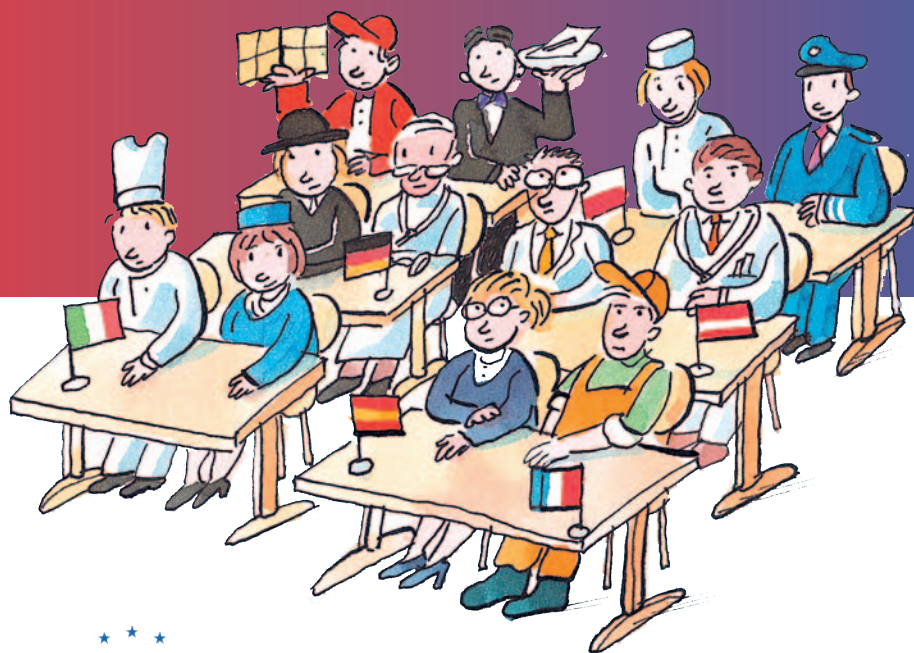


The Role of Social Dialogue in Fighting Youth Unemployment

Europe 2020 Strategy – Situation of young people
in the European labour market





With kind support of the European Union

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Executive Summary

Youth unemployment is a Europe-wide problem and has recently become an absolute policy priority all over Europe. In many countries, the youth unemployment rate is currently twice as high as overall unemployment. Often the first to be affected by changes in the labour market, young people are more likely to be unemployed in times of crisis. Insecurity in the labour market and precarious labour relations are thus a destabilizing factor for both the individual and society.

Therefore, one of the main topics of the educational programme "European social dialogue" of the European Centre for Workers' Questions (EZA) was "Europe 2020 Strategy – The situation of young people on the European labour market". In this framework, 20 European seminars were realized between April 2014 and February 2015.

The Europe 2020 Strategy defines labour market and education-related policy targets for youths – with a focus on young people with few or low qualifications and thus limited labour market chances. EU policies aim at reducing the number of early school leavers (ESL) and those not in employment, education or training (generally referred to as NEETs) as well as at raising the general level of education. An example for a Europe-wide measure is the so-called "youth guarantee": within this overall EU agreement there is a variety of different youth-targeted measures at national level (such as the promotion of self-employment, youth coaching or apprenticeship programmes). Vocational education might be one (but not the only) long-term solution to fight youth unemployment. Education and training-focused approaches concerning the dual vocational training of youths (i.e. combining schooling with hands-on training at the workplace) could be part of such a bigger, EU-wide strategy. Dual vocational systems that have been traditionally used in some EU countries (e.g. Austria, Germany) are therefore currently being discussed as possible 'role models' for other Member States. Given the lower

youth unemployment rates in these countries, the smoother school-to-work transitions of dual vocational training might help to reduce the youth unemployment problem.

The successful implementation of such education and training policies requires the involvement and commitment of all relevant players (governmental organisations, schools, enterprises, public employment services, NGOs, ...) – with the social partners playing a substantial role in labour-market-related education policy changes.

This report starts with a discussion of the current (post-crisis) labour market situation of young people in Europe in relation to the existing education and training systems. This first theoretical part was the basis for a number of presentations given and discussed in 20 seminars in Europe. The second part of this report summarizes feedback from these seminars and describes the problem and challenges. A concluding section develops recommendations for workers' organisations.

1 EUROPE 2020 STRATEGY

1.1 Introduction

The Europe 2020 Strategy, adopted by the European Council on 17 June 2010, is the EU's agenda for growth and jobs for the current decade. Given that the financial and economic crisis of recent years has challenged the social and economic progress of the EU Member States, a series of reforms is to ensure sustainable development in the European Union.

The Europe 2020 Strategy puts forward three main growth priorities:

- A) Smart growth: Developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation.
- B) Sustainable growth: Promoting a more resource-efficient, greener and more competitive economy.
- C) Inclusive growth: Fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion.

Progress towards these objectives is measured against five representative EU-level headline targets, which Member States are asked to translate into national targets reflecting the respective starting points.

The EU-level headline targets related with the EU strategy's key objectives concerning employment, education and poverty are:

- **Employment:** 75% of the population aged 20-64 to be employed.
- **Education:** The proportion of early school leavers should be under 10%,

and at least 40% of the younger generation (30 to 34-year-olds) should complete tertiary or equivalent education.

- **Fighting poverty and social exclusion:** 20 million fewer people should be at risk of poverty.¹

Note that these “targets are interrelated. For instance, better educational levels help employability, and progress in increasing the employment rate helps to reduce poverty.”²

Figure 1: Europe 2020 in a nutshell, EU actual status/EU targets

Topics	European Union actual figures 2013 (28 countries)	European Union target (28 countries)
Employment rate by age group 20-64, in %	68,4	75,0
Early leavers from education and training, in %	12,0	<10,0
Tertiary educational attainment by age group 30-34, in %	36,9	>=40,0
People at risk of poverty or social exclusion, (million)	121,4	96,6

Source: EC, Eurostat, Europe-2020-indicators;

<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/europe-2020-indicators/europe-2020-strategy>

(2015/03/18)

¹ EC (2010, 2020), Communication from the Commission. Europe 2020. A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

² Ibid, p. 9

1.2 Process description

This report is based on the IHS report *“Strategie Europa 2020. Der soziale Dialog im Rahmen der Jugendarbeitslosigkeit – Bekämpfung der Jugendarbeitslosigkeit in Europa durch berufliche Bildung”* and comprises discussion contributions and data available for the last few years.³

Between April 2014 and February 2015, a series of 20 seminars was held within the context of the training programme of the European Centre for Workers’ Questions (EZA). The seminars were attended by some 1,000 participants from 15 European countries. The participants provided the project team with interesting opinions and helpful feedback on the presentations made within the framework of the seminars.

In order to describe the currently difficult situation of young people in the European labour market and to derive recommendations for action for workers’ organisations – i.e. the role of social dialogue in fighting youth unemployment – this study relies on both statistics and research findings (theoretical background information) as well as the input of seminar participants.

The report is structured in six interrelated chapters: the theoretical introduction and mapping of the situation (chapters 2 and 3) offer statistical material and first insights into the current youth employment and unemployment situation in Europe. Chapter 4 summarizes feedback from the seminars, while chapter 5 discusses problems and challenges that have to be solved to attain the EU 2020 youth targets. Finally, chapter 6 offers policy recommendations for workers’ organisations.

³ As a consequence of including all important recent publications concerning the topics mentioned, the time series data presented may vary.

Overview of seminars held

11.04. - 12.04.2014, St. Julian's/Malta, *Innovative instruments to address Youth Unemployment*, UHM (Union Haddiema Magħqudin)

25.04. - 26.04.2014, Cracow / PL, *The situation of young workers on the labour market*, Europejski Dom Spotkań–Fundacja Nowy Staw

29.05. - 31.05.2014, Lisbon / PT, *Dual training system in Europe: deciding factor - youth employment strategy*, CIFOTIE (Centro Internacional de Formação dos Trabalhadores da Indústria e Energia)

05.06. - 07.06.2014, Vilnius / LT, *The role of the social partners implementing youth employment strategies in European countries*, LPS (Lietuvos Profesinė Sąjunga) "Solidarumas"

15.06. - 21.06.2014, Nals / IT, *Social Europe in decline? Strategies against unemployment and poverty*, KAB Deutschlands (Katholische Arbeitnehmer-Bewegung Deutschlands e.V.)

20.06.2014, Namur / BE, *Fight against youth unemployment*, CET (Centre Européen du Travail)

01.09. - 04.09.2014, Eforie Nord / RO, *The role of education in the framework of the Europe 2020 Strategy regarding stimulating the share of high education graduates, among the population between 30 to 40 years old*, CSDR / Departamentul Educare - Formare al CSDR (Confederația Sindicatelor Democratice din România)

05.09. - 08.09.2014, Nowy Sącz / PL, *The situation of young workers on the labour market*, Europejski Dom Spotkań–Fundacja Nowy Staw

17.09. - 19.09.2014, Zagreb / HR, *Trade unions and youth unemployment: Is education the only answer to solve unemployment*, Krifa (Kristelig Fagbevægelse)

19.09. - 20.09.2014, Guimarães / PT, *Youth Employment and the Crisis - Priority to Employment and Social Responsibility - The importance of the social partners in the framework of the Social Dialogue*, FIDESTRA (Associação para a Formação, Investigação e Desenvolvimento Social dos Trabalhadores)

22.09. - 23.09.2014, Thessaloniki / EL, *Vocational Training in the focus of the action of workers' organizations in view of the fight against youth unemployment - Reform needs, debates, perspectives*, ÖZA (Österreichisches Zentrum für Arbeitnehmerbildung)

08.10.-11.10.2014, Ohrid / MK, *Let's talk about the young generation, possible solutions and strategies for handling youth unemployment in the region and in the EU countries*, YHACM - UNASM - UIATUM (Union of Independent Autonomous Trade Unions of Macedonia)

10.10. - 12.10.2014, Radenci / SL, *Structural Changes in the Labour Market: A Challenge for Educational Systems and Young People*, ZD NSi (Združenje delavcev Nove Slovenije)

15.10. - 17.10.2014, Bad Honnef / DE, *Mobility of young workers on the European labour market*, KSI (Katholisch-Soziales Institut)

16.10. - 19.10.2014, Lisbon / PT, *The fight against unemployment. Prospects for decent work in a united Europe*, ECWM (European Christian Workers Movement)

19.10. - 21.10.2014, Cologne / DE, „Let’s share experiences - let’s swap ideas! What do you do against precarious work?“ – Exchange on realities and the effect of precarious work on young workers in Europe as well as on measures of workers’ organisations against precarisation in the world of employment, JOC Europe (Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne - Europe)

22.10. - 24.10.2014, Tallinn / EE, *Youth Employment Initiative - Creating Jobs for the Young Europeans*, ETÖK (Eesti Tööküsimuste Keskus)

03.12. - 05.12.2014, Milan / IT, *Good vocational training – a future for young workers*, FLC (Fondazione Luigi Clerici)

12.02. - 15.02.2015, Lisbon / PT, *Youth Employment promotion and social cohesion in the European Union*, CFTL (Centro de Formação e Tempos Livres)

13.02. - 15.02.2015, Toledo / ES, *Vocational Training in the focus of the action of workers’ organizations in view of the fight against youth unemployment - Reform needs, debates, perspectives*, ÖZA (Österreichisches Zentrum für Arbeitnehmerbildung)

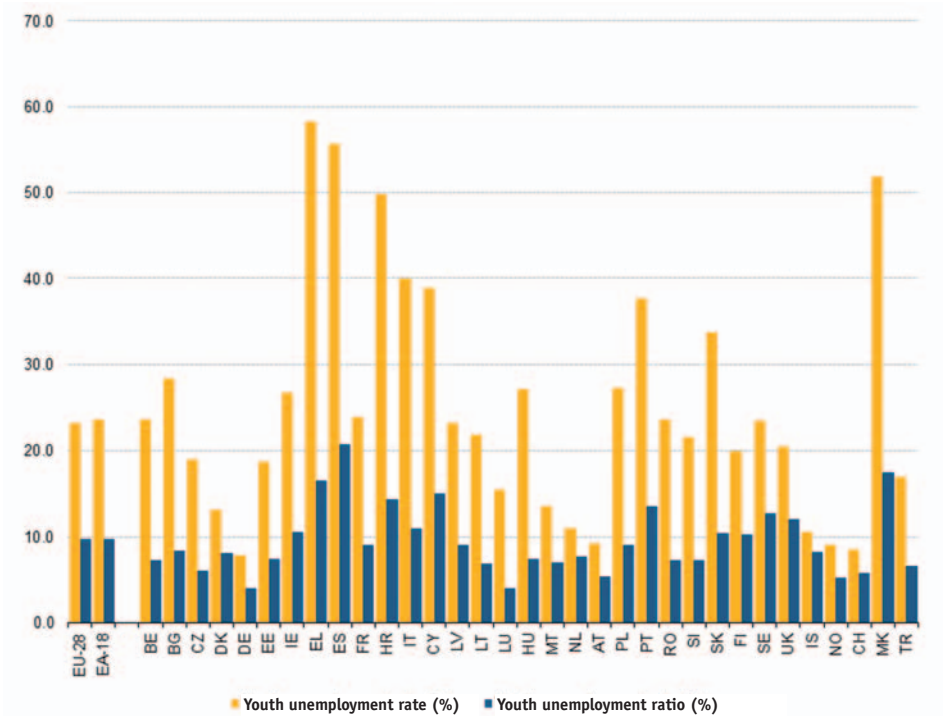
2 YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

2.1 Youth unemployment rate and youth unemployment ratio

The transition from education to the labour market is often not a straightforward path, but more diverse. Therefore, “Compared with people in other age groups, this makes the classification of the population aged 15-24 years into ‘employed’, ‘unemployed’ or ‘economically inactive’ harder to analyse... Eurostat publishes two different indicators of unemployment among young people: the youth unemployment rate and the youth unemployment ratio. While the former expresses the number of unemployed persons aged 15-24 as a share of the labour force of the same age group, the latter refers to the share of the unemployed within the total population of the same age.”⁴ The second indicator is generally much lower. For comparative reasons, data from 2013 are used in Figure 2.

⁴ Eurostat news release (Stat/13/107), Young people in the EU. The measurement of youth unemployment – an overview of the key concepts, p. 1

Figure 2: Youth unemployment rate and youth unemployment ratio (15 to 24-year-olds), 2013



Source: EC, Eurostat, statistics explained, Labour market and labour force survey (LFS) statistics [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Labour_market_and_Labour_force_survey_\(LFS\)_statistics](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Labour_market_and_Labour_force_survey_(LFS)_statistics) (2015/03/18)

The main indicator of youth unemployment is the **youth unemployment rate** for the age group 15-24.⁵ In 2013, the youth unemployment rate in the EU was 23.3%. It fell to 21.4% in December 2014. In December 2014, the lowest rates were recorded in Germany (7.2%), Austria (9.0%) and the Netherlands (9.6%), and the highest in Spain (51.4%), Greece (50.6% in October 2014), Croatia (44.8%) and Italy (42.0%).

The **youth unemployment ratio** is an important indicator, in particular for young people, as not every young person has entered the labour market yet. In 2013⁶ the youth unemployment ratio was 9.9%. The highest youth unemployment ratios were recorded in Spain (21.0%), Greece (16.5%) and Cyprus (14.9%) and the lowest in Germany, Luxembourg, Austria and the Czech Republic, where they were around 6% or lower. In 2013 Italy had one of the highest youth unemployment rates (40.0%) but a youth unemployment ratio of 10.9%, i.e. a lower ratio than Sweden (12.8%) or the United Kingdom (12.1%).⁷

The **third relevant statistic often used in this context** is the NEET rate, reflecting the 15 to 24-year-olds not in employment, education or training (NEET). About 7.5 million (13.0% of EU-28) young Europeans between the age of 15 and 24 years are neither in employment, nor in education or training. The lowest rates were found in the Netherlands (5.1%) and Luxembourg (5.0%), while Italy (22.2%) and Bulgaria (21.6%) showed the highest rates.⁸

5 The number of unemployed young people (15-24 years) divided by the working age population (employed and unemployed people). It uses the same standard definition as the unemployment rate for the population aged 15-74.

6 Last available data.

7 Eurostat database (2015/03/19); Youth unemployment ratio by sex and age, `yth_empl_140` (last update 2015/03/13); and: EC, Eurostat, statistics explained, Labour market and labour force survey (LFS) statistics.

8 Eurostat database (2015/03/19); Young people not in employment and not in any education and training by sex, age and activity status, `yth_empl_150`.

The above figures show that the transition from education to work is not just a “change of status” for many European youths. Instead it has become an area to watch, not only for the persons concerned but also for policy-makers.

2.2 NEETS

In recent years, EU policymakers started to focus their attention on the NEET group. “This group comprises persons typically aged between 15 and 24 years who, regardless of their educational level, are disengaged from both work and education and are therefore at a higher risk of labour market and social exclusion.”⁹

As explained by the authors in the Eurofound study on NEETs, “there is general agreement in the literature about the range of social, economic and personal factors that increase the chances of an individual becoming NEET.”¹⁰

2.2.1 Risk factors having an impact on the probability of becoming NEET

The results of the Eurofound study “show that the following factors have an impact on the probability of becoming NEET:

9 European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (ed.), *Young people and NEETs in Europe: First findings*, p. 3.

10 Ibid, p. 3. Note: The risk was investigated by exploring potential risk factors relating to the individual and their family background, using the 2008 European Values Survey (EVS) data, a large scale, cross-national, and longitudinal survey on basic human values.

- Those reporting having some **kind of disability** are 40% more likely to become NEET than others;
- young people with an **immigration background** are 70% more likely to become NEET than nationals;
- those with a **low education level** are three times more likely to become NEET than those with tertiary education;
- living in **remote areas** increases the probability of becoming NEET up to 1.5 times;
- young people with a **low household income** are more likely to become NEET than those with average income;
- **having parents who have experienced unemployment** increases the probability of becoming NEET by 17%;
- **having parents with a low level of education** doubles the probability of becoming NEET;
- young people whose **parents divorced** are 30% more likely to become NEET.”¹¹

2.2.2 Economic costs of the NEET group

Being NEET means wasting the potential of young people, but it also has an impact on **society** and the **economy**. The Eurofound study offers an estimate of cost related to the European NEET problem. “Spending periods of time as NEET may lead to a wide range of negative social conditions, such as isolation, insecure and underpaid employment, crime, and mental and physical health problems. These outcomes each have a cost attached to them, and therefore being NEET is not just a problem for the individual but also for societies and economies as a whole.”¹²

¹¹ Ibid, p. 3f.

¹² Ibid, p. 4.

The NEETs' lack of participation in the labour market in 21 EU countries¹³ costs two billion euros per week to their citizens. "At the country level, the most expensive bill in euros is paid annually by Italy (EUR 26 billion) and the UK (EUR 16 billion). However, in terms of percentage of GDP, Ireland and Bulgaria pay the highest bill (more than 2% of GDP), followed by Italy (1.7%). Conversely, the cost of NEETs for Luxembourg and Germany is quite limited (0.34% and 0.65% of GDP respectively)."¹⁴

2.2.3 Social and political dimension of the NEET situation

"The results of the analysis reveal that the NEET group, and in particular the subgroup of the unemployed, are distinguished by having less trust in institutions and a lower level of political and social participation. On this basis, empirical evidence confirms that NEETs, and especially the young unemployed, as a group are at a higher risk of disaffection and more likely to withdraw from society. On this basis, the concerns of policymakers about the implications of NEET status on democratic engagement is fully justified, as is the need for policy measures to re-engage the NEET into the labour market or education."¹⁵

13 Countries included in the calculation: AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, ES, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, NL, PL, PT, RO, SI, SK, UK.

14 Ibid, p. 5.

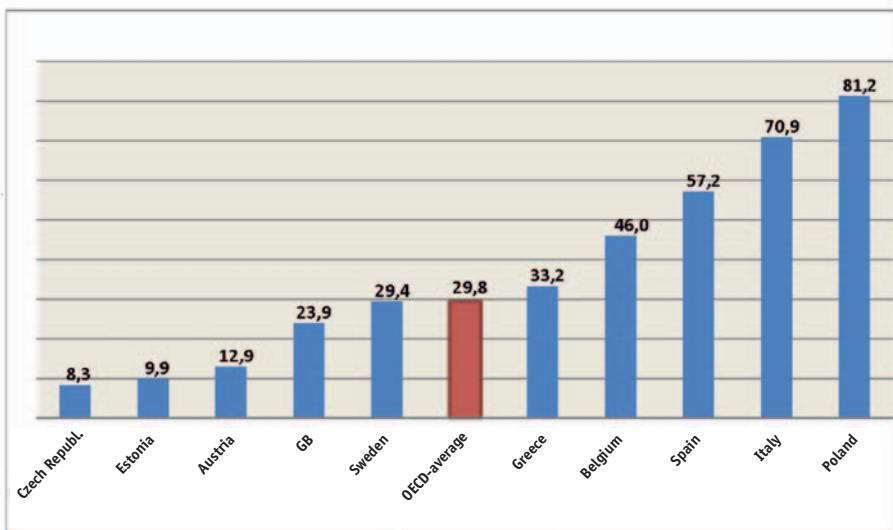
Note: The population of interest is the group of 16 to 29-year-olds. In this section only, the NEET group was defined as those who have been unemployed or inactive for a period of six months or more during the reference period of the survey. The analysis is performed using the 2008 European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC). Young people and NEETs in Europe.

15 Ibid, p. 7.

2.3 Insecurity for young people in the job market

What working conditions do young people face? The quality of work is defined not only by job security, adequate remuneration and training and career opportunities, but also by the existence of variable working times and a choice of full-time or part-time employment. Yet, a significant part of young people in the European Union works part-time although they would like to work more; they are stuck in involuntary part-time work. The figure below shows the results of an OECD survey from 2011.

Figure 3: Share of involuntary part-time workers aged 15-29 among total part-time workers (2011), in%



Source: OECD (ed. 2013), Education at a Glance, p. 333 (Note: For this average additionally: Israel, Switzerland, New Zealand, Canada and Korea).
http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-at-a-glance-2013_eag-2013-en (2015/03/25)

Although Austria, for example, is not among the countries with high levels of youth unemployment, some 13% of young people in part-time employment would prefer to work full-time. The above chart also shows data for Poland (very high at 81%), followed by Italy (71%), Spain (57%), Belgium (46%) and Greece (33%), all above the OECD average. Sweden (29%), the UK (24%), Estonia (10%) and the Czech Republic (8%) are below the OECD average.

3 EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE LABOUR MARKET

3.1 Early school leavers

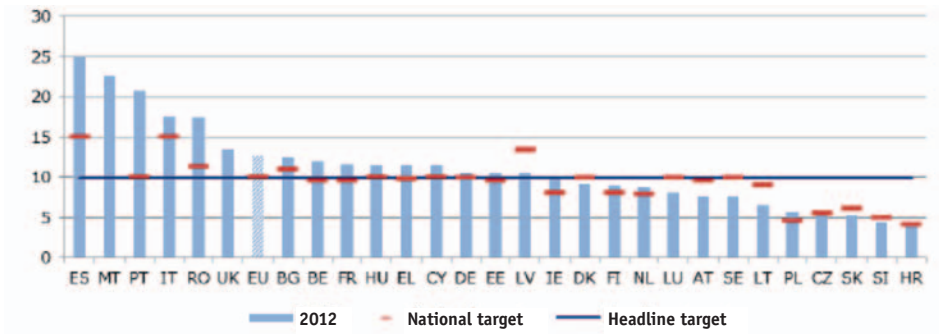
The definition of early school leavers (ESL) used at EU level refers to “those young people who leave education and training with only lower secondary education or less, and who are no longer in education and training. In statistical terms, European ESL rates are measured as the percentage of 18 to 24-year-olds with only lower secondary education or less and no longer in education or training”.¹⁶

On the topic of ESL, the European Commission (EC) states that “Early school leaving is linked to unemployment, social exclusion and poverty. There are many reasons why some young people give up education and training prematurely: personal or family problems, learning difficulties or fragile socio-economic situation. The way the education system is set up and the environment in individual schools are also important factors. Since there is not a single reason for early school leaving, there are no easy answers. Policies to reduce early school leaving must address a range of triggers and combine education and social policy, youth work and health-related aspects such as drug use or mental and emotional problems.”¹⁷

¹⁶ EC (ed., 2013), Reducing early school leaving: Key messages and policy support. Final Report of the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving, November, p. 8.

¹⁷ EC, Education and Training. Supporting and improving education and training in Europe and beyond, p. 1.

Figure 4: Early school leaving (ESL) rate 2012, Europe 2020 target and national targets



Source: Eurostat (LFS); EC, Europe 2020 target: Early leavers from education and training.

http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/themes/29_early_school_leaving.pdf (2015/03/19)

The EU has set the target of reducing ESL to 10% across member states by 2020. In 2012, 12.7% of all 18 to 24-year-olds had not completed upper secondary education and were no longer in education or training, i.e. some 5.5 million young people. The EU-28 average in the year 2013 fell to 12.0%.

The Eurostat results for 2013 did not change a lot compared to the previous year. There are large differences between EU member states: extremely high values were found in Spain (23.6%), Malta (20.8%), Portugal (18.9%), Romania (17.3%) and Italy (17.0%). Early school leaving was much less frequent in Slovenia (3.9%), Croatia (4.5%), the Czech Republic (5.4%) and Poland (5.6%), but also in Luxembourg (6.1%), Lithuania (6.3%) and Slovakia (6.4%).¹⁸

¹⁸ Eurostat statistics (2005-2013), Early leavers from education and training (code t2020_40).

The analysis shows that some groups of young people are more at risk of ESL than others. In most countries, **boys** have a greater risk of leaving school prematurely than girls. The same holds true of young people from a **migrant background**. They often display an above-average rate of ESL.

The EC's Final Report on the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving published in November 2013 finds that "ESL is higher in VET than in general education although good quality VET¹⁹ can be successful in helping many young people complete upper secondary education. Leaving school before completing upper secondary education is often the outcome of a **progressive and cumulative process** of disengagement. It is triggered by problems that can be related to the course of study, the school, or to certain health, personal, or emotional difficulties young people face. It can be associated with the socio-economic or family background of pupils. Limited access to quality education or to an individual's preferred choice of study may be especially problematic in rural or disadvantaged areas. **Structural characteristics** of the education system, such as inflexible education pathways, early tracking or high retention rates may also contribute to high ESL rates. At the school level, an unhealthy school climate, bullying or poor relationships between pupils and teachers may trigger ESL. Pupils who do not feel ownership of their education and do not have a voice in the school may lose interest and become at risk of ESL."²⁰

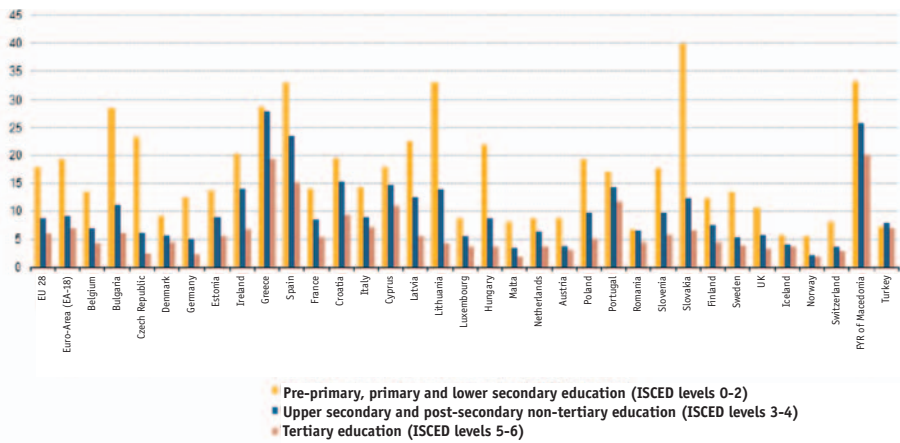
19 Vocational Education and Training.

20 EC (ed., 2013), *ibid.*, p. 8f.

3.2 The labour market rewards high educational attainment

Figure 5 shows the relation between youth unemployment and educational attainment on the basis of ISCED²¹ levels. In all countries analysed, a similar pattern shows: people with higher educational attainment are less likely to be unemployed.

Figure 5: Unemployment rate of persons aged 25-64 by level of educational attainment, 2013 in %, Eurostat



Source: Eurostat (data code lfse_urgaed); EC, Eurostat, statistics explained: unemployment and beyond.

http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment_and_beyond
(2015/03/19)

21 International Standard Classification of Education.

Obviously, educational attainment has a huge impact on employability, and the crisis has only strengthened this impact. The recent OECD data show that “On average, over 80% of tertiary-educated adults are employed compared to less than 60% of people with below upper secondary education. Yet tertiary-educated people, especially **young adults**, are not immune to unemployment. On average across OECD countries, the unemployment rate among tertiary-educated adults stood at 5.0% in 2012 (and up from 3.3% in 2008), but among **25-34 year-olds**, it was 7.4% (up from 4.6% in 2008). By comparison, the unemployment rate for 25-34 year-olds without upper secondary education reached **19.8% in 2012** (and even higher in many countries), up from 13.6% in 2008. These data reconfirm (in relation to the previous report) that the recent economic crisis **hit young low-educated adults hardest.**”²²

3.3 The “dual” or “co-operative” system of vocational education and training (VET)

The ISCED 97 defines vocational (or technical) education and training as “education which is mainly designed to lead participants to acquire the practical skills, know-how and understanding necessary for employment in a particular occupation or trade or class of occupations or trades. Successful completion of such programmes leads to a labour-market-relevant vocational qualification recognized by the competent authorities in the country in which it is obtained.”²³

22 OECD (ed., 2014), Education at a Glance. Multilingual Summaries.

23 UNESCO (ed., 1997), ISCED 1997, p. 26.

In some systems, school-based learning is widely combined with on-the-job training. Some countries, such as Austria or Germany, have a long-standing tradition of social dialogue in vocational education and training. Its importance is reflected in the high levels of upper secondary education attainment, graduation and enrolment in these countries. Through upper secondary programmes, students can acquire the skills, knowledge and practical experience relevant to specialized jobs, and young people can prepare for the labour market. Not only do VET systems vary greatly between countries, but even in those countries where VET education is an important part of the education system, its prestige is usually eclipsed by general education.

Also known as “dual” or “co-operative” systems of vocational education and training, these systems influenced by social dialogue are characterized by:

- “their links between work- and school-based learning to prepare apprentices for a successful transition to full-time employment;
- the high degree of engagement on the part of employers and other social partners;
- the opportunity for governments to share education costs with the private sector;
- the opportunity for enterprises to acquire a young, employable workforce and reduce advertising, hiring and induction costs; and
- the opportunity for trainees to benefit from highly motivating earning and learning situations, to take responsibility, and to develop personally and professionally.”²⁴

²⁴ OECD (ed., 2013), *Education at a Glance*, p.29.

3.3.1 Attainment levels in EU countries (VET programmes/dual system)

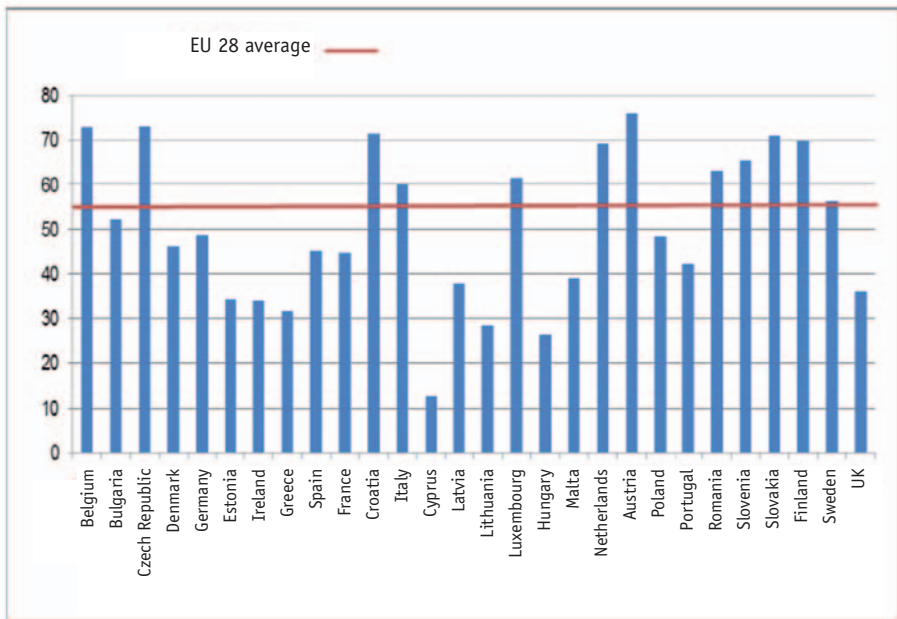
Despite the advantages of combined education and training programmes (especially providing potentially smooth transitions from school to work), apprenticeships and VET generally seem to have an **image problem**, at least in some EU countries. Nevertheless, VET is an important education path. In 2012, more than half of the EU's upper secondary students (some 50.5%) attended initial VET programmes. There are wide differences between EU countries, ranging from VET proportions of over 70% in Austria to only 13% in Cyprus (see Figure 6 below).

Apprenticeship-type programmes exist in almost all EU countries, although their setup is quite different from one country to the other. Only 27% of VET students participated in vocational programmes combining school and job-based learning, in which 25% or more of the curriculum is taught outside the classroom.

Countries such as Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic and Slovakia exhibit the highest VET rates in the EU, with more than 70% of upper secondary students enrolled in initial VET in 2012. Denmark with 46.1%, Germany (48.6%), and France (44.5%) are closer to the European average. Yet VET school attendance alone does not imply a combination of school and work-based learning. While nearly all initial VET students in Denmark (and some 88.2% in Germany) are in some form of combined school and work-based learning, figures in Austria and Slovakia (just over 40%) are visibly lower. France (with 26.9%) is close to the EU average but in Belgium – despite the high proportion of vocational students – only 4.3% combine school and work-based learning.²⁵

25 CEDEFOP (May, 2014), Developing apprenticeships. Despite their advantages as a way of aligning vocational education and training to labour market needs, apprenticeships are underused.

Figure 6: VET students enrolled in upper secondary education (2012) in %



Source: Eurostat, in: CEDEFOP (May, 2014), Developing apprenticeships <http://www.researchonline.org.uk/sds/search/taxonomy.do?jsessionid=310C312F455738506C9675E3D880003?action=document&ref=B37463&taxonomy=APP> (2015/03/19)

For several years now, European countries have worked to make VET and apprenticeships a more attractive learning option for young people. Countries have agreed to set up national common quality assurance frameworks for VET providers by 2015, which will also include workplace learning. There is widespread commitment to increase the number of young learners in apprenticeships – but also other forms of work-based learning. They are based on the recommendations of the European Commission in the context

of the Youth Guarantee but also (new) national qualification frameworks that help to raise the social status of VET diplomas and now allow for easier transition from initial VET (including apprenticeships) to higher education. In addition, an increasing number of VET programmes and qualifications are offered at post-secondary and tertiary level. Media coverage also plays a role as stated in the CEDEFOP report: Evidence from some countries suggests that promotion campaigns and skill competitions also help to increase the attractiveness of and enrolment in VET.²⁶

Nevertheless, image problems prevail since VET-based jobs in many countries have been traditionally associated with difficult working conditions, low status and low pay. While the Eurobarometer suggests that some 38% of young people perceive the jobs and careers that VET leads to as unattractive, “more than 70% of young people find VET attractive and useful for finding a job” in the first place.²⁷ While (already) seen as a good form of learning, it seems that young people (and their families who generally take the decision for their children to attend VET programmes) need to be convinced that apprenticeships and other VET training courses are an attractive option for entering the labour market today, as well as a starting point for advanced education and training.

Interestingly, new types of apprenticeships do not face negative image problems. In highly skilled sectors and jobs (which traditionally did not offer apprenticeships) such as ICT, sales, health care and renewable energies, young people and their parents are more likely to see apprenticeships in a more favourable light and as leading to attractive jobs and promising careers.

²⁶ CEDEFOP (May, 2014), *ibid.*

²⁷ CEDEFOP (May, 2014), *ibid.*, p. 3.

The **European Alliance for Apprenticeships** aims to increase the quality and supply of apprenticeships across Europe and to change the way this type of learning is seen. The Alliance brings “together public authorities, businesses, social partners, VET providers, youth representatives”²⁸ and others with a view to coordinating and improving different initiatives for successful apprenticeship-type schemes.

3.3.2 Example: VET in Austria

In Austria, vocational education and training plays an important part in youth education. “75% of all learners who have completed compulsory schooling are in a VET programme. Young people can choose from a wide range of mainly school-based or dual-track (apprenticeship) programmes (about the same proportions in both). These upper secondary programmes cover all economic sectors and lead to different qualification levels.”²⁹ The duration of the training varies in relation to the chosen trade and takes two to four years (for apprenticeships usually three) with varying proportions of school-based and job-based training. The apprentice spends, say, 80% of his or her working time in a company and 20% in a vocational school.

The Austrian system offers the following VET programmes:

- **VET schools** (berufsbildende mittlere Schulen or BMS): Three-year to four-year (mainly) school-based programmes (14–18 years, ISCED 3B) leading to qualifications that enable the student to work in a specific job and have access to regulated activities immediately after the final exam.

28 EC, Education and Training. Supporting and improving education and training in Europe. European Alliance for Apprenticeships.
29 CEDEFOP (2013/2014), European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training. Spotlight on VET Austria, p. 2.

- **VET colleges** (berufsbildende höhere Schulen or BHS): Five-year (mainly) school-based programmes (14–19 years, ISCED 4A), which lead to better qualifications for senior positions in business and to general access to higher education (Reife- und Diplomprüfung).
- Dual-track vocational training (**apprenticeship**, Lehre): From the age of 15 (ISCED 3B) in some 200 different jobs. Training takes place in a company and at vocational school. Workplace training is based on a regulation valid throughout Austria, which lies within the responsibility of the Ministry of Economy, but is largely shaped by the social partners. The school-based part comes under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education (curricula) and the federal states (Länder). Graduates can obtain further qualifications, such as the master craftsperson exam (Berufsreifeprüfung). This exam offers the possibility to progress to higher education, but it is limited to those courses of study in which the student has acquired professional experience.
- Programmes at **universities of applied sciences** (FHS, from 18 years onwards, ISCED 5A/6): These programmes are tailored to specific jobs and result in academic professional qualifications at higher education level (Bachelor or Master).

For older youths (young adults) in search or need of education, training or new job orientation – e.g. those that missed out earlier or do not have the skills needed in the labour market – adult learning programmes (adult learning/CVET)³⁰ offer another way of re-entering the labour market, accessing jobs or improving their skills. Qualifications can be acquired through specific programmes within the formal education and training system, programmes that build on prior (basic) VET or general education. In addition, there are

30 CEDEFOP (2013/2014), *ibid.*

programmes to prepare for the master craftsperson and foreperson exam or those with similar qualifications. Furthermore, a large variety of CVET centres offer VET outside the framework of schools and higher education institutions, some of them also awarding regulated qualifications. There is a wide range of tailored courses and a high degree of institutional diversity, with the social partners' institutions as a key provider of such services.

Although in theory possible at different stages, the transition from general to VET or between different types or sectors of VET can be challenging. Given the substantial proportion of work-based learning and the focus on job-related theoretical knowledge in each VET class, horizontal mobility requires additional efforts.

Yet, after successfully finishing a VET school or apprenticeship, upward mobility is possible. "Upper secondary VET graduates can progress to tertiary level studies either immediately after graduation or after completing additional exams (such as *Berufsreifeprüfung*), depending on the type of programme undertaken."³¹

3.3.3 The role of the social partners

The following short section will use the examples of Austria and Denmark to show how successful social partner participation in VET processes is and can be achieved. In both countries, the social partners have a long history of playing an active and well-integrated part in developing, setting up and realizing VET.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Participation of social partners in VET/Austria

The Austrian social partners, i.e. employers and workers' organisations, together with the two relevant ministries (Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Education), see themselves as co-owners of the dual apprenticeship system. This creates a strong partnership based on shared powers that enhances companies' willingness to recruit and train apprentices.

In the area of schools and colleges, the Austrian social partners are entitled to deliver opinions on relevant legislative bills, the curriculum etc. They play an active part in providing information on education, training and careers, and encourage co-operation between VET institutions and the business community. In the field of apprenticeships, they take initiatives to establish new types of apprenticeships (Lehrberufe) or to redefine existing apprenticeship profiles. In addition, they are invited to collaborate in compiling framework curricula for part-time schools for apprentices. Moreover, the apprentices' pay in Austria is determined as part of the industry-wide process of collective bargaining.

In higher education, the Chamber of Labour and the Chamber of Crafts also play a part as providers of diploma courses on tertiary level (Fachhochschulen = universities of applied sciences). It is an Austrian specificity that many universities (as well as Fachhochschulen) request the opinion of the employers' and workers' organisations on their courses even though they are under no legal obligation to consult these bodies. In addition, the social partners sponsor relevant studies and engage in targeted lobbying for the provision of additional resources (education grants, tax allowance for education,...).

Co-operation between schools, employers and workers' organisations, and public authorities to develop necessary and up-to-date VET skills is a defining feature of the Austrian dual vocational system – quite similar to the VET setup in Denmark.

Participation of social partners in VET/Denmark

The VET setup in Denmark is characterized by a tradition of strong social dialogue at all levels of apprenticeship governance – where various councils comprising representatives of all key players (social partners, management, teachers, students and experts) advise on major and minor issues of VET. At national level, the Council for Vocational Training offers expertise and advice on the structure of the VET system, accreditation of colleges and the framework for content and assessment. For education and crafts programmes, there are some 50 craft committees which set out (and revise) the details of such programmes (i.e. objectives, duration, structure and assessment as well as the distribution between school-based and practical hands-on training). The Ministry of Education has the possibility of appointing development committees for new jobs, which then develop appropriate programmes for training and education. As a rule, the (new) craft committees appoint local education committees (LECs) for each of the new programmes. The LECs advise the programme providers (colleges) in terms of planning the programmes and developing co-operations with local craftsmen and industry.³²

³² CEDEFOP (May, 2014), *ibid.*

4 FEEDBACK FROM SEMINAR PARTICIPANTS

This chapter includes selected opinions and feedback from the participants in the 20 seminars held throughout Europe. It offers a cursory overview and focuses on the topic of youth unemployment and education in the context of the labour market.

At the 20 EU-wide workshops on the above topic, there were lively discussions about current problems, challenges and possible solutions relating to youth unemployment, difficulties in accessing the labour market as well as the need to adapt and reform youth education and training to match current and future needs of employers. Speakers and participants exchanged views and elaborated on short-, medium- and long-term measures to tackle the problem of youth unemployment and provide smoother and sustainable school-to-work transitions.

While some issues and problems were revealed to be (quite) similar for all countries, others had more regional relevance. Perceived challenges varied to a certain degree with the countries of origin of the participants and accordingly, discussants did not always agree on the main issues to be tackled. Despite these differences of opinion, there was general agreement on the urgent need to find and come up with sustainable solutions for all young people in Europe.

Given the large number of presentations, contributions and thematic discussions in this series of workshops, listing all issues and specificities discussed would fill more than one book. Nevertheless, there were a number of issues that came up in all discussions and were felt to be of great relevance for all countries and by all participants. These have been summarized under the topics below, which of course cannot repeat all contributions but aim to capture the main thrust of the seminars.

Main topics discussed in the 20 seminars:

- **Transition of young people from school to labour market:** Given the ageing of the European population and the fact that Europe will have to replace a generation of workers soon (i.e. when the baby boomers retire), politicians need to tackle the current youth unemployment problem and transition from school to the labour market, which is difficult for many young people, from all angles. What was generally considered to improve the situation? The seminars discussed the following possible actions: (better) stimulate growth, create (more) jobs, work on better youth education, promote increased youth mobility, reduce school drop-outs and offer apprenticeship models to improve and/or smoothen school-to-work transition, offer up-to-date VET and apprenticeship programmes matched to labour market demands, provide efficient legal and fiscal framework to improve access, fair pay and working conditions, sustainable arrangements and longer-term perspectives. The last point was made especially by the European Platform for Young Workers of EZA which aims at attaining a higher profile and “being heard” in such processes.
- **Youth unemployment is both a long-term and short-term challenge:** Undoubtedly, youth unemployment has become a structural problem in many countries. The creation of new structures and work cultures (with the intention of reducing youth unemployment) will take time and is thus considered to be a long-term challenge. As a result, many participants pointed to the fact that youth unemployment needs long-term solutions. Yet, and in addition to long-term restructuring, fast-track approaches are seen as relevant measures to improve the situation in the short run, such as the Youth Guarantee, which aims at balancing current employment deficits by offering other ways of access to training and thus increases the (vulnerable) youths’ labour market chances.

- A seminar held in Zagreb by “Krifa” offered an interesting discussion and insights into the (new) role of unions. Under the title “Trade unions and youth unemployment: Is education the only answer to solve unemployment”, participants discussed the role of unions relating to access to employment for young people. Participants agreed that it should be a (core future) role of unions to ensure that young people are offered high-quality, sustainable and skilled jobs, both in the private and public sector: “The **creation of new high-quality, competitive and sustainable jobs** has to be promoted”. At the seminar, participants also discussed the **opening up of unions in terms of self-employment**. As in many countries such as Italy, Spain, Portugal and Lithuania self-employed work is promoted and supported by government as one of the measures against youth unemployment, the new self-employed workers (whose characteristics differ little from those in regular jobs) should have access to unions.
- Participants in the “Krifa” seminar also pointed out that improvements in work-related VET training can only offer solutions for countries that currently do not have dual forms of education and training or where job-related specific training prior to labour market entry is generally less prevalent. Yet, the creation of such (new) cultures and traditions of VET will take a number of years. Given the fact that this cannot be realized in the short run, **additional short-term preventive measures** may be adequate tools for reducing youth unemployment (or even prevent it from rising) in the next five to ten years.
- Critical voices stated that short-term measures to reduce youth unemployment such as the European **Youth Guarantee** should be **implemented with more vigour in some countries**. An example of a very successful measure, however, comes from Finland. The Finish model was presented in the LPS “Solidarumas” seminar in Vilnius. Another issue of the current discussion is that of funding: there is broad agreement that the EU funds

earmarked for the Youth Guarantee are by no means sufficient, and that the need for co-financing makes it difficult for countries to obtain funds for their initiatives. This criticism discussed in the Vilnius seminar was high on the agenda in other workshops, too. There is a general perception that the funds available for intervention and initiatives in areas where the need appears to be greatest are insufficient.

- An additional point raised was that of a **lack of social partner involvement**. Past experience has shown that ad-hoc policy actions to improve youth unemployment statistics do not necessarily yield sustainable improvements in the actual situation. What was also discussed was the (general) purpose of austerity policies and their impact on the often critical labour market situation that young people face today in many EU countries. Do austerity policies have a negative impact on the job situation? Do jobs get lost that later have to be re-created by means of a youth guarantee? Is there another way of dealing with the problem?
- **(Negative) Impacts of youth unemployment on youth but also society:** In the past, austerity measures, misjudgements by education politicians and drastic budget cuts (e.g. mentioned in Portugal and Lithuania) strongly impacted on young people. More discussion between social partners and other key players in the field might be needed to resolve the situation of high youth unemployment and the observed problems in school-to-work transition. Europe needs to invest in the **inclusion of young people** – one way being to increase youth employment. In order to avoid having a “lost generation” without prospects, countries should engage more, not only in the labour market but also social inclusion, especially as smooth uninterrupted careers seem to become the exception. Otherwise, there is a real social threat that increasingly unhappy youths – those that cannot earn a living, have their own home, have a family of their own, and/or contribute to and participate in new social developments – might become radicalized.

- At the seminar of the “European Christian Workers Movement” (ECWM) entitled “The fight against unemployment. Prospects for **decent work** in a united Europe” prospects for (more) decent work for youths were discussed. Presentations covered basic questions related with work from a philosophical point of view. The seminar in Nals in South Tyrol run by the Catholic Workers Movement (Katholische Arbeitnehmerbewegung Deutschlands, KAB) also looked into and tried to interpret “**meaningful work**” in the current European labour market context. What responsibilities do politicians have vis-à-vis young people? What are the responsibilities of the European Union? The discussion covered basic values in society, atypical employment, social integration and social security (for all, but especially the young) as well as the involvement and possible role that social partners might play in this important field.
- The same seminar discussed the fact that young people have to decide on their education and training at a young age, maybe too early to account for talents, preferences and personal traits that only develop later in life. How does this fit in with our current **education-focused society** and to what extent does it promote **equal opportunities for all**? What careers do such early choices produce? In Europe, young people generally face restricted access to university and many professional choices – entrance exams, quotas etc. Given the need to use all available skills to promote innovation, inclusive and sustainable growth as aimed for in the EU agendas, such restrictions might lead to a **sub-optimal allocation of skills and resources**.
- The main focus of the ÖZA seminar in Thessaloniki with the title “Vocational Training in the focus of the action of workers’ organizations in view of the fight against youth unemployment - Reform needs, debates, perspectives” was on the current and much needed **adaptation of education systems to new jobs and new labour market needs**. Which old job descrip-

tions are obsolete and which new ones have developed? What impact does this and should this have on the European education and training systems? Another focus of this event was on the **role of teachers in VET**. Relevant theoretical knowledge and skills in practical learning as well as good teaching skills have become a must. The important role of teaching, teachers and their training was also highlighted in the seminars in Radenci (Slovenia) and Vilnius (Lithuania). It is important to include teachers in the current change process, both in terms of obtaining their expert input and also in allowing them to adapt to the new situation and requirements – which involves not only their training but also the restructuring and (new) development of teaching contents and methods.

- The seminar “Let’s talk about the young generation, possible solutions and strategies for handling youth unemployment in the region and in the EU countries” in FYR of Macedonia evolved around the situation of young people in the countries of the **Western Balkans** and the role of the social partners in this region. Participants mainly criticized the bad education and training system in the region, where private universities act as “production sites for diplomas”. On the other hand, participants also criticized the fact that young people in these countries lack commitment in school, training and on the job.
- The seminar in Milan discussed **different education and training systems** in various EU countries. Under the title “Good vocational training – a future for young workers”, speakers and participants discussed region-specific vocational education and training. This problem is not limited to Italy – although the discussion often referred to the Italian case and its regional structure. Similar problems exist in Malta and Portugal, where national education systems exist alongside regional systems. The general conclusion was that living in a global world, education and training systems should reflect this globalization.

- **Mobility and migration:** Some countries, due to the small number and/or low quality of jobs and low wages, have no prospects of keeping young people in the country and/or motivating young people to return to their home country from abroad. In the “KSI” seminar in Bad Honnef, Germany, the discussion touched on the situation in countries such as Estonia, Bulgaria and Romania, where **trained workers and professionals** migrate to Germany, reducing the local pool of workers and **leaving a gap in the domestic labour market**. The problem that countries (heavily) invest in educating young workers who later leave the country was considered quite relevant, not only in the KSI seminar but also in the Vilnius seminar. The Estonian seminar on the “Youth Employment Initiative - Creating Jobs for the Young Europeans “ centred on the same problem, i.e. that especially young, well-trained Estonians leave the country (for Finland, for instance) since they do not see any prospects or future at home.
- Another main question that came up in many of the seminars was how to **attract migrated youths back into their home country**. The issue at hand is not only the loss of a professional workforce but also about visible demographic change related with such (currently strong) migratory movements. Yet, it should be noted that for some countries outward migration is not an issue yet, for example Malta. Few young Maltese decide to leave their country despite few job opportunities in the small, specialized domestic labour market.

Other discussion topics were:

- **Several initiatives to fight youth unemployment on a local/national scale between various partners:** Throughout Europe, there are various examples of successful initiatives to fight youth unemployment on a local and national scale. Initiatives combine various partners (companies,

schools, unemployment support centres, social partners, municipalities, public service providers etc.). It might help others to learn from such experience.

- **Co-operation between different organisations.** Successful vocational and education systems can only be created through close co-operation between the education system, enterprises, social partners, politicians, experts, youth representatives and NGOs. The huge importance of good co-operation between these key players was stressed in almost all seminars (as for example in Vilnius in the LPS “Solidarumas” event or Radenci in the ZD NSi seminar).
- **Information for young people:** Young people are often not (well) informed about job opportunities and choose study courses in little demand in the labour market. Problems with career counselling in schools were mentioned, for example, in the LPS “Solidarumas” seminar in Vilnius. Personal career counselling should already happen during compulsory schooling.
- **Threats and opportunities of new technological developments should be part of social dialogue** and be considered in the reform of schooling/education and labour markets necessary for better youth inclusion.
- **“Enterprise solidarity”:** There was an appeal from small and medium-sized enterprises that large companies should create apprenticeship positions that exceed their own demand with the aim of making skilled workers available to the small and medium-sized enterprises (as a kind of “enterprise solidarity”).
- **Guidelines for public procurement** should be installed; enterprises educating apprentices should be given the status of preferred suppliers.

Notes from seminars relating to the discussion of the dual vocational system:

- According to the Europe 2020 Strategy at least **40% of the younger generation** should have a university **degree or diploma** by the year 2020. **This target should be questioned** as a high rate of university graduates does not always lead to a low youth unemployment rate. By contrast, countries with a functioning dual system often have lower unemployment rates (e.g. Germany, Austria).
- **Image problems of apprenticeships:** In order to be successful, vocational training should be practical, recognized and have a good image. Nowadays, apprenticeship training in many countries (e.g. in Lithuania, Slovenia) has an image problem and is often associated with low status and low-paid jobs. Related with this, there is little of a lack of trust in the VET system. This explains to a certain extent why some countries have rather high levels of university graduates.
- **Vocational education** should be oriented towards sectors with **high future job potential**. Areas that should be promoted from today's point of view are e.g. energy, information technology, green jobs/ecology and the care sector. This was especially stressed in the "CIFOTIE" seminar with the title "Dual training system in Europe: deciding factor - youth employment strategy" in Lisbon.
- **Recognition of diplomas:** The recognition of diplomas is often limited to a certain region or to certain companies or sectors. This is a disadvantage in the increasingly global and changing labour market. VET should offer the possibility of tertiary education. The **transparency and permeability of the education systems** in different countries was discussed as important in this context.

Other points raised relating to different target groups:

- As young people often see no sense in their schooling/education (and thus lack effort), the education system needs reforming – not only in terms of up-to-date and relevant skill training and knowledge transfer but also in terms of orientation and teaching itself. **Problematic areas and groups** might need special initiatives, e.g. NEETs, the long-term unemployed, vulnerable or those difficult to integrate. With regard to **NEETs**, it should be noted that not only social partner but also street worker initiatives are called for. Nevertheless, workers' organisations could include initiatives for this large and growing vulnerable group in their programmes with the aim of preventing large groups of youths without future prospects becoming a threat to society. Adopting their causes may allow the workers' organisations to activate them as valuable members of society and members of their own organisation, increasing their potential as a secondary effect (win-win-situation where everybody gains).
- In view of increased mobility, melting-pot situations, high youth unemployment and high proportions of NEETs, broad public campaigns on youth are called for. They should comprise a reform of the schooling/education system, lifelong learning (LLL), a reform of the social protection system, a reform of the labour market, and thus create a transition space for young people (accompany, train, find job, help socialize, control) and increase employability.
- **NEETS and ESL** are an increasingly destabilizing factor with potentially negative consequences, e.g. poverty, social exclusion, extremism, social unrest. Besides social responsibility, individual responsibility is important – young people have to take initiative in order to tackle the transition from school to work.

- **Precarious work** (involuntary part-time work, temporary work, fixed-term contracts) is increasing and influencing young people's life planning and health (e.g. mental disorders).
- **Young workers** are often confronted with hardly decent working conditions, **social dumping** and **corruption** in the labour market. Information and solidarity are needed to prevent precarious employment and working conditions.
- Youths today face different **life trajectories** than in the past, remain "young" and in education longer, generally face more than one labour market and undergo multiple education-to-work transitions. Different social and cultural backgrounds matter in terms of expectations, both for youths but also on the part of society. Not finding a job "in time" may result in a long search, precariousness, poverty and exclusion.
- Young workers often lack the experience which older workers or social partners may be able to offer. **Communication between generations** of workers might improve the situation for all, as will informing labour market participants about their work-related rights. The second is especially true for youths in transition and unclear working conditions, who may not know about their options.
- **Workers' organisations should be open and open up for new target groups:** Given the new realities in the European labour market – with unemployment, precarious jobs, self-employment and atypical work forms becoming increasingly more common – workers' organisations should be **open to new groups of members** which are not part of the regular workforce. How to include workers from the above-mentioned groups? In addition, and this is a Europe-wide fact, young people are not sufficiently involved in Europe's workers' organisations. And those that do belong to

such an organisation hardly ever exercise great influence or hold higher positions within these organisations. This frustrates young people, as was especially stated and discussed on the EZA Platform for Young Workers' event in Cracow (Poland). There is a feeling that **young workers' interests are not sufficiently reflected** in the programmes of workers' organisations', that their voices are not heard and they have no influence on decisions concerning them. As a result, interest is low – which should maybe be changed if worker's organisations want to remain key players in the field.

5 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM AND CHALLENGES

The implementation of the above-mentioned Europe 2020 Strategy and targets (as well as their future sustainability) relies on the EU-wide realization of lower levels of youth unemployment, early school leaving and NEETs. Various VET programmes – engaging youth in the labour market from an early stage – might offer smoother transitions from school to work and into non-precarious, secure employment. Given the multitude of existing VET set-ups as well as cultural diversity within and between EU countries, it seems that **social dialogue** can be a means of promoting and realizing modern, forward-looking VET which will engage, motivate and support not only young people and their future employers but also the European economy as a whole.

What actual challenges and problems does Europe face in 2015?

Youth unemployment

Youth unemployment is a EU-wide problem and has recently become an absolute policy priority all over Europe. In many countries the youth unemployment rate is twice as high as overall unemployment. There are studies that speak of “negative effects of longer durations of unemployment” and “a lost generation”³³, which is why youth unemployment is undoubtedly one of the most serious and disturbing realities of the European Union – a reality that has worsened with the economic and social crisis. People with low-skilled jobs and young people are in many cases the first to be affected by

33 Appelbaum, Lauren, D. (2013), Economic and Psychological Consequences of Long-Term Unemployment, *Employment Research* 20(1).
Blanchflower, David, G. (2010), The wellbeing of the young, research paper.

changes in the labour market; during a crisis young people are more likely to be unemployed. Low-skilled youths, who even before the crisis faced multiple barriers to finding work, are now at high risk of long-term inactivity and exclusion. Even high-skilled youths face many problems in finding jobs or have to accept lower-skilled jobs.

Migration

The EU member states are developing an inhomogeneous way. In some countries, youth unemployment has reached alarming levels, forcing or encouraging a growing number of young people to leave their home country. Those who emigrate are often high-skilled workers from certain countries (e.g. Estonia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, and Romania). They are leaving for countries with higher wages and better job prospects (e.g. Finland or Germany). This process leads to gaps in the domestic labour market – the education potential is lost – and a problematic demographic development. So far there are only insufficient strategies to keep young people in the country and/or to motivate those already abroad to return to their home country. As a consequence, countries are drifting apart in terms of young labour potential, societal structures, as well as social systems and growth.

ESL, precarious work, lack of motivation and NEETs

The situation is even more worrying when it comes to the phenomena of ESL and NEETs. NEETs are a burden on public finances, a waste of labour potential and a destabilizing factor: they affect social cohesion, the future of the institutions, democracy itself and societies.

There has been a noticeable increase in the precariousness of labour relations, especially for young people: fixed-term work contracts, temporary work, involuntary part-time work with few or no social guarantees, internships etc. are on the rise.

The effects of being a NEET or working under precarious conditions are far-reaching for the individual, leading to mental problems, the inability to start a family, poverty, social exclusion etc. In addition, it is a “waste of brain power” Europe could use.

Other factors that de-motivate young people are a lack of respect on the part of their employers and bad (work) practices – e.g. when employers use apprentices as cheap labour and/or neglect their education and training.

Supply and demand in the labour market/counselling

Today, the link between education (acquired skills and knowledge) and the labour market (required skills and knowledge) is sometimes unclear or missing. Several sectors are facing a lack of skilled labour (especially skilled technicians) while in other areas supply far exceeds demand. Job vacancies result from a lack of workers with the right set of or sufficient skills. This mismatch of skills is de-motivating for young people in Europe because learning and seeking a job seem pointless if they cannot use the knowledge and skills they acquire at school or university.

Accordingly, it is crucial that education and schooling systems provide students with the right skills and qualifications – those that meet (future) labour market needs and will thus secure them interesting and adequately paid jobs in the future. Given the fast technological changes, it is a permanent and important task to estimate demand and re-orient vocational education and training. What skills will be needed in ten or twenty years from now? Some countries are systematically promoting education and training in specific areas (e.g. energy, IT, green jobs) while others still rely on past experience and labour market developments and might invest in areas less relevant in the future (e.g. farming and fishing).

Support and personalized career counselling in schools may also help youths to find relevant programmes for skills that are in greater demand. Yet, counselling is often missing or insufficient.

In order to meet the targets set by the Europe 2020 Strategy, at least 40% of the younger generation should have a degree or diploma by 2020. In countries with an effective dual vocational system (such as Germany and Austria) where youth unemployment is comparatively low, many young people opt for vocational training. The number of university graduates is relatively low. In contrast, in countries where vocational training is not very effective and where youth unemployment is high (e.g. Portugal), only few attend vocational programmes. With no jobs open, education is continued and the number of university graduates is much higher. As a result, and despite the fact that Austria and Germany fail the Europe 2020 “degree and diploma” target, they are performing well in terms of youth labour market inclusion and low unemployment. From this point of view, it seems necessary to rethink – and VET may provide the necessary “bridge” for a better and sustainable inclusion of young people in the changed and changing post-crisis European labour market.

Vocational training: quality, image, recognition

Successful participation in the labour market depends considerably on the quality of education and training received. In Europe, vocational education is offered on various levels and with differing outcomes in terms of quality. Yet, it is the quality aspect that matters, as (young) people choose a certain education to acquire knowledge that actually improves their career opportunities and helps them both at work and in everyday life. Prior and reliable information is thus the key to choosing the right education and training, as is the choice of programmes available. An inadequate education system is a big hindrance for young people on their way to work and self-reliance.

While some countries offer private universities (with varying quality of knowledge transfer), there are few countries that have developed an effective dual training system (consisting of a balanced mix of work in companies and education in schools) such as Germany or Austria. Yet, in the current European labour market situation, such systems have proven an attractive alternative to general education.

Nevertheless, the image of vocational education and training in many countries remains low. A young person who deciding on his/her future will only consider the system of vocational education if it offers noticeable advantages in the labour market. If s/he does not have confidence in the system of vocational education, s/he will tend to acquire a university degree instead, hoping that the labour market situation will improve in the next years, making this the right choice for a good start into the labour market (= “high-grade waiting loop”).

Some countries face problems changing from an old (and often outdated) to a new system of vocational education, although they realize the need. Teachers cannot cope with the new system, need re-schooling themselves, teaching methods may no longer be suitable, the content of education might be partly obsolete. In addition, the distribution of theoretical education and practical training might not be suitable and maybe both are not sufficiently interwoven, confidence in the new system and specific (economic) policy measures may be lacking. And changing from an old to a new VET system takes time, often five, ten or even fifteen years. Accordingly, other measures to fight youth unemployment may be needed in the short run (e.g. Youth Guarantee).

Recognition as well as transferability of knowledge and skills may be a challenge, too. In view of ongoing globalization, education policies focused on the region only may be counter-productive. In countries like Italy and

Portugal, for instance, the regions are exerting a dominant influence on vocational education: the recognition of qualifications and skills in other regions and the transferability of skills is not always given and should be developed.

Another weakness of some education systems is their limited permeability. This should be increased to match the multitude of transitions from school to work, from childhood to adulthood, migratory flows and the changing labour market which may require re-training or re-schooling.

The involvement of the social partners in the development and design of modern vocational education may also prove an added value. Yet, in some countries this is non-existent or insufficient – which might result in short-sighted educational and training activities without lasting effect.

Self-employment and entrepreneurship education

One of the European Commission's long-term strategic objectives is to support creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

Public awareness that the promotion of self-employment might help to reduce (youth) unemployment is growing although it is not yet very strong. Accordingly, (youth) entrepreneurship has been included in national curricula for vocational education in a majority of European countries. Nevertheless, the situation is not fully satisfactory: entrepreneurship is not included in all parts of the VET system and not linked to specific training classes or jobs. Where it exists, student participation is often limited and schools are not open-minded enough. Teaching methods are ineffective, with teachers not fully competent and the practical element of entrepreneurship often missing. Successful business people should be involved to a greater extent.

Youth: new target groups and higher positions within workers' organisations

Workers' organisations are working on behalf of their paying members, who are employees, often older employees. Many (unemployed) young people do not even know what a workers' organisation is about. Young people are not sufficiently present (and represented) in workers' organisations. From the unions' point of view, it is therefore difficult to include them in their activities.

On the other hand, young members have little influence in their organisations and their role in the social dialogue is limited. Important union functions and jobs are generally held by older men ("Old Men's Club"). It is a challenge for them and the workers' organisations to reach the target group of "young (unemployed) people" and to empower the young people within workers' organisations.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

6.1 Description of different fields of action

NEETs, ESL, precarious work and lack of motivation

With regard to NEETs, ESL and precarious work, workers' organisations have a duty to at least point out that some developments have gotten out of control. These issues and their potential negative consequences (e.g. poverty, extremism) should be part of workers' organisations' demands for policy action.

Migration

Workers' organisations need to offer activities/initiatives to accompany young people in their process of migration. It is important to find access to those young people and to support them both in their home and target countries. Workers' organisations should develop cross-border co-operation on this issue.

Supply and demand in the labour market/counselling

The European labour market currently offers an insufficient number of good/high-quality jobs for young people. Jobs for young people must be created, especially in countries with very high youth unemployment rates. It is the duty of workers' organisations to push for new and sustainable jobs both in the private and public sector. New structures and mechanisms need to be created, both in education and in terms of labour market access. Undoubtedly, a stronger economic situation would support these efforts.

Social partners should participate in the development of national employment and education strategies. As regards the development of vocational education systems, it is important to consider new trends both in production and services (e.g. industry 4.0) and the future supply and demand situation in the labour market.

Companies and organisations have to be made aware of the advantages of a sustainable economy and their social responsibility. Workers' organisations could play an important part in this.

In terms of output indicators, the Europe 2020 target – at least 40% of the younger generation should have a university degree or diploma – should be questioned. Given the current labour market situation, this target does not automatically result in a decline in youth unemployment. Higher education is an advantage but does not automatically solve the problem of youth unemployment. It might be necessary to rethink the role of university education.

Support, career guidance and coaching are very important and have to be included as core subjects in educational institutions. Early contact with companies (open days, events etc.) may motivate pupils to reconsider their career choices. Early school leaving may be avoided to a greater degree and knowledge of the actual demand in labour markets would increase and be up-to-date.

Vocational education: quality, image, recognition

Vocational education and on-the-job training is one (but not the only) long-term solution to fight youth unemployment in countries without dual training systems or where vocational education is generally not strongly developed. There are successful role models for vocational training (e.g. in

Austria and Germany). As the education systems differ strongly in the EU member states and transferability may be limited, countries may find it useful to start (and are starting) pilot projects.

Transformation processes might benefit from the inclusion of various key players in the education and labour market. Workers' organisations' representatives and experts might therefore be involved in the process of setting up modern, state-of-the-art vocational education systems strongly oriented towards the labour market. They might play an important role in this process and could offer contributions in the following fields: integrating learning and work (linking theory and practice; time spent in school/company); better interconnection/complementarity of theory and practice; change from old to new VET systems; orientation for teachers; the role of teachers; educating teachers – high quality both in the theoretical and practical part; new teaching methods/didactics; curricula/content of education; quality management initiatives; creating new or modernizing existing jobs; the recognition of diplomas; permeability of the education system; creating trust in the new system; changing mindsets on all levels (state level, school level, the level of young people, employers and workers' organisations); (financial) involvement of companies in the process of education. Workers' organisations can play an important role as intermediaries, by helping to identify current and likely future needs of employers and communicating them to educational facilities and public decision-makers (e.g. ministries).

In order to improve the image of and the trust in vocational education, a change of mindset might also be necessary. Awareness has to be created on all levels: pupils, parents, teachers, ...workers' organisations.

Measures to improve the situation of young people in the labour market

Together with other key players, and given their vast expert knowledge in this field, workers' organisations could propose appropriate national meas-

ures to improve the situation of young people in the labour market. Furthermore, they might monitor the implementation of those measures. In the case of temporary migration, workers' organisations can accompany young people and keep contact with other workers' organisations in the countries involved.

Examples of successful or interesting measures are:

- **Youth Guarantee:** In order to reduce the time young people are unemployed and inactive, member states should offer all persons up to the age of 25 a quality job, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed.³⁴

- **YOUTH ON THE MOVE**

“Youth on the Move” is a comprehensive package of policy initiatives on education and employment for young people in Europe. It was launched in 2010 and is part of the Europe 2020 Strategy. Its intention is to improve young people's education and employability and to reduce high youth unemployment rates. In particular, it should make education and training more relevant to young people's needs; encourage more of them to study or train in another country; encourage EU member states to facilitate the transition from education to work.³⁵

- **MOBIPRO-EU:**

In Germany the Federal Government supports young people from EU countries in taking up company-based vocational education and training or

34 EC (2012, final), Proposal for a council recommendation. On establishing a Youth Guarantee.

35 EC, Youth on the Move. A Europe 2020 initiative.

qualified employment as a skilled worker in Germany as part of the special programme “Promoting the occupational mobility of young people interested in training and unemployed young skilled workers from Europe”³⁶. The intention is that the young people will go back to their home country after being trained in Germany.

- **Measures of the “Austria Youth Strategy”**

The Youth Strategy of the Federal Ministry of Families and Youth is a process designed to strengthen and develop youth policies throughout Austria.³⁷

- “Future for the Youth”: Offers young people from 19 to 24 for instance intensified job placement and counselling from the Public Employment Service, (re-)training, (up-)skilling or special employment subsidies. Young unemployed persons are to be given a job, (re-)training/(up-)skilling or subsidized employment within three months.
- “Youth coaching”: The aim is to provide guidance and support for young people who are facing difficulties in continuing or choosing their education paths or have already dropped out of the education system/labour market. It is an important measure with regard to early intervention (gate-keeping function) as well as activation and (re-)integration.
- “Apprenticeship coaching” and measures aimed at apprentices: Apprentices as well as their employers can request supportive coaching, which provides assistance and advice during on-the-job training. The aim is to avoid young people from dropping out. Qualified coaches have

³⁶ Federal Ministry of Education and Research (ed.), MOBIPRO-EU.

³⁷ Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan Austria.

initial talks with apprentices, identify prospects and mediate where required. Moreover, they support apprentices in their preparation for the final exams.

- “Ready for education and training”: Many young people are lacking basic qualifications and social skills or are confronted with health, financial or family problems, which keep them from starting a regular education or work. This is why a comprehensive low-threshold offer was developed. It aims at (re-)integrating young people into the education system or labour market by offering individual promotion. Cornerstones are: traineeships in companies, coaching for those who need socio-pedagogical services, provision of basic knowledge and qualification in teaching through creativity as well as sports and pedagogical offers.
- “Production schools”: The goal is to stabilize young people, increase their motivation, provide specialist knowledge and basic skills. They are mainly targeted at young people between 15 and 19, but are also open to young people up to the age of 25 who have difficulties in finding a job.
- “Training guarantee”: This guarantee ensures everyone up to the age of 18, socially disadvantaged youths, slow learners and increasingly also education drop-outs and young adults up to the age of 24 an apprenticeship position. If someone is not able to find an apprenticeship position in a company, s/he can enter an apprenticeship programme in a supra-company apprenticeship training facility. This form of apprenticeship including final exam corresponds completely to that of a company-based apprenticeship.³⁸

³⁸ As of December 2013, there were approx. 9.000 students enrolled in the supra-company apprenticeship training, which corresponds to 7.6% of all apprentices in Austria.

- **Promotion of self-employment**

In many countries (e.g. Spain and Portugal) self-employment is promoted by national governments as a measure to give young people a prospect and reduce youth unemployment. The aim here is to create jobs and self-employed work with products and services that have a high quality and are competitive in the European market. Difficulties (e.g. bureaucracy, funding) and prospects should be assessed realistically.

- **Entrepreneurship education**

It is important to start early (that is in primary school) and pursue every level of education – this kind of thinking can be useful both in work and private life.

Youth: new target groups and higher positions within workers' organisations

Most importantly, young people themselves have to play a major role in the (future) development of society. Accordingly, the participation of young people and their role in the social dialogue in workers' organisations has to be improved. Workers' organisations need to open up to new target groups (e.g. non-paying members such as the unemployed). New structures and instruments (e.g. new media tools) have to be developed to encourage membership and to support young people in their labour market activities. Workers' organisations could temporarily offer assistance without immediately asking for a membership fee.

Young people should not only be able to express their needs and contribute their perspective – which often differs considerably from those of older members of workers' organisations – but should also be enabled and promoted to hold high and powerful positions within workers' organisations.

6.2 Summary of recommendations for workers' organisation action

Based on the different fields of action, the following recommendations for workers' organisations can be summarized under four items:

- Stakeholder co-operation
- Assistance to young people
- VET challenges and development and
- Organisational development of workers' organisations.

Topic	Recommendation(s) for action
Stakeholder co-operation	
Co-operation of all stakeholders	Work on cooperation of all stakeholders; foster and support local initiatives; copy (or adapt) successful strategies.
Supply and demand in the labour market	<p>Push for developments that may help to create new and sustainable jobs for young people in both the private and public sector.</p> <p>Account for new developments in technology both in the reform of schooling/education and in the reform of labour markets; anticipate changes.</p>
Mismatch of skills	<p>Offer support and expertise on modernization or introduction of dual VET programmes; co-ordination of labour market needs and education programmes.</p> <p>Questioning the Europe 2020 target for the 40% tertiary educational attainment.</p> <p>Enriching the 40% Europe 2020 tertiary educational attainment by adding other relevant indicators such as VET proportion in the education system.</p>
Education and employment measures	Propose global, national and local measures targeted to improve the situation of young people in the labour market: e.g. youth guarantee, youth coaching, promotion of self-employment.
NEETs, ESL, precarious work	<p>Workers' organisations' suggestions and recommendations should comprise these issues and offer campaigns, initiatives and possible solutions.</p> <p>Inform on, transfer or adapt successful training and youth labour market integration measures; target vulnerable groups.</p>
Counselling, career guidance	Foster co-operation between key players in this field (governmental organisations, schools, companies, public employment services, NGOs, ...) and workers' organisations in order to improve the support and career guidance for young people.

Assistance to young people	
Counselling, career guidance	Inform young people about jobs in demand and thus sensible schooling choices; support choices by offering up-to-date and relevant (VET) programmes.
Better information	Inform youths and young workers about basic rights relating to job, work and the labour market and social system.
Motivation of young people	Increase motivation and effort of young people by informing them and integrating them in the process (give them a say).
Migration	Accompany young people in their process of migration.
VET challenges and development	
Vocational education: quality	Involvement in the process of setting up vocational education (curricula, role/education of teachers, role of enterprises, apprenticeship contracts etc.).
Vocational education: recognition, permeability and transparency	Participation in recognition of diplomas, permeability and transparency of education systems. Given greater mobility and a more diverse work force: work on relevance and transferability of acquired knowledge and labour market skills.
Vocational education: pay, working conditions	Include these issues in collective bargaining/ agreements.
Vocational education: image and trust	Promote awareness on all levels: students, parents, teachers and society. Create trust in the VET system.
Organisational development of workers' organisations	
New target groups	Open up workers' organisations to new target groups: more youths, unemployed, self-employed people.
Positions in workers' organisations	Give young people a say; empower young people for high-er positions in workers' organisations.

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