## 4. Close employer links and the prospect of real work

Despite the fact that employment can seem a distant prospect at the start, it can provide a big incentive for clients. For those who have made the decision to turn their lives around, paid work is a stepping stone towards a future that is financially stable and crime-free. Rubikon invests time and energy in cultivating and maintaining good employer relationships. It monitors employers' advertising campaigns and involves them in events, which include business breakfasts and practice interview sessions. An important message is the potential of ex-offenders who can bring skills, hard work and loyalty to employers willing to give them a chance. In a labour market where competition for staff is fierce, Rubikon has enjoyed some success.

This has included the pioneering prison-based factory model in Vinařice. Not only does this offer the prospect of real work, it also starts that journey at the pre-release stage and is built around the needs of an engaged employer.

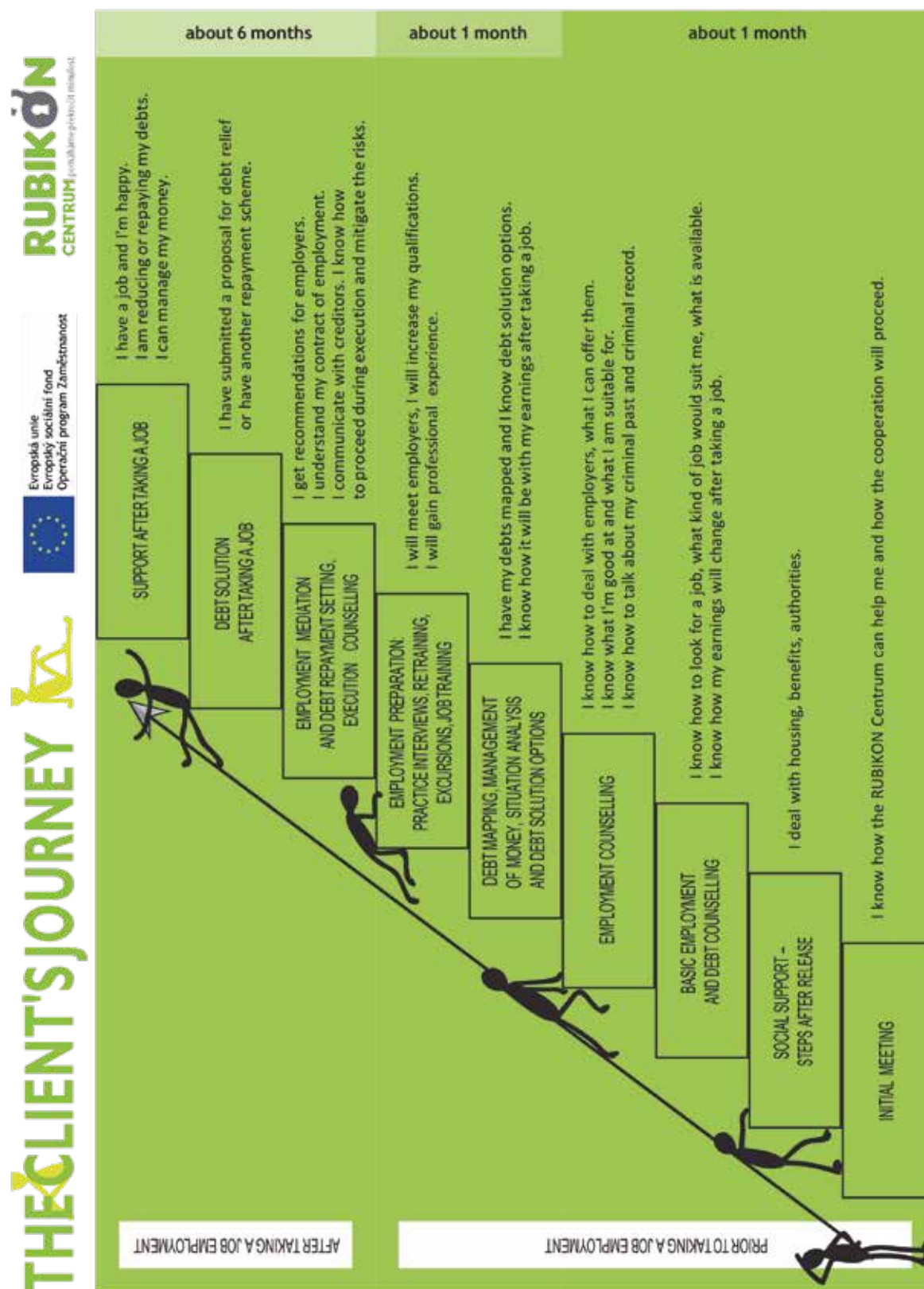
## 5. The importance of a stable funding model

Rubikon is an NGO working with some of the hardest client groups in society. One of its biggest challenges is securing funds to continue its work, despite the fact that it is achieving good results. When funds are available, they are often short-term, which militates against a long-term strategic approach.

The ESF is an important funding source for organisations like Rubikon. However, it is not a sustainable source, and NGOs like this have little security, which has implications for its services as well as for the recruitment and retention of staff.



Figure 3: Steps in the client's journey back to employment



Source: Rubikon Centrum

### 3.4 Other approaches to client activation

#### 3.4.1 Activating the NEET group

This section steps back to widen the lens on the discussion around activation. It includes reflections on the EU policy perspective – linked closely to the Youth Guarantee – as well as referencing examples of interesting approaches beyond those in Prague.

A number of key findings and recommendations emerged from the European Commission's review<sup>22</sup> of the Youth Guarantee and Youth Employment Initiative. One was confirmation of the challenge faced in identifying, connecting with and supporting the most disadvantaged young people into sustained labour market participation. Although a lot has been learned, tackling the most disadvantaged NEETs remains an ongoing challenge.

The well-documented heterogeneity of the NEET group is a factor here. It contains sub-groups who are relatively easy to move towards employment – provided the right kind of labour market opportunities are there. Unemployed graduates are a good example of this, and they are particularly evident where economic recovery has been slower, such as Greece, Spain and Italy.

The NEET group also comprises young people with complex and multiple support needs who are more challenging to support into sustained employment. For example, as we have already discussed above, this applies to young people with offending and or addictive backgrounds. In some cases they may lack motivation, or any confidence that employers will offer them work. In other cases, they may be highly motivated, but find that access barriers – including social discrimination levels – are high. In such situations – and for some sub-groups in particular – the informal economy provides an attractive alternative to mainstream economic activity. This is damaging for them as well as for wider the society.

There is an important structural issue about European labour markets here. This is the fact that regardless of where an economy is in the economic cycle, the hard-core of NEETs is there. Although they may be in relatively small numbers – as in the Czech Republic – that can mean that

their experience is all the more damaging. As the OECD and other sources have shown, prolonged experience of being NEET can have lifelong consequences, often referred to as 'scarring'.

For those with complex support needs, although our focus here is on activation, it is hard to consider this in isolation without the important component parts of an effective service. Often, these comprise outreach and service integration, our other two focal points. At the heart of this is the need for a personalised approach, involving a holistic service offer. The Youth Guarantee review indicates this through its emphasis on the need for "a single point of contact helping to provide tailor-made services specific to the young person's needs".

Another important aspect addressed in the report – and also pinpointed by European Youth Foundation (EYF) research – relates to the quality of the offer for young people. Any guarantee is only as attractive as the opportunity it can offer. Without a quality offer, it can be especially hard to activate young people who have little or no previous labour market experience.

In the network's recent fieldwork, we have also considered the importance of *intrinsic motivation*. A term widely used in youth work and educational psychology, this refers to the inner drivers and enthusiasms we all have. Increasingly, organisations working effectively with the most marginalised young people are recognising the value of tapping into this. By identifying a young person's passion, they can create a trusted dialogue about expectations and ambitions.

This is important when a body of research indicates that within the NEET group, there are young people who may not respond well to a standard traditional 'training' offer. There are various reasons for this. In some cases, negative experiences of school have turned them off formal learning models. In others, there may be personal barriers, such as learning disabilities, which make it hard for them to benefit from a traditional instruction approach. Others may have behavioural issues which make group work challenging.

This presents a number of implications for any services designed to support them. One is the need to appreciate the importance of avoiding a 'deficit model' approach, which reinforces negative messages about what they can't do. Many of these young people leave school burdened

<sup>22</sup> European Commission: *The Youth Guarantee and Youth Employment Initiative three years on, October 2016* – <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52016DC0646>

with this, particularly in education systems where qualifications inflation has diminished the value of competencies that are less easy to capture.

### 3.4.2 Four practical steps to support activation

From our work, we have identified a number of practical steps that seem to help providers tap into beneficiaries' intrinsic motivation:

#### 1. Drawing out their talents

An effective way of working with disaffected young people is through reframing the guidance exchange with them to focus on what they are good at. For young people who have struggled at school, this may not be immediately evident. However, a skilled adviser who has created a trusted platform for dialogue with them can help draw this out.

Often this requires a conversation which goes beyond the realm of vocational skills. For example, the young person might look after their younger siblings. They might plan and cook meals at home for the family. They might help out in a local business. They might enjoy DJing, five-a-side football, or helping at the mosque. Within these activities we can determine competencies that employers value – communications, leadership, planning, reliability, team working, creative problem solving and so on.

#### 2. Articulating what they bring to the labour market

Once we have identified these talents, there is the challenge of presenting them. A traditional CV is not always the best way to do this, as it is primarily designed to showcase formal qualifications and employment experience, which may be limited.

Increasingly, organisations are using ICT to capture this wider range of competencies. JES, working in three cities in Flanders, pioneered the concept of the *C-Stick*<sup>23</sup> which was one of the first attempts to showcase a young person's abilities in a more three-dimensional way. It allowed the young person to present all of their competencies on a USB stick that contained a résumé, but which could also contain other documents and multimedia



products – such as videos – that provided evidence to potential employers.

The speed of change in the tech world means that the C-Stick format is now less relevant, since online media dominate and social media have become increasingly commonplace. Social media tools such as Facebook and Instagram (as well as older platforms like LinkedIn) are now being used both by agencies and individuals to fulfil this function.

#### 3. Considering the learning style of your participants

In the past 20 years, a great deal has been discovered about individual learning styles since the work of Gardner<sup>24</sup> and others. We now know that everyone learns differently and that optimum training/teaching approaches take this into account, using a variety of mechanisms to convey concepts, content and information.

In the context of activating disaffected young people this is particularly important to consider. As we have seen in the examples shared in this paper, non-traditional approaches can be more effective ways to build confidence, change mindsets and support the journey to employability.

#### 4. Widening their horizons

Young people lacking confidence and direction need to be stretched beyond their comfort zones, without exposing them to the risk of major failings. This awareness of relevant proximal steps requires an understanding of

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.jes.be/C-Stick/index.php?TK=En>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.tecweb.org/styles/gardner.html>



the individual and when they are ready for the next steps. Effective guidance and ongoing support are at the heart of this.

Many organisations working effectively with marginalised young people employ this approach. In Scotland, the [Venture Trust](http://www.venturetrust.org.uk/)<sup>25</sup> has laid on ‘outward bound’<sup>26</sup> activities in the Highlands as part of its support repertoire for young offenders. For many of them, it is the first time they have ever spent outside their immediate neighbourhood, in a natural wilderness with no mobile phone signal and far from the chaos of urban life. Few find it an easy experience, but many are transformed by it.

We see the same patterns in operation within the German *Integration durch Austausch* (IdA)<sup>27</sup> model, now widely replicated and supported through the ESF Transnational Learning Network on Mobility.<sup>28</sup> Disadvantaged young people with very limited life experience find themselves in an alien environment, not knowing the language, culture or locality. A challenging experience, this is also transformative for many who discover they have skills and capabilities that were previously hidden. Greater self-confidence is commonly a key result.

25 <http://www.venturetrust.org.uk/>

26 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outward\\_Bound](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outward_Bound)

27 [http://www.esf.de/portal/DE/Ueber-den-ESF/Geschichte-des-ESF/Foerderperiode-2007-2013/ESF-Programme/Programme/programm\\_ida.html](http://www.esf.de/portal/DE/Ueber-den-ESF/Geschichte-des-ESF/Foerderperiode-2007-2013/ESF-Programme/Programme/programm_ida.html)

28 <http://www.esf.de/portal/EN/Funding-period-2014-2020/TLN-Mobility/content.html>



### 3.4.3 Other distinctive approaches to client activation

In this section we briefly present three other approaches to client activation from our network membership. Although each is distinctive, there are clear common elements which we consider in our concluding section.

#### • Flanders

In Flanders, there has recently been a policy emphasis on using sport and recreational activity as a mechanism for stimulating client activation within the NEET group.

One organisation funded through the ESF to work this way is De Sleutel, based in Ghent. This is a not-for-profit organisation, which is part of the Brothers of Charity. Since the 1970s De Sleutel has supported people with drug addiction, largely funded through the Belgian national health insurance system.

In response to a call for *Innovation through Adaptation*, De Sleutel developed an employability programme that incorporates sport. This innovation was added to the existing work of its sheltered workshop or *sociale werkplaats*, and is described as an ‘extra gateway’ to support clients.

De Sleutel’s beneficiaries typically present with a series of complex support issues. They can lack a structured routine, living lives where the determining factor in their day revolves around their addiction. Furthermore, they are often in very poor health, which is a barrier to their employability as well as to their quality of life. Also significant is the fact that when they manage to desist from drugs, there is a risk that having lots of free time might lead them back to bad habits.

On starting with the organisation, each beneficiary begins a customised programme that includes a support package. In addition to the acquisition of skills and competences, this includes a sports component. For each participant, that means an initial baseline fitness test to determine his or her starting point and to help set some future goals. Typically, new starts are extremely unfit, so the targets take account of this, and other factors such as their wider health issues.

De Sleutel reports a number of benefits deriving from the sports-related activities. One of these is that clients

can often see measurable progress quite quickly. Through a structured programme of activities, their fitness levels can improve over relatively short periods of time. This can help them feel that they are regaining control of their lives, which in turn increases levels of self-confidence.

For participants, the sports activities also provide a different way of coming together with other people. Whereas the social dimension of their previous lives may have been structured primarily around accessing and consuming drugs with others, this is a different social situation, which encourages collaboration and teamwork, but in ways they may not be used to. It is a different way to relate to other people, which is unthreatening and which provides a common neutral conversation topic.

It is also not offered in a classroom setting, which for many has negative connotations. As the De Sleutel team put it: “We have to drop the traditional, too verbal way of working, and a specific hands-on approach appeals more to the target group.”

The organisation has identified specific benefits deriving from the introduction of the sports component, which include:

- fitter beneficiaries who have a healthier attitude to activity and employment
- higher levels of self-confidence and greater belief that they will find work
- lower levels of absenteeism compared to their programme without the sports component
- positive influences on mental health

The De Sleutel programme lasts for ten weeks. Following this, the offer includes volunteering activity and work placements within its own and other social economy organisations on its extensive campus in Ghent.

Another organisation in Flanders which is using sport is Risesmart,<sup>29</sup> based in Bruges. It has also found that the introduction of sport is a useful way to re-engage disaffected young people who are not attracted by a mainstream training offer.

One of the challenges Risesmart discovered was that offering well-known sports, such as football, simply reinforced hierarchal behaviour patterns amongst groups of young people who knew one another. To address this, they have

deliberately introduced sporting activities which will be new and unfamiliar to all participants.

In line with this, in the summer of 2017, it held a traditional Scottish Highland games<sup>30</sup> event in the city. This involved sports and activities which are familiar to Scottish Highlanders, but not to streetwise young people in Ghent. Wearing DIY kilts, participants got involved in boulder throwing, tug-of-war and other activities rarely seen south of the Scottish border. The team reported positive results from participants, illustrating how ingenuity and humour can be used in the activation process.

Specifically, they reported that key lessons for beneficiaries included:

- improved team working
- better punctuality
- increased assertiveness
- ability to deal with constructive criticism

#### • Sweden

Disaffected young people who feel they have no stake in society are at high risk of becoming NEET. They are also vulnerable and can be open to persuasion from malevolent sources. Whether these are criminal gangs or radical Islamic groups, research shows that the invitation to ‘belong’ to these alternative family structures can be attractive.

In late 2016 Gothenburg was identified as one of the EU cities of its size with the highest proportion of young jihadis joining ISIS in the Middle East.<sup>31</sup> The city has also struggled with issues relating to gang membership. The north-east of the city is most affected by this. Compared to the city average, it has higher deprivation levels, higher unemployment rates and poorer health indicators.

As part of a co-ordinated response to these challenges, ESF funding was awarded to a new project, *Ung Ost* (Young East),<sup>32</sup> designed to identify and support those young people at risk of gang recruitment and radicalisation. Based within the municipality, the concept involves a cross-departmental approach comprising colleagues in the education, health and justice spheres.

<sup>30</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Highland\\_games](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Highland_games)

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.thelocal.se/20151115/swedish-city-is-largest-recruiting-ground-for-islamic-extremism>

<sup>32</sup> <https://goteborg.se/wps/portal/enhetssida/projekt-ung-ost>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.risesmart.be/en/home>

The project has involved the start-up of a carefully selected team of six youth workers (plus a co-ordinator) operating across the neighbourhood. They work closely with an expanded outreach team, also comprising six members. They work in an established 'streetwork' model where they are out on the streets, in communities and in local organisations. Close collaboration ensures the regular exchange of information on the local hotspots. Prior to the establishment of the team, the entire city district had one outreach worker operating in this way.

Each of the six youth workers has a caseload of around seven clients. This is more than anticipated – and above the ideal – but is due to the demand for the service. Referrals are made through Social Services and there have been around 50 participants so far. Within local schools the SSPL team (combined School, Social Services, Police and Leisure team), teaching staff and parents collaborate to support young people at risk within the education system. This 'early warning' system is also a source of referrals.

Initially 80% of these clients were male, but that percentage has now fallen to 65% as more young women take up places. The typical duration of support is six months, but youth workers are finding that at times this is not long enough. Many of these young people present with a variety of complex support needs. The youth worker's task is to identify these, provide or signpost sources of support, and promote resilience in their young clients. This work also involves an analysis of the young person's support ecosystem. Who is around them that they can rely upon in tough times in the future?

Trusted relationships are at the heart of this sensitive one-to-one work with young people. Much of the initial baseline activity consists of building a clear picture of the young person's background. This includes an assessment of their interests and levels of support. A patient non-judgmental approach is important, and their route to a brighter future is rarely straightforward.

Although the project's success is measured in traditional ESF terms – return to education, employment outcomes and so on – much of the beneficiary progress relates to softer skills such as self-confidence. The project has started using the Scott Miller test,

which was developed in family therapy work, to establish baselines, measure soft indicator progress and gauge the effectiveness of the youth worker-beneficiary relationship.

To date, there has been more progress with young people at risk of criminal gang recruitment than with those at risk of radicalisation. This remains work in progress which is at a relatively early stage. It will involve establishing strong working relationships with local mosques and members of the Muslim community. The team is also supporting a number of young women affected by 'honour-related violence' and abuse within their families.

At this early stage some key lessons to share have been:

- This is intense individual work that takes time to achieve results;
- Young people cannot do this alone – one of the keys to success is to mobilise the networks around them;
- A strong cross-departmental approach is required from all services.

#### • Spain

In Spain the Red Cross has devised an innovative pilot approach to the activation of young people in the NEET group. As part of a wider package of support, it has introduced a concept called 'Strength of an Image' which is designed as a self-reflective tool. It also provides beneficiaries with the chance to consider how they come across to others.

The approach revolves around each beneficiary having a photo-shoot that creates his or her individual portrait. It is led by a guidance professional and a photographer. The process involves four stages:

1. Young people as a group consider issues around images, stereotypes, character assumptions linked to appearance and attitude. The group discussion also covers issues relating to self-image and self-esteem;
2. An individual stage which involves some collaborative discussion and analysis with the guidance professional followed by a photo-shoot session with the photographer;
3. Sessions with the young person to reflect on their portrait and the messages it conveys. This is initially an individual session which is then followed





by discussions with those who know the beneficiary and others who do not. This provides insightful and useful feedback;

4. A short video of the reactions and discussions related to the portrait. This provides an opportunity for the beneficiary to examine more deeply the perceptions they generate in others.

To date, the approach has only operated on a small scale. Some of the experiences are captured in this [video](#).<sup>33</sup> It represents a novel and fun way for beneficiaries to consider how they come across to others. It also triggers an exchange about their strengths and potential and whether these come through non-verbally.

The aim is to promote self-confidence and self-awareness. Albeit on a small scale, the approach is playful, and apt given the growing use of social media and other digital tools in the recruitment arena.

## 3.5 Conclusions

In this final section we consider the key points arising from this scan of client activation approaches relating to youth employment. As the sharing paper addresses a mixed audience of policy-makers (including Managing Authorities) and practitioners, our closing remarks are aimed specifically at these groups.

### 3.5.1 Five messages for policy-makers and Managing Authorities

#### 1. Take risks – encourage non-traditional approaches

The example of the Czech Republic shows that the NEET group does not just disappear when economic cycles and employment rates are high. Even at the best of times, there are groups of young people facing complex and multiple barriers to employment.

Often, the barriers these young people face extend beyond simple shortcomings relating to competences. Mental health issues, addictive behaviours and offending

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=esv6tAi1VoE&feature=youtu.be>

backgrounds are some of the support issues we have considered in this document.

Consequently, a traditional offer that fails to provide holistic support is unlikely to lead to sustained results. All of the key lessons about successful approaches – client-centred, individualised and with a trusted adviser – must be part of an effective activation package. But sometimes something more is required. The examples given here where sport and cultural approaches have been mobilised are good examples of this in practice.

We are mindful that such policy approaches play out differently across Europe. For example, in Flanders there is a willingness to try non-traditional approaches, such as offering sport and recreation. This reflects a pragmatic ‘whatever it takes’ approach to beneficiaries who are notoriously difficult to activate. The calculation is that any way to use public money to avoid a lifetime of state dependency, drug addiction and unemployment is worthwhile in the long term – although the cost-benefit arithmetic is complicated.

In other parts of Europe, such approaches would be less acceptable, despite the return on investment. It seems that offering say, sport, would be construed as ‘rewarding’ young people commonly regarded as delinquents. The insights such discussions shed on the moral landscape facing such young people is, in itself, instructive. It also highlights the need for regional and cultural sensitivity in policy development.

## 2. Support cross-cutting approaches

We have already noted the need for holistic support models. In our initial sharing paper<sup>34</sup> we highlighted the comprehensive support offer provided through Ohjaamo in Helsinki, which frequently included guidance on housing, health and other matters. Our exploration of client activation models in the Czech Republic, Flanders, Sweden and Spain endorses this message.

For many of these young people, the road to sustained employment is long, winding and filled with obstacles. Particularly at the initial stages of engagement, unless basic needs – such as housing and health – are addressed up front, then it is hard for them to get beyond first base in labour market terms.

Acknowledging the complexity of clients’ support needs is the first step. The second is creating a funding environment that can address it. This might mean support for the integrated service models we have already explored in our work. Alternatively, it may mean supporting organisations which can furnish beneficiaries with a holistic support package.

## 3. Actively encourage collaboration

Few organisations have the capacity to meet the wide range of support needs that the most marginalised young people present with. As we have seen in this Sharing Paper, many address this through collaboration with other

<sup>34</sup> Integrating services to promote youth employment: Lessons from Finland – [https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/filedepot\\_download/865/434](https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/filedepot_download/865/434)

Top 10 skills in demand from employers	
2020	2015
1. Complex problem solving	1. Complex problem solving
2. Critical thinking	2. Co-ordinating with others
3. Creativity	3. People management
4. People management	4. Critical thinking
5. Coordinating with others	5. Negotiation
6. Emotional intelligence	6. Quality control
7. Judgment and decision making	7. Service orientation
8. Service orientation	8. Judgment and decision making
9. Negotiation	9. Active listening
10. Cognitive flexibility	10. Creativity

Source: Future of Jobs Report, World Economic Forum

providers. This is a particular feature of many NGOs' activities. However, the European Social Fund does not always encourage this.

On the contrary, the implementation of the operational programmes is frequently an arena where organisations compete against one another for beneficiaries and, ultimately, for funding.

Competition can be healthy, and in many instances it helps drive quality and service improvements. It can also achieve value for money, which everyone wants. However, there are times to compete and times to collaborate.

In supporting young people facing multiple high-level barriers, there is much to be said for collaborative approaches. An obvious one is that it encourages the kind of cross-referral culture required by approaches that are truly client-centred. Organisations encouraged by funding models to focus on short-term outcomes are less likely to refer beneficiaries elsewhere, even if it is in those individuals' interest.

In Ghent, we heard about the important role of the city authority in facilitating collaborative approaches within the local NGO sector. In Hamburg, during a previous study visit, we also hear about the way in which the Lawaetz Foundation is fulfilling this role. We will explore this concept more closely in a future sharing paper.

#### 4. Promote the development of soft skills

The De Sleutel case study illustrates the low base starting point faced by many young people who are far from the labour market. Unfit, lacking in confidence and with poor social skills, they have some way to go before being work-ready.

One of the stated benefits of introducing the sports component is that it yields short-term tangible results. Beneficiaries find they can run faster – and for longer. They lose weight and demonstrate greater resilience. Yet, even though these qualities matter for some physical jobs, they are not the typical indicators ESF-funded projects work to. Equally, the psychological benefits related to these changes – including higher levels of confidence and greater self-awareness – although important in the work place, rarely feature on the ESF dashboard.

On the ground, organisations are taking creative steps to assess and capture these positive steps forward for beneficiaries. In doing so they are looking beyond narrow vocational frameworks to other disciplines, such as sports science in the case of De Sleutel and family psychology in the case of Young East.

Policy-makers should encourage this ingenuity and creativity. If we look at the latest set of World Economic Forum (WEF) key competencies for 2020<sup>35</sup> we see that employers value these soft skills very highly. In fact there is a case for saying that they value them even more highly than academic and vocational qualifications. Within our policy approaches, this must be reflected more.

#### 5. Recognise the need for flexibility around timescales

Organisations like Rubikon, De Sleutel and Young East are working with young people left behind by many other organisations. They are not always easy to support, and their backstory often involves failed attempts by schools and other institutions to keep them on track.

Within funding models where money is linked to results, they can be an unattractive prospect. Organisations looking for quick results – by cherry picking and selecting low hanging fruit – will avoid working with these young people. However, unless they are actively supported into employment, young people are unlikely to make an active contribution to society in future.

At the policy level these challenges are usually evident. However, they are not always reflected on the ground in the ways that they should be. This relates to the earlier point about soft indicators, and the need for a wider range of indicators to measure beneficiary progress and achievement. But it also relates to timescales.

As we have seen in the Rubikon case study, young people with chaotic backgrounds rarely progress to the labour market in a smooth linear way. They relapse, they zig-zag, and they stall along the way. Happily, such organisations support many young people into work, but the journey can take time and this must be recognised in the funding models.

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-future-of-jobs>

### 3.5.2 Five messages for providers

#### 1. Focus on talent and do whatever it takes to tap into intrinsic motivation

Asset-based approaches are more likely to succeed with disaffected young people. Many have spent years in school being told what they are not good at. Their self-confidence is often low and they can feel undervalued. Often the competencies they have are overlooked – even by themselves.

A common feature of successful approaches is to spend time building a rounded picture of the individual. This includes identifying and capturing competences and attitudes they have which have currency in society and the labour market. Using tools to articulate these – particularly through social media – can help here.

Asset-based approaches can help identify not only talents but passions. Through connecting with these, providers can tap into beneficiaries' intrinsic motivation, which can be channelled positively to support their employability. Sometimes this may involve providers in widening their offer beyond a narrow vocational menu. Activities set out in this section – which include sport and photography – provide good examples of this.

#### 2. Measure soft skills

The activation examples contained in this paper underline the value of measuring soft skills. Although the ESF ultimately focuses on measurable results such as training places and job entries, the young people in the scope of these organisations start far from these measures. As the De Sleutel example shows, they are often physically unfit, mentally fragile and lacking a structure in their lives. Often they are struggling to transition from damaging lifestyle patterns that have prevented them accessing work.

In the short term, their progress is likely to relate to improvements in self-confidence, more effective communication and better team working. Measuring these employability changes is important for providers to track, in order to evidence that their interventions are effective. Equally, for beneficiaries it can offer powerful validation and encouragement that can, in turn, reinforce their commitment and effort.

Many tools are available to measure soft skills. Some of these have been created specifically for the employment

field. Others – such as those used by De Sleutel and Young East – have been customised from other policy areas. Sharing the benefits of these measurement tools is an ongoing priority in the youth employment field.

#### 3. Build individual trusted relationships

There is established evidence of the importance of working with individual advisers. This has proved to be effective for many disadvantaged groups – however it is particularly important with disaffected young people. Trusted individual relationships are particularly valuable for young people who may mistrust authority and feel that the system is working against them.

Mentors and positive role models are important here. It can be easier for young people to identify with others who have a lived experience similar to their own. This may come from the same neighbourhood. They may have been members of the same gang. Or they may have overcome an offending background or an addiction.

A chequered background, such as a criminal record, can disbar candidates from public service in some member states. However, NGOs are not normally bound by such restrictions. Consequently, organisations such as Rubikon Centrum, can recruit former beneficiaries who can strongly relate to the target group and support them with credibility and empathy.

#### 4. Diversify the team

Widening the recruitment net in this way can also help to diversify the workforce. In our initial sharing paper we referred to the aspiration within the Ohjaamo network to diversify the workforce. In Helsinki, a city growing in diversity, this was felt to be particularly important. Young people are likely to feel more comfortable in an environment where the workforce represents the profile of the wider population. However, in Helsinki – and in most of Europe's cities – this remains work in progress. Public workforces do not yet reflect the profile of their tax-paying population.

We have already noted the benefits of having staff members who can empathise with the experience of their beneficiaries. This relates to life experiences. However, it also extends to a team's ability to understand the cultural perspectives of its beneficiary group. Consequently, he have





*The ESF Youth Employment Thematic Network*

seen that in Gothenburg the Young East team has gone some way to ensuring that its team is representative of the diverse beneficiary group it seeks to support. Equally, in Ghent we heard how the outreach team had changed its recruitment practices in order to achieve this goal. We will investigate this further in a forthcoming sharing paper.

## 5. Collaborate

A clear message from this work is the importance of collaboration in the activation of disadvantaged young people. We can go even further and say that unless collaboration is fixed within the DNA of service providers, they will struggle to offer the holistic support model these young people need.

However, partnership working does not always come naturally. In particular, for organisations operating on tight budgets and within competitive environments it is a tall order. As we have argued above, Managing Authorities have an important role to play in ensuring that funding models do not encourage selfish introspective organisational behaviours. But on the ground service providers have their own role to play.

A commitment to a genuinely client-centred approach must be at the heart of this. In practice, this involves a holistic assessment of the beneficiary's support needs. Linked to this is a frank assessment of which organisations are best placed to provide the different elements of the package. Few organisations have the scale or skills to deliver a sophisticated support package that might comprise, for example, support relating to housing, addictions and the criminal justice system.

In this sharing paper we have seen examples of organisations working in a collaborative way. Rubikon Centrum works closely with other organisations specialised in supporting drug addicts, whilst De Sleutel collaborates with other NGOs who can offer sheltered work placements and volunteering opportunities.

In Ghent, we heard that the city authority encouraged and supported collaborative working within the city's NGO sector. In Hamburg, we discovered the important role played by one of the city's key foundations in brokering collaboration. Again, these are themes we will explore more closely in a future sharing paper.

## 4. OUTREACH

### 4.1 Summary

This chapter focuses on outreach, and related activities to build trusted connections supporting vulnerable young people into employment. The paper also gives special attention to care experienced young people, whose life chances are often worse than their peers. EU level research indicates that in Germany, where youth employment rates are low, they are almost 20% for this group. It also shows that only 8% of care leavers enter higher education, five times less than the average.

Two case studies offer insights into effective work with care experienced young people.

The **So Stay** project in Gdańsk has been developed by the city's Foundation for Social Innovation, working closely with the city authority. At the heart of it is a boutique hotel, offering employment to young care leavers, most of whom have come from Family Homes also run by the Foundation. Combining ERDF and ESF funding with other sources, So Stay provides an excellent example of integrated sustainable urban development, benefitting a very marginalised social group.

**MCR Pathways** operates in Glasgow secondary schools, where it provides support for vulnerable young people identified in the system. Care experienced young people are a priority group within the model, whose support takes the form of mentoring and other tailored inputs. Started by an individual philanthropist, the project's results have been impressive, and the model, which started in a single school, will soon be operational across the entire city.

In addition to these strong case studies, the Sharing Paper includes examples of effective practice from:

- Hamburg, where the Lawaetz Foundation operates as an umbrella agency for a range of city-wide services supporting marginalised young people;
- Ghent, where the city authority's streetwork model provides a good example of a proactive approach, mobilising community assets to connect with vulnerable youth;

- Karlovy Vary Region, Czech Republic, where the Don't Stay Lets Go project offers an alternative employability route for young people in small towns;
- Estonia, where an ambitious digital outreach programme is being piloted across the country.

The paper identifies the following key lessons for policy makers and project promoters:

#### Policy-makers

- Adopt an asset-based approach when supporting young people;
- Build strong employer links and recognise the importance of employment tasters for young people far removed from labour market experience in their community;
- Start small, when you are innovating, and scale up based on evidenced success;
- Optimise opportunities to collaborate, particularly across policy sectors;
- Gather accurate data and use it to inform young people's own stories of transformation.

#### Project Promoters

- Adopt an asset-based approach when supporting young people;
- Build strong employer links and recognise the importance of employment tasters for young people far removed from labour market experience in their community;
- Start small, when you are innovating, and scale up based on evidenced success;
- Optimise opportunities to collaborate, particularly across policy sectors;
- Gather accurate data and use it to inform young people's own stories of transformation.



## 4.2 The study visits informing this chapter

Two Youth Employment network study visits provide the principal sources for this chapter.

The first took place in Gdańsk, Poland, in March 2018. The primary focus of this was the So Stay project,<sup>36</sup> an innovative social enterprise supporting young people leaving the care system. The second study visit took place in May 2018 to Glasgow, Scotland. One of the projects visited was MCR Pathways, an innovative intervention supporting vulnerable young people in secondary schools.

As we discuss in the following chapter, young people leaving care are amongst the most vulnerable in society across the EU. They are invariably over-represented in the NEET figures, although the data picture across Europe is uneven. Consequently, they are worthy of particular attention, which explains our focus in Chapter 2.

Reaching out and building trust with vulnerable young people is routinely recognised as a key component of effective youth employment policy. Other study visits undertaken by the Youth Employment network have explored other approaches to outreach, which are also referred to in this paper. The study visits to Hamburg and Ghent have been particularly relevant and the approaches there are discussed in Chapter 3. Here, we also make brief reference to an upcoming study visit to Estonia that offers important lessons.

## 4.3 Supporting young care experienced people into employment

### 4.3.1 Introduction

It is well established that the NEET group is not a homogenous collection of young people. In this chapter, we focus on a particular set of young people generally over-represented in the wider NEET group – ‘care experienced young people’. By this, we mean young people who have been in the care of the state due to a variety of circumstances.

These are young people who have grown up in a range of support settings, which can include care institutions, foster homes and kinship care.<sup>37</sup> Across the EU, care models vary, as do the age and process when young people leave the care system. An interesting finding from our network discussions is the varying levels of awareness of these young people and their situation, from country to country.

As we discuss below, where data is available, care experienced young people have worse life outcomes than their age group as a whole. This typically includes a more difficult transition from education to sustained employment. In this chapter we explore some of the reasons behind this, and showcase two positive examples designed to address it.

### 4.3.2 Young care leavers in Europe

Across Europe, the situation for care experienced young people varies considerably. Legal, professional and cultural attitudes differ markedly from country to country. However, these young people have two important things in common. Firstly, they are amongst the most vulnerable people in society, who often struggle to overcome their difficult start in life. Secondly, they appear disproportionately in many of the negative data fields, including those tracking offending behaviour and unemployment.

In many countries, compared to their peers, the life chances of these young people are poor. Eurofound

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.sostayhotel.pl/en/>

<sup>37</sup> Kinship care is when a young person is raised by other family members.

research<sup>38</sup> shows that they are a consistent sub-group within the overall NEET figures in Europe. At a time when transition periods to adulthood are extending, and when youth employment levels are at historically low levels in many places, the journey of these young people is particularly difficult.

Data is patchy across the EU, but for example in England, recent figures from the Department for Education show that 40% of care leavers aged 19-21 are not in education, employment or training (NEET), compared to around 13% of those in the general population. The SOS report<sup>39</sup> estimates that in Germany, where the youth unemployment rate is relatively low, for care experienced people aged 15-24 it is almost 20%. It also identifies a 20% gap in employment levels between care experienced young people and the young population generally in Austria.

There is also a gender dimension to this question. There is a gender imbalance in the care population, with consistently more males than females. In Croatia, Norway and Germany more males than females are unemployed, while in Austria and Hungary, amongst care experienced young people, there are more unemployed women than men.

EU-level research<sup>40</sup> shows that only 8% of care leavers proceed to higher education (the average rate is five times higher) and that many young care leavers opt for short-cycle occupational training in order to become economically independent as soon as possible. Danish research from this study refers to the 'yo-yo transition' process for many in this group where they repeatedly enrol and drop out of training courses.

Policy approaches to care experienced young people vary from country to country. In some parts of the EU, for example the Nordic Member States, care experienced young

people are expected to be supported by mainstream provision. There is little specialised support, and an expectation that these young people are best served by having access to the same quality support offer as all. Within this policy is a recognition that special support measures might be unhelpful, discriminatory and stigmatising. On the other hand, their mainstream participation makes it more difficult to track and monitor their progress.

At the other end of the scale are those Member States where there is a sharp focus on care experienced young people, and a policy approach which sets them apart from their wider peer group. Amongst these is the UK, and within it, Scotland, which in recent years has undertaken a major policy shift in relation to this group. Currently, the Scottish government is undertaking an independent review of care services nationally, in recognition of the need to improve outcomes for these young people.

Launching this, Nicola Sturgeon, Scotland's First Minister, said:

*"Many of our young people who grow up in care go on to do great things in life, and those who work with looked after children do an amazing job. We should celebrate that and the progress that is being made – for example, school exclusions are down and the number of young people living in permanent rather than temporary accommodation has increased."*

*"But we cannot – and must not – ignore the reality for too many children who grow up in care. Only four percent go to university, nearly half will suffer mental health issues, almost one third will become homeless – and perhaps most shocking of all, a young person who has been in care is more likely to be dead by age 21."*<sup>41</sup>

Below, we examine two examples of good practice supporting care experienced young people. Both have featured in the Youth Employment network's study visits.

38 Mascherini, M., Salvatore, L., Meierkord, A. and Jungblut, J. (2012) NEETs - Young people not in employment, education or training: Characteristics, costs and policy responses in Europe, Dublin: Eurofound: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2012/labour-market-social-policies/neets-young-people-not-in-employment-education-or-training-characteristics-costs-and-policy>

39 Cameron, C., Hauari, H. and Arisi, C. (2018) Decent work and social protection for young people leaving care – gaps and responses in 12 countries worldwide, Vienna: SOS Children's Villages International: [https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/getmedia/842a5811-fdb7-41c4-a0b2-45b0e5e79090/SOS\\_LeavingCare\\_web.pdf](https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/getmedia/842a5811-fdb7-41c4-a0b2-45b0e5e79090/SOS_LeavingCare_web.pdf)

40 Jackson, S. and Cameron, C. (2011) Young people from a public care background: pathways to further and higher education in five European countries – Final report of the YIPPEE project, London: Thomas Coram Research Unit: [http://www.kineo.nu/skolfam/moodle/pluginfile.php/35/mod\\_resource/content/1/Final%20Report%20of%20the%20YIPPEE%20Project%20-%20WP12%20Mar11.pdf](http://www.kineo.nu/skolfam/moodle/pluginfile.php/35/mod_resource/content/1/Final%20Report%20of%20the%20YIPPEE%20Project%20-%20WP12%20Mar11.pdf)

41 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/may/08/fiona-duncan-love-scotlands-care-system-children>

## 4.4 So Stay, Gdańsk

### 4.4.1 The model

So Stay provides a unique transition model to adult working life for care experienced young people in Gdańsk, Poland. The most visible component of the model is the So Stay Hotel, which opened in 2016 and operates as a boutique destination hotel near the city centre. Most of the hotel's employees have care-experienced backgrounds, and work across the range of professions present in the modern hospitality sector: including front of house, gastronomy, and team management.

The development of the So Stay model forms part of a wider policy shift that has taken place in Poland in recent years. An important element of this is the trend towards deinstitutionalisation, that has formed part of the work of our partner network focusing on Inclusion. The implications for care experienced young people included a reduction in the number of large care institutions, widely disparaged as 'social warehouses', which made it difficult to provide a personalised support service.

Instead, the emphasis was on widening the other options – most notably foster care and adoption – as well as the establishment of smaller care units, known as 'Family Houses'. The design of these family houses took account of the growing intelligence around the support needs of care experienced young people – which, not surprisingly,

mirrored the needs of all young people: a safe comfortable place to live, with trusted adult support and scope to build relationships with other young people.

The Gdańsk Foundation for Social Innovation,<sup>42</sup> discussed below, established and manages a number of these Family Houses in Gdańsk. An important component of these is the trained staff who live with and support the young residents. The foundation offers support in the form of six homes for children (in each home there are up to 14 children and 6-7 instructors). The focus of their support is on education for future independent living.

The Homes for Children model was established in 2007 and the social enterprises (described below) in 2012. Until today, the foundation has supported around 400 people through these facilities.

As part of their support role for the young people in their care, Family House staff will talk with the youngsters about their schoolwork, what they enjoy doing best, and where their talents lie. This kind of conversation will often take place between parents and their children, but there was no scope for it in the old institutional model.

As well as running the Family Homes, the foundation also has a number of social enterprises within the city.

<sup>42</sup> <http://gfs.pl/>

*Youth Employment Thematic Network, 8<sup>th</sup> meeting, Gdańsk, Poland, February 2018*



*Kuźnia* is a café and market garden, generating produce for other hospitality businesses. The foundation runs it in partnership with a local energy company. The foundation also operates *Bistro Central*, located in the basement of the city authority building, which is open to employees and the public. Together with *So Stay*, these social enterprises offer a range of training and employment opportunities for the young people living in the Family Houses.

This flexible range of social enterprises enables the foundation to offer a mix of opportunities to the young people it works with. They can start by volunteering a few hours or by having a weekend job. They can use these opportunities to try out different occupations, and to work out what they like and where their skills lie. The foundation also offers traineeships, and encourages young people to study whilst working, and gain accredited qualifications.

During our study visit the Youth Employment network met with some of the young employees working in *So Stay*. One told us that she had previously worked in *Kuźnia*, where she had identified an interest in gastronomy and working with people. Encouraged by the foundation, she had completed a gastronomy management professional qualification and was now working in a management position in the hotel. Hers was a typical story of the young people who spoke to our network during the visit.

Her story is captured in the animation<sup>43</sup> produced after the *So Stay* study visit.

#### 4.4.2 The players

The Social Innovation Foundation is behind the *So Stay* model, and the satellite interventions linked to it. Its services are provided in 18 places (in the area of Gdańsk, Sopot and Gdynia) and there are three social enterprises in Gdańsk. In addition to 100 employees the foundation has a network of volunteers. Its work provides an excellent example not only of social innovation applied to the labour market, but also of a holistic approach to supporting vulnerable young people to gain sustained employment.

<sup>43</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I157384&lg=EN&sublg=EN>

The foundation works in close cooperation with the Gdańsk City Authority, which itself has a strong reputation for innovation in the youth employment field. For example, Gdańsk was a key member of the successful *My Generation*<sup>44</sup> and *My Generation at Work*<sup>45</sup> projects, which designed innovative ways to support youth employment and entrepreneurship.

In relation to *So Stay*, the city authority's role was instrumental in securing the premises, a formerly empty public building on the edge of the city centre, owned by it and loaned to the foundation for a 50-year period. The municipality also held the financial keys, working closely with the foundation to combine a mix of funds in a complex and ambitious project.

The financial package included ERDF funds combined with municipal finance for the building refurbishment. It also used the ESF, in a limited way, to cover the costs of professional sectoral training inputs from hospitality experts.

#### 4.4.3 Key learning points from *So Stay*

To recap, the *So Stay* model provided several key learning points for our network. A number of these reinforced points made by other effective approaches. We specifically identified:

1. The **importance of providing a holistic support offer** to young people – for example, here we see housing and employment being addressed, as well as other issues through the pastoral model in place in the Family Houses;
2. **All young people need the support of trusted adults.** This is particularly the case when they have not had the benefit of a stable home environment in their early years;
3. **Large institutions do not always provide the best nurturing spaces for marginalised young people.** In Gdańsk, the development of smaller, more supportive living units has been a key element of improved outcomes with care experienced young people;
4. **Young people lacking role models in employment often benefit from having tasters of the world of work.** This enables them to try different

<sup>44</sup> <http://urbact.eu/my-generation>

<sup>45</sup> <http://urbact.eu/my-generation-work>

options, and to gain a better understanding of what they like and where their skills lie;

5. **Learning through doing**, and having the opportunity to study on the job, is a powerful and attractive model for many young people.

## 4.5 The Glasgow MRC Pathways model

Glasgow is a city with a sophisticated and well-developed approach to supporting vulnerable young people into employment. It has a strong partnership model, supported through ESF funding, which works within a clearly defined strategic framework. Core components of this include a well-developed risk-matrix system that operates in schools to identify young people at risk of dropping out. This enables the partners – which include the schools, careers guidance and social services – to assemble appropriate support packages to address this. Another feature of the Glasgow model is the Activity Agreements programme, whereby young people leaving school without a ‘positive destination’ commit to a negotiated programme of support.

Glasgow has also developed a strong reputation for innovation in its approaches to supporting young people. One of these is the MCR Pathways programme launched by an individual philanthropist, and now operating in schools in most of the city.

### 4.5.1 The model

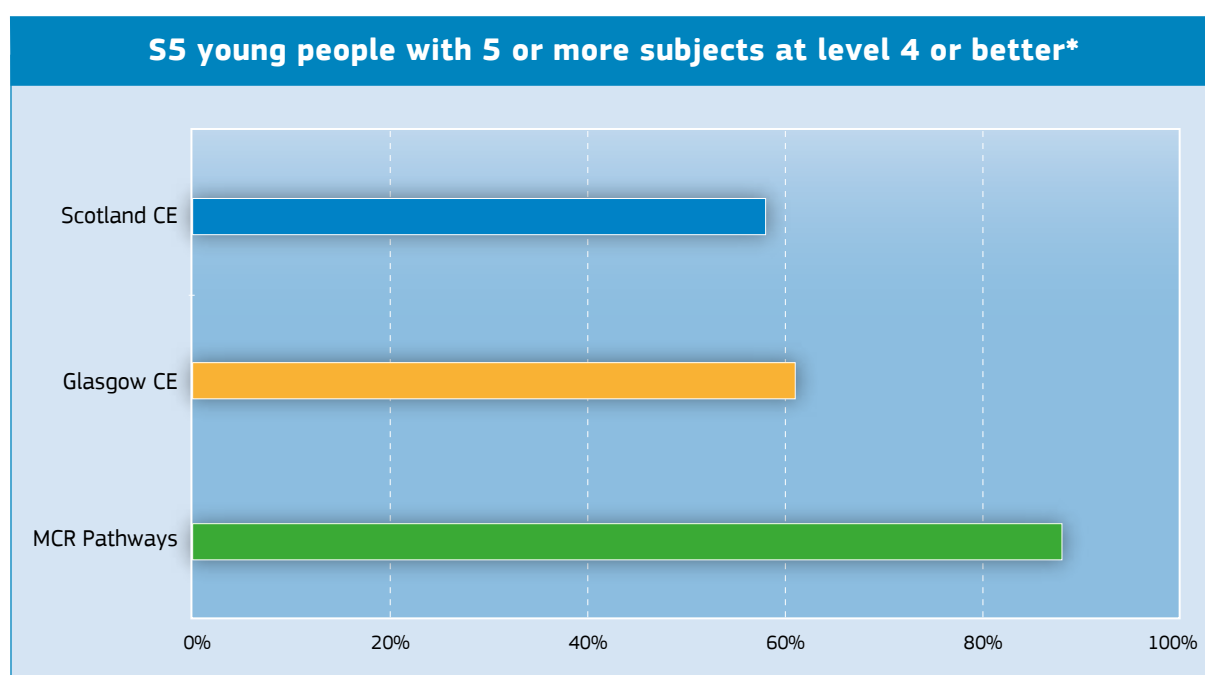
MCR Pathways is a support programme targeting vulnerable students in Glasgow’s secondary schools. It has become an increasingly important tool providing additional support to students identified as being at risk of educational underachievement and school dropout. The programme is primarily aimed at care experienced young people in the school system.

The core component of the MCR Pathways model is mentoring. This is complemented by group work, and access to personal development initiatives such as the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award.<sup>46</sup> MCR Pathways has also introduced a package of ‘Talent Tasters’ allowing participants the chance to experience the world of work, but in small chunks. In practice, these are three-hour blocks organised for small groups of students aged between 13 and 16. The programme’s latest annual report<sup>47</sup> notes that 264 young people had chosen tasters from a menu of 188 jobs showcased by 88 organisations across the city.

MCR Pathways has a Pathways Coordinator and nominated link worker in each participating school. It has been operating in 15 Glasgow secondary schools and

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.dofe.org/>

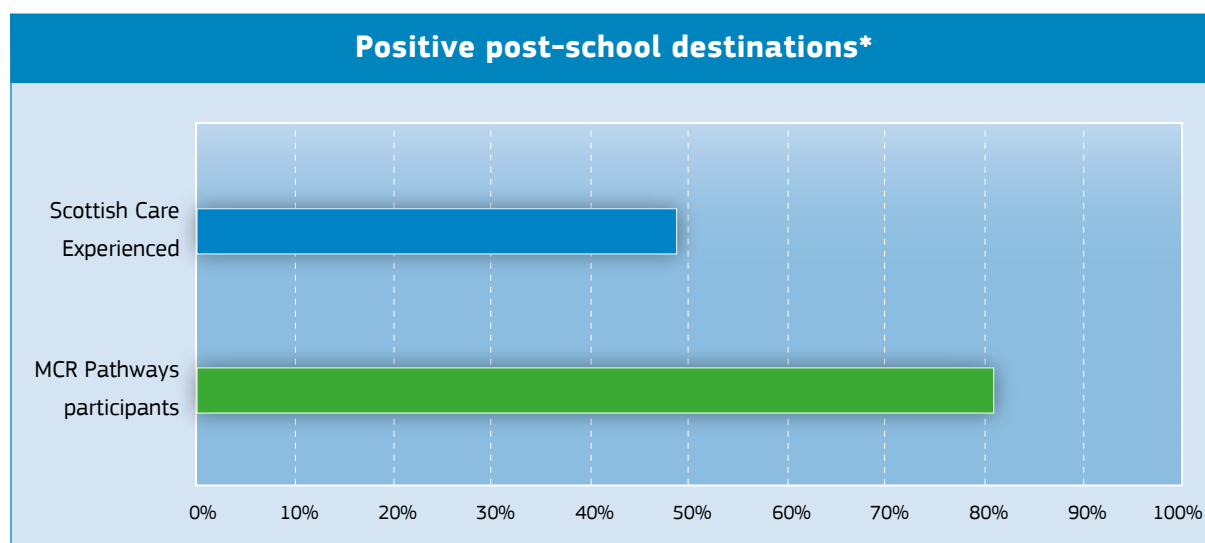
<sup>47</sup> <http://mcrpathways.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/GCC-MCR-Impact-Report-July-17-1.pdf>



\* 55 is students in 5<sup>th</sup> year of secondary education. See guide to SCQF qualification levels - [https://www.sqa.org.uk/files\\_ccc/Guide\\_to\\_Scottish\\_Qualifications.pdf](https://www.sqa.org.uk/files_ccc/Guide_to_Scottish_Qualifications.pdf)

Source, MCR Pathways Evaluation 2017





\* Defined as progression to university, college or employment

Source, MCR Pathways Evaluation 2017

has plans to expand into all 20 in the city. The programme does not form part of the school curriculum, and one of the challenges has been building good working relationships with teaching staff.

MCR Pathways mentors are drawn from a wide range of organisations across the city. All mentors undergo a Scottish Government Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) assessment to ensure their suitability to work with children. They also undertake a training programme to prepare them for their mentoring role. Meetings between mentors and mentees are always in public places, and mentors have no personal contact details of the young people they support. There is a Facebook group for mentors and mentees.

The mentor and the young person are carefully matched, and the student has an option to refuse or change mentor if they wish. There is no fixed programme of what the mentoring pair will discuss, and what is covered varies depending on the individuals. An online evaluation of each exchange is recorded by the mentor, who provides feedback to the MCR Pathways Coordinator. There is no mandatory feedback mechanism to schools.

The programme's objectives are to improve positive destinations amongst the target group. Data from the 2017 independent evaluation indicated very positive results, as the charts below show:

#### 4.5.2 The players

The MCR Pathways model comprises a number of key players, including:

- **MRC Pathways**  
MRC Pathways is a small not-for-profit organisation, which was established to develop and administer the programme. It employs a network of coordinators based in schools across the city, as well as a small administrative team. It is funded by a number of charitable foundations, including the MCR Charitable Foundation, the Robertson Trust and the Life Changes Trust.
- **Glasgow Education Department and schools**  
MCR Pathways began in a single Glasgow Secondary School. Following this successful pilot, it has extended across the network of the city's secondary schools, and it now works closely with the Education Department.
- **Mentoring providers**  
High-quality mentoring support is a key component of the model. As MCR Pathways expands, the need for mentors correspondingly increases. As its reputation has grown, a number of major employers in the city have supported it. This means committing 10% of the organisation's employees to assume a mentoring role, which translates to one hour per week of that individual's time. Employees do this during their working hours, and organisations are

increasingly recognising the human resource benefits of such arrangements. Employers already signed up to MCR Pathways include Glasgow City Council and the Wheatley Group (Glasgow's largest social housing landlord).

MCR Pathways is not funded through the ESF programme, as the West of Scotland Operational Programme prohibits funds being used to support interventions in schools.

### 4.5.3 Shared messages

There was much to learn from the MCR Pathways model. Some of the key points highlighted by our network were:

- **The importance of early intervention** – rather than waiting for problems to build up
- Again, **the value of a joined-up service approach**
- **The importance of trusted adults**, in this case working as mentors
- **The benefits of starting small** innovative pilots, and scaling up on the back of evidenced success
- **The power of mobilising local employers**

## 4.6 Reaching out to build trusted connections to promote employability

### 4.6.1 Introduction

In the previous section we explored two effective models supporting care experienced young people. As we noted in the concluding section, there are common messages from the Gdańsk and Glasgow stories. One of these is the importance of linking support services for young people, a theme we explored in an earlier chapter on integrated services.<sup>48</sup> Another is the importance of having trusted adult connections for young people. A third is the ability to anticipate problems, and provide support early, rather than waiting for things to go wrong.

Working this way is easier if you are able to identify and support young people within the system, as these two examples have. But identifying young people need-

ing support, diagnosing their needs and building that trusted supportive connection is harder when young people are out of the system – as many young people in the NEET group are, by definition.

In this section we give some thought to different outreach approaches, and in particular to the examples that our network has identified.

### 4.6.2 The importance of outreach

There is a growing body of evidence supporting the value of effective outreach activity. Correspondingly, evaluation messages – such as those from the most recent Youth Guarantee review – continue to identify weaknesses in reaching the most marginalised young people. This suggests that there is a need for more outreach to make connections and help support trusted connections with these young people.

Public institutions remain an important part of the problem. Young people with negative experience of officialdom – whether through school, the police or immigration services – tend to carry negative perceptions of bodies which represent public authority. They have higher than average levels of mistrust in relation to officialdom (as Eurofound research shows) and, as a consequence, are unlikely to actively come forward to seek support.

Most public services have been designed on the basis that service users will come to them. The architecture of their buildings – large, complex, bureaucratic – and their location – in the city centre – reflect this assumption. Their hardware is not typically designed for mobility and outreach. Nor is their software. A 2015 European Commission report<sup>49</sup> into PES Services' work with NEETs found that only three of them across the EU had specific teams providing outreach services to youth.

## 4.7 Challenges and responses: Four inspiring responses

This PES example illustrates one of the systemic issues facing effective work with NEETs, and one which is particularly pertinent to the ESF. This is that large traditionally

<sup>48</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/filedepot\\_download/865/434](https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/filedepot_download/865/434)

<sup>49</sup> European Commission (2015) *PES Practices for the outreach and activation of NEETs*: [ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=13728&langId=en](https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=13728&langId=en)

structured organisations are good at accessing complicated funding streams, but normally less good at reaching out to work with the most disadvantaged young people. On the other hand, organisations with the characteristics associated with successful work with these young people – agile, creative, community-based and client-focused – often lack the administrative and organisational capacity to deal with funds like the ESF.

So, what is to be done? In this section we share five short summary examples of ways in which agencies are building trusted connections with NEETs. Each provides a different dimension to the challenge, reinforcing the message that there is no silver bullet solution.

#### 4.7.1 Hamburg

With 3.52 million inhabitants, Hamburg is Germany's second largest city, and as well as having a city authority it also functions as an administrative Land, with its own ESF Managing Authority.

The Lawaetz Foundation<sup>50</sup> plays an important role in the city region's work with the most marginalised young people. In recent years, these have included new arrivals from beyond Germany, since the refugee crisis of 2015.

The foundation operates as an umbrella organisation for smaller project providers operating across Hamburg's seven districts. This gets around the difficulty small neighbourhood organisations face with the administrative burden of the ESF. It also provides coherence amongst services, which too often compete for the same young people, as Lawaetz encourages agencies to refer clients to other providers, if they are better placed to provide the right kind of support.

The Youth Active Plus programme delivered by Lawaetz and its subsidiary partners targets young people with multiple disadvantages. In Hamburg, these commonly include debt, homelessness and addictive behaviours.

The model comprises three related elements:

- Proactive personalised support to build trusted relationships with young people

- Diagnostic work to identify their support needs and to prepare a plan to address them
- Creating appropriate next steps which include routes into education and internships

Coaches are at the centre of the Lawaetz model. Based in community locations, they are the front line of the service. They work within 12 organisations operating out of 31 locations across the city. An independent evaluation of the project underlined that young people in the target group highly value having someone actively listen to their issues and treat them with respect and seriousness.

#### 4.7.2 Ghent

Ghent is a medium-sized (260,000 inhabitants) city in Flanders. It has an increasingly diverse population, comprising 156 different nationalities, which is relatively young compared to the rest of the region.

The city has a well-developed outreach model, run directly by the municipality. At the centre of this is a street work approach, where highly skilled professionals work within the community, operating from popular neighbourhood locations. Their primary role is to build relationships with disconnected young people and, in due course, to link them into appropriate sources of support.

The Ghent Outreach service is delivered through a number of elements, reflecting the diversity of the target client group. Four interesting parts of this are:

- **Neighbourhood Stewards** whose focus is particularly on the city's migrant community, and specifically the Roma population, estimated to be around 12,000. The team is largely recruited from within the target population, to encourage cultural empathy;
- **School Spotters** are young people recruited from within the community to operate as an early warning system, helping to identify young people at risk of dropping out of school. Working in the schools, these young people are more credible with their peers than professional adults would be. They are paid for this work and are also supported to continue the next steps in their education;
- **OpStap** (Step-Up) is an outreach service targeting young drug users. Specifically, the programme works with those who are not yet ready to desist from this

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.enfem.eu/partners/lawaetz-stiftung/>

lifestyle, and for whom becoming clean is currently unrealistic. The service is run from a residential property located in the community, where these young people can drop in, make social connections and gain support, if needed. OpStap also provides links to services and provides volunteering activities, as a step towards structured open employment.

The Ghent model is a good example of an outreach service which complements the standard range of support services. It provides a trusted outer face to those not yet ready to take the next step. Part of its role is to assess when people are ready for that commitment, and to ensure they are signposted to the most appropriate support source when that time comes.

#### 4.7.3 Karlovy Vary Region, Czech Republic

In Chapter 4, we showcased the work of Rubikon, supporting people with addictions in Prague and other parts of the Czech Republic. Here, we would like to share details of work specifically focused on marginalised NEETs in the Karlovy Vary region, located in Bohemia – *Don't Stay, Let's Go*.

The target group is young people who have never accessed the open labour market since completing their education, often living in small towns with poor transport connections. Frequently, they are young Roma, living in homes reliant on a combination of social welfare and work in the informal economy. There is little incentive – and limited opportunity – to find regular work.

The approach relies on coaches located within trusted voluntary organisations and youth councils with links to these young people. The model is most likely to succeed when the young people want to break out of the cycle of worklessness and poverty. One of the most effective tools on offer is the *I can do it* project. This offers complementary education at vocational schools or at integrated secondary schools established by the Region in the form of two-year courses. The aim is for clients to complete formal education and obtain an apprenticeship certificate. The offer includes boarding school accommodation, allowing the same regime as other students, a higher chance of completing the programme – and an opportunity to break old patterns.

This educational offer is complemented with business development support from tutors. This involves advice

and guidance on starting a business, as well as practical guidance on dealing with local authorities and business support agencies. Any business competence and experience is taken into account, and can be professionally accredited.

To date, 397 young people have participated in the project. Of these, 259 have completed the programme. In terms of results, 160 have gone into employment (82 standard jobs, 78 subsidised placements), 14 have started businesses and 5 have stayed in the education system to continue their studies. The model<sup>51</sup> has been recognised as an innovative and effective way to support a particularly marginalised and challenging sub-group.

#### 4.7.4 Estonia

The Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs, working in partnership with local authorities, has launched an innovative digital outreach pilot, targeting inactive NEETs aged 16-26. The aim is to bring them into the education system and labour market.

The approach has two components. This first is an information technology (IT) solution which will interrogate existing national databases to identify individuals who are not actively engaged in employment, education or training. Prior to this, local authorities could not identify inactive NEETs within their municipal areas. The second component of the approach is for social workers to use a case management approach to building a relationship and designing an action plan with the identified young people. A consistent approach will help data collection to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the model.

The pilot is under way and will run until 2019. The IT solution is in place and national legislation has been passed to ensure that data protection laws are not compromised. The data to identify NEETs will be aggregated from various national registers where each query is based on the respective inactivity criterion. Each participating municipality will confirm its commitment to making purposeful use of the data provided. Success indicators include the number of NEETs who have received active labour market services and the percentage of these NEETs who are employed after six months of having received the services.

<sup>51</sup> [http://www.zamestnanostkk.cz/?page\\_id=255](http://www.zamestnanostkk.cz/?page_id=255)

The pilot has a budget of €660,000, with 85% of the budget coming from the ESF. An initial evaluation will be conducted, with results anticipated after the conclusion of the pilot

## 4.8 Conclusions

### 4.8.1 Introduction

This chapter has addressed one of the consistent and ongoing challenges relating to work with NEETs. This is the difficulty in connecting with and supporting the most marginalised young people in society.

This is a heterogeneous group, which is reflected in our paper. It includes young people who, despite being the legal responsibility of the state, are often overlooked in these discussions. Approaches to supporting care experienced young people vary across the EU, as this paper shows, and too often these vulnerable young people do not achieve their potential. The policy approaches and interventions from Gdańsk and Glasgow, shared here, offer examples to share and replicate.

Young people from migrant and minority backgrounds can also be cut off from mainstream support services. This may be due to being relatively recent arrivals – for example in growing and diverse cities like Hamburg and Ghent. It may be because they live in deprived neighbourhoods where service provision is poorer. It can also be because they are from communities disconnected from wider society, like some of the young people being supported in Bohemia.

As there is no neat single grouping, so there is no neat single answer to this challenge. In this paper we have shared a variety of approaches, which are often complementary. Mentoring is one of these. Taking services out of institutions and into communities is another. And from these different approaches, we can identify characteristics which have already emerged clearly from our earlier Sharing Papers. One of these is the need to mobilise trusted intermediaries in building good connections with young people. Another is to assume an asset-based approach, particularly when clients have had a negative experience in formal education.

All of this remains work in progress. Most evidence shows that there is still much to do in order to reach



*ESF Youth Employment Thematic Network members visiting the Athens Digital Lab, 23-24 October 2018*

and support the most vulnerable young people in society. However, these examples illustrate what can be done, and provide inspiration as well as practical tips for transfer and replication.

In the sections below we identify the key messages for policy-makers and project promoters, to help take this debate forward.

### 4.8.2 Messages for policy-makers

We have identified five important messages for policy-makers and Managing Authorities from this part of our network's activity. They are as follows:

1. Check levels of awareness in relation to care-experienced young people. Are they identifiable in your tracking systems?
2. Ensure that you have good information on the interventions and outcomes for care-experienced young people;
3. Identify industry sectors where there may be the scale and range of employment opportunities open to vulnerable young people, and encourage links with these (as in Gdańsk);
4. Promote integrated service model approaches, and explore ways to encourage collaboration amongst project promoters;



5. Explore ways in which ESF funds can be invested upstream – for example to support at-risk school-age children – on the basis that prevention is better than cure.

#### 4.8.3 Messages for project promoters

Many of the headline messages from this work reinforce ones from earlier papers aimed at project promoters, delivering services to young people. The principal ones are:

1. Adopt an asset-based approach when supporting young people;
2. Build strong employer links and recognise the importance of employment tasters for young people far removed from labour market experience in their community;
3. Start small, when you are innovating, and scale up based on evidenced success;
4. Optimise opportunities to collaborate, particularly across policy sectors;

5. Gather accurate data and use it to inform young people's own stories of transformation.

#### 4.8.4 How can our network members use this experience?

These Sharing Papers are designed to shine a light on the effective work our network has identified and experienced. However, they are not an end in themselves. The real prize is to use this evidence to encourage and support change across Member States and, ultimately, to help secure better results.

We appreciate that despite the shared regulations, the use of the ESF varies from place to place, depending on operational programme priorities and differing interpretation of the rules. Separately, our network will focus on opportunities for improved transfer in the final year of our transnational cooperative activity.

*Study visit to the revitalised Kypseli Market, Athens, 23-24 October 2018*



## 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

### What have we learned about the challenges associated with effectively supporting the NEET group?

To date, the experience of the ESF Thematic Network on Youth Employment has confirmed many of the challenges relating to supporting young people who are NEET. It has shown the diversity of the group, and the fact that these young people often present with multiple and complex support needs. However, we have seen successful approaches and common patterns in supporting them to move into sustained employment. We have also seen common barriers to working with them effectively. These include:

#### 1. The structural challenges to addressing multiple support needs

The classic structure of public sector organisations does not easily lend itself to working across policy silos. Effective support for these young people – indeed for most ESF beneficiaries – requires a holistic approach that transcends these divisions.

#### 2. Funding limitations – how we can use the money and how long it lasts

Organisations supporting marginalised young people consistently tell us that the complexity of funding procedures, the limitations on how they can use resources and the relatively short timescales all limit their effectiveness.

#### 3. Linked to this – how we define success – the challenge of measurement

Many young people who are NEET are far from the labour market. In these cases, they require sophisticated support packages to enhance their employability. At least initially, this means that we should be measuring progress towards employment – rather than hard outcomes like jobs. Although much work is underway, there remains much scope to improve our development and recognition of soft indicators.

#### 4. The double edged-sword of competition and results-driven models

It is important to have evidence of impact, as the ESF is public money. But, as we have already stated, it is also important to work towards realistic indicators. It

is a question of balance. Currently, the focus on blunt outcomes risks encouraging providers to cream off beneficiaries who are easier to deal with, focussing on quick wins. It also discourages funded organisations from collaborating, as beneficiaries each carry a price tag. Knowing that young NEET people often need support from multiple sources, the ESF should do more to reward and encourage collaboration – rather than promoting competition.

### 5. Tackling the deficit culture – focus on what we can do not what we can't

Many marginalised young people have gone through life being told what they are not good at. In particular, their school experience may have left them feeling that they are not good at much. Organisations working effectively to support them often turn this around. They take an 'asset-based' approach which starts with the individual's interests and talents – and builds from there.

### Six key guidelines

What these good practice examples tell us for – policy-makers is:

- Encourage joined up approaches and reward collaboration
- Look beyond collocation to build truly integrated services (investing in culture change)
- Take risks and drive service innovation – within a culture of learning and reflection

What they tell us for **service providers** is:

- Adopt an asset-based approach to young people
- Listen to them, and adopt co-design approaches (or at least gather honest and open feedback)
- Work across sectors to create synergies and to drive innovation

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**6. Tackling Long-Term Unemployment through RISK PROFILING AND OUTREACH – May 2018**

This discussion paper from the Employment Thematic Network reviews approaches to risk profiling and outreach, summarises their benefits and challenges, and gives case examples.

**7. REVIEW OF THE EUROPEAN CODE OF CONDUCT ON PARTNERSHIP (ECCP) – Thematic Network on Partnership – May 2018**

The main aims of the review were to assess the usefulness of the ECCP, learn more about the challenges encountered in its implementation, and develop recommendations to embed the partnership principle into the next European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) programming period.

**8. FEMALE (UN)EMPLOYMENT AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE – November 2018**

This paper examines gender equality issues in employment (including segregation, the pay gap, entrepreneurship and care responsibilities), describes ESF projects which address it, and concludes with the ESF Employment Thematic Network's recommendations.

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