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Guiding at-risk youth through learning to work

Lessons from across Europe

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Guiding at-risk youth through learning to work

Lessons from across Europe

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Foreword

This Cedefop study is placed in the context of the European economy gradually starting to recover in 2010 from the deepest recession since the 1930s. To overcome the crisis and to stimulate the economy, the EU budget 2010 provides funds to boost the recovery, to improve labour market activity and to increase overall EU competitiveness. However, parallel to the recovering economy, Europe will have to deal with the consequences of the crisis, such as an increased level of youth unemployment as well as the subsequent difficulties young people face in entering a labour market that remains somewhat unstable and turbulent.

Statistics suggest that national labour markets are not easily accessible for young people/youth at risk. Since the first quarter of 2008, in the wake of the global economic crisis, unemployment – especially for young people – has increased sharply in the EU. In November 2009 ⁽¹⁾, youth unemployment (under-25s) was 21.4 % in the EU-27 compared to 16.6 % a year earlier (November 2008). At the same time, the level of early school leavers remains high (15.2 % in 2007) ⁽²⁾.

It is clear that no country can respond to the crisis in isolation as even the best national policies are likely to prove less effective without policy coordination and cooperation between countries. Young people should be an integral element in national and European education, training, employment and social policies. It is not only justified but also efficient to invest in young people in order to support their social inclusion, active participation in lifelong learning and smooth integration into working life.

In response to this crisis situation, policy-makers should utilise targeted interventions that provide support for young people to complete their education and training and to become easily integrated into the labour market. Work towards developing more open and flexible lifelong learning systems that engage all youngsters in formal, non-formal and informal settings should be fostered to

⁽¹⁾ Eurostat Newsrelease 5/2010 (8.1.2010):
http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/3-08012010-AP/EN/3-08012010-AP-EN.PDF

⁽²⁾ EU labour force survey (the latest EU-level statistical data on early school leavers is from 2007):
http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/userfiles/115_Early%20school%20leavers_2009-07-20.xls

remove obstacles to their employment and employability during the economic crisis. It is also of paramount importance to promote careers guidance as well as better interaction between education providers, labour market institutions, social partners, service users and national authorities.

This Cedefop study draws attention to guidance measures and initiatives applied across Europe to support school completion and education-to-work transitions of young people at the risk of dropping out of mainstream education and training. One of the core messages from the report is that coordinated approaches must be combined with outreach work to identify and reach those individuals who are in most urgent need of support (hardest-to-help groups). The partnership between different parties needs to be based on mutual trust and respect but also needs to place the interests of the young people first. In this setting, guidance professionals and teaching staff providing guidance services should learn how to establish a good working relationship with the at-risk youth. Further, parental involvement together with competent teachers, guidance practitioners, youth and social workers, and health care providers, is the backbone of support in the young person's transition process.

We trust that this report will inspire future action in the Member States on improving guidance service provision to support at-risk youth's smooth transition from adolescence into meaningful adulthood, with career and learning opportunities, partnership and parenthood, financial and residential independence.

Aviana Bulgarelli
Director of Cedefop

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Executive summary

Nine out of ten new jobs in Europe will require medium or high level qualifications, yet one in seven young people leaves formal education without completing the upper secondary level (Cedefop, 2008a). Alongside this skills mismatch, fundamental changes are taking place in terms of economic activity, job and career patterns, and education systems. As a result, young people in Europe face increasing uncertainty and have a greater need for high quality information and guidance services. These services are particularly important for at-risk groups.

This Cedefop report presents the findings of a study carried out in 2009 on guidance policies and practices in Europe that support young people at risk. Specifically, the report examines guidance measures (formal, informal and non-formal guidance) that aim to support school completion, those which aid reintegration of disengaged young people, and measures to ease the transition of the young from school to work. The study takes account of both mainstream provision and specific projects which fall within the definition of guidance adopted by the Council of the European Union (*Resolution of the Council ...*, 2004).

This research has shown that reforms have taken, and are taking, place across Europe to transform education and training systems, to meet better the needs of young people who have already dropped out or are at risk of doing so. Such reforms have included, for example, the creation of alternative learning options, the development of more comprehensive and tailored delivery methods, widening choices, providing better and more targeted support, addressing barriers to participation, and making practical changes such as tracking young people more effectively. These reforms appear to be making a difference as official statistics indicate that the number of early school leavers in Europe is declining, albeit at a much slower pace than anticipated (see footnote 2 in the Foreword).

While successful practice has been identified, more needs to be done, not least due to the high costs associated with early school leaving. The analysis suggests that coordination, a strategic overview, and long-term, sustainable, funding are often missing and are too focused on project-based approaches. There is growing recognition that effective practice in efforts to prevent early school leaving comprises a professional approach, joined-up structures, personalised guidance, and thinking 'outside the box' when considering ways of supporting young people in their transition from education to the world of work.

Such approaches need to be combined with outreach work to identify and reach those in most urgent need of support (hardest-to-help groups).

Guidance is an indispensable ingredient in any policy that seeks to speed up the education-to-work transition. Successful guidance policies take into consideration the specific situation of each individual and recognise that early school leavers are a heterogeneous group, from diverse backgrounds and with varied needs and aspirations. While access to professional guidance should be made available to all, it is particularly important for at-risk groups. Further, the role of guidance provided through informal and non-formal routes (by family members, friends, peers, tutors, mentors, etc.) cannot be underestimated, especially in the absence of professional guidance.

Guidance professionals and other front-line staff working with at-risk groups have a challenging job in learning how to establish with young people a professional partnership, based on mutual trust and respect but placing the interests of the individual young person first. Front-line support staff need to be appropriately selected, trained, coordinated and then supported continuously.

Involving parents in their children's education and development is beneficial, for the child, the parent, the school and the wider community. Support for children to achieve at school decreases the likelihood that they will disengage and, in many cases, establishes a solid foundation for learning throughout life.

A multi-agency approach is central to effective delivery of career guidance and personal, social and academic support for young people. It also prevents the chances of young people 'slipping through the net', or missing out on support appropriate to their needs due to lack of coordination across the range of support services offered. Another key ingredient of successful guidance policies targeting at-risk groups is the involvement of young people in designing such policies and approaches.

Successful preventive approaches take a long-term view, are systematic, comprehensive and adequately targeted, funded and resourced. Early interventions, as soon as signs of difficulties are detected, are critical to avoid the cumulative development of problems. Effective preventive approaches also focus on guiding young people through key transition points. Area-based approaches have the potential for reducing the level of early school leaving, although funding too often tends to be spread too thinly to make a real impact.

The reintegration of a young, disengaged person into mainstream education, training or employment begins with an assessment of their needs and aspirations. The process then continues with their participation in learning and continuous review of their progress through to employment. It is important that

the journey does not end when the young person enters employment but that support is received through to their first steps in the mainstream.

The education-to-work transition comprises two interrelated elements that help young people take career decisions: the development of career management skills and the opportunity to familiarise oneself with the world of work. This second aspect is important for all young people, though particularly so for those who have been disengaged.

There has been a transformation and expansion in guidance delivery mechanisms and options. These now range from multi-agency service centres addressing the guidance needs of young people in a holistic manner, to sophisticated, integrated online information and communication tools. Careers information alone is sufficient for many but this is not the case for most disaffected young people, who need to be supported in a more holistic manner.

This Cedefop study suggests that young people need to be empowered through a relationship which sees them as resourceful individuals. Practitioners have an important role to play in promoting high expectations, as career aspirations developed during teenage-years can have lifelong significance. It is important to recruit, and support the continuous development of, talented and committed individuals for such roles.

Guidance should not be seen as one of many approaches to supporting transition: it should be seen as an integral part of any approach to tackling this problem and it is important that guidance moves from implicit to explicit policy response. It should also be seen as a continuum: guidance is not about supporting a young person at a specific point in their life only, but is something that extends over time and out into the community and the workplace.

It is important that young people are aware of guidance support on offer and understand what difference it might make. Further research could be beneficial to demonstrate the cost-benefits of guidance and its role in prevention, reintegration and facilitating transitions. The examples identified in this report need to be communicated to policy makers, to ensure that they learn from practice and do not reinvent the wheel.

It is important that teachers and trainers are able to assist young people to develop career management skills and apply them in both the transition into work and throughout their working lives. Concerns have been raised that the guidance offer that accompanies initial vocational education and training (IVET) is not at an equivalent standard to the mainstream education offer; as such efforts need to be focused on ensuring that the same quality is available to young people pursuing a vocational route.

In the context of demographic change, there is merit in ensuring that working life familiarisation is perceived as a two-way process: an opportunity for young people to acquaint themselves with the world of work as well as an opportunity for employers to familiarise themselves with the local talent pool.

In the current economic crisis, it is important that employers, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), are given the necessary support to be able to offer apprenticeships and traineeships. This is where dedicated coordinators from schools, VET establishments and reintegration programmes can offer real added value, for example by coordinating placements and helping young people to adjust to them.

1. Introduction

A recent skills needs analysis published by Cedefop concluded that nine out of ten new job openings in Europe during 2006-10 would require medium or high level qualifications (Cedefop, 2008a). A new labour market forecast is being carried out by the European Commission to take into consideration the effects of the financial crisis, which is further reinforcing the need for high level skills and qualifications in order to remain competitive in the slack labour market. At the same time, one in seven young people in Europe leave the formal education system without the necessary competences and qualifications for successful labour market entry. They leave without completing upper secondary education, the level considered the minimum required for active participation in the knowledge-based economy.

Alongside this mismatch in educated workforce supply and demand, fundamental changes are taking place in Europe in terms of economic activity, job and career patterns and education systems. Economic activity is now strongly reliant on services and information, where previously manufacturing and distribution were the key industries and sources of employment. Education systems are becoming increasingly complex, as the number of study pathways has increased, more tailor-made solutions have been made available and second-chance opportunities have been created. People increasingly mix working life with periods of learning. The student population is becoming more diverse and education and training systems are having to adjust to the requirements of globalisation and internationalisation, increased migration, and rapidly changing occupational profiles resulting from technological and economic developments. The result of these changes for young people is a shift 'from certainty to contingency and from predictability to impermanence and fluidity' (Stokes, 2000).

The complexity of these changes highlights the importance of providing high quality information and guidance services to young people. This is particularly important for at-risk groups who require assistance in navigating their way from learning to employment. However, even where strong guidance services exist, young people can experience difficulties in accessing them. As a result, those who could most benefit from mainstream guidance services are often the least likely to use them.

For the last two decades the Member States of the European Union have piloted innovative ways of assisting vulnerable young people to face this

increasingly complex set of challenges as they move towards the world of work. A range of programmes and support schemes has been put in place to assist them to stay in school or to make the transition to post-compulsory education or training or employment. Other initiatives provide a continuum of support along which a young person progresses towards employment. Opportunities for return to education and training (for example second chance schools), aided by guidance, have been created at a rapid pace, particularly in the current decade. Measures have also been introduced to provide alternative training opportunities for those young people who prefer a more practical approach to learning, and opportunities are being created for young people to acquire skills that allow them to manage their careers.

This Cedefop report presents the findings of a study carried out in 2009 on guidance policies that support young people at risk. Specifically, the report examines guidance measures that aim to support school completion, those which facilitate the reintegration of disengaged young people, and measures to ease the transition of the young from school to work.

The study was undertaken in the context of the European policy priorities on lifelong guidance and early school leaving. It builds on the earlier work of Cedefop and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on guidance provisions for young people (Cedefop, Sultana, 2004; OECD, 2004a; OECD, 2004b). The study also adds to the policy reviews carried out as part of other European level projects on early school leaving (GHK, 2005; Stokes, 2000; Walther and Pohl, 2005) and career management (European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network ELGPN, Sultana, 2009a; Watts, 2009).

This introductory chapter provides an overview of the study objectives and describes the methodology used.

1.1. Study aim and objectives

The purpose of the study was to identify and examine established and experimental guidance measures that support young people at risk. The research mapped out areas for further development potential for guidance policies and services available to at-risk groups; it provides policy-makers and guidance practitioners with recommendations and key messages for future action.

The study covers the European Union (EU) countries, plus Iceland and Norway. Examples have also been included from Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey; these case studies were prepared and provided by the European Training Foundation (ETF).

Three types of initiatives have been examined:

- (a) preventive guidance measures that support school completion. The measures under this theme include practices that aim to identify potential early school leavers and target them with programmes that offer them guidance, counselling and other support to help them to overcome problems and avoid early school leaving;
- (b) reintegration measures that offer disengaged young people an opportunity to return to education or training, or facilitate access to the labour market. The examples chosen incorporate strong guidance and counselling elements;
- (c) measures to facilitate education to work transitions through working life familiarisation and career management skills. This theme considers initiatives that allow young people to become acquainted with the world of work, as well as programmes that help them to analyse their on-the-job learning experiences in the context of professional and personal competences and career management skills.

The aim has been to provide illustrations of both established and new, innovative practices, not to collate an all-inclusive inventory of measures implemented in the study countries. The common thread running through all examples is the strong presence of guidance, which in this study is understood as a broad framework of support. The study is built around the definition of guidance adopted by the Council of the European Union, which refers to services designed to assist individuals of any age to make occupational, training and educational choices and to manage their careers ⁽⁴⁾. Guidance covers ‘a range of individual and collective activities relating to information-giving, counselling, competence assessment, support, and the teaching of decision-making and career management skills’ (*Resolution of the Council ...*, 2004). These services can be available on an individual or group basis, and might be delivered face-to-face or from a distance, for example helpline and web-based services (Cedefop, Sultana, 2004).

However, the concept of guidance in this study also covers informal guidance (guidance provided by family members, peers, friends, etc.) and non-formal guidance (guidance provided on a non-formal basis by teachers, tutors, mentors and other professionals working with young people).

⁽⁴⁾ Guidance is ‘a continuous process that enables citizens at any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which those capacities and competences are learned and/or used’.

This study covers projects, programmes and policies that target compulsory school-age children and young people that belong to the age group, as defined by Eurostat, to describe early school leavers (18 to 24). The particular focus of the study is on 15 to 24 year olds at risk of social exclusion. The European Commission defines social exclusion as ‘a process whereby certain individuals are pushed to the edge of society and prevented from participating fully by virtue of their poverty, or lack of basic competences and lifelong learning opportunities, or as a result of discrimination’.

1.2. Study method

The study has been carried out in three stages: background research and mapping, case studies, and analysis. The background research and mapping summarised the EU policy background and explored the scale and scope of the problem of early school leaving. The availability and accessibility of mainstream guidance services to young people was also analysed to set the scene for the targeted measures which are the focus of this study. This initial stage also included an extensive mapping exercise, involving a review of European studies, publications and summaries of guidance and other expert networks, project websites, and a selection of national research and policy reports. Approximately 180 country reports were reviewed. Many Euroguidance network members also provided important inputs by offering suggestions of successful practices in their respective countries.

The background research and mapping was followed by case studies, which built on the case study suggestions made from the earlier research, and criteria produced as part of the first stage. They also provided more detailed insights to inform key findings about trends and successful approaches. The case studies are primarily from 13 countries (Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Spain, France, Italy, Lithuania, Hungary, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Finland and the UK), although this report includes examples from most EU Member States, Iceland and Norway.

The final phase of the study analysed the findings from the two earlier stages and presents the results, with conclusions and recommendations for further action.

2. Guidance context

The need to improve the provision of guidance has been recognised in European policy on lifelong learning, social inclusion, early school leaving, and individual sectors of education and training (vocational, higher and adult education and training). Progress has also been monitored at European level and it has been stressed that there is still more to be done. Funding has been made available to support further action.

Against the background of pan-European commitment to improving guidance services, this study begins by examining mainstream policy and provision of guidance services to young people. In a brief review of mainstream guidance availability and accessibility for young people, a context is identified in which the targeted measures described in the following chapters are delivered. It is also important to highlight the role played by mainstream career guidance services in aiding the transfer from education to employment.

The EU context is described in more detail and is followed by a section outlining Member State responses in terms of mainstream guidance provision delivered in schools and by education providers, as well as by public employment services.

2.1. EU policy

Assisting Europe's youth to make a smooth transition into work and giving them the skills to manage their career paths through their working lives is a priority for the European Commission and the Member States. European cooperation in education and training has paid significant attention to the contribution of guidance (Watts, 2006). Education, training and employability were recognised by the European Lisbon Council in March 2000 as integral to economic and social policies. Since the Lisbon Council meeting, the European Commission and the European Council of Ministers have highlighted the importance of high quality lifelong guidance provision in a series of different communications, declarations and resolutions. The Commission's 2001 Communications on lifelong learning (European Commission, 2001b), the 2002 Council resolution on lifelong learning, and the 2004 Joint Interim Report of the Council and the European Commission on the Implementation of the Lisbon strategy, all confirmed guidance as a priority

theme and urged Member States to support learning at all ages through guidance measures.

Similarly, joint actions in vocational education and training have stressed the need for Member States to strengthen career guidance provision, policies and practices (The Copenhagen declaration, 2002; the Maastricht communiqué, 2004; the Helsinki communiqué, 2004). Guidance has also appeared on the higher education agenda (the European higher education area, Achieving the goals and European Ministers responsible for Higher Education, 2005) and the adult learning sphere (the Council Conclusion of May 2008). All of these policy documents have stressed the role that guidance can play in promoting social inclusion, improving efficiency of investments in education and training, and aid education-to-work transitions and job mobility.

In May 2004, the European Council adopted a Resolution on guidance throughout life. This spelled out priorities for guidance within the framework of the Education and training 2010 work programme. It invited the Member States and the Commission, within their sphere of competences, to develop policies and concrete actions to improve guidance provision throughout life. The work of an expert group on lifelong guidance, established by the European Commission in 2002, has resulted in the development of three common European reference points for guidance systems. These are intended to enable Member States to benchmark and develop their existing provision within a lifelong learning policy framework, with an aim to support their life pathways in a knowledge-based economy and society.

Recent evaluation reports on the implementation of the Resolution of 2004 have concluded that progress has been made in Member States but further efforts are required to improve the quality of guidance services, provide fairer access focused on individuals' needs and aspirations, and coordinate and build partnerships between existing forms of guidance provision. In response, the EU Council of Ministers in its Resolution (21 November 2008) provided instruments to assist the Member States in introducing career guidance service reforms within their national lifelong learning strategies (*Resolution of the Council ...*, 2008). The Resolution highlighted that longer periods of active employment and better opportunities for study and work abroad (through EU enlargement and the globalisation of trade) require individuals to adapt their skills and develop their learning and professional pathways in a broader geographical context, to safeguard their career paths. The importance of guidance is also stressed by the growing number and complexity of transitions, the mismatch between persistent unemployment and difficulties in recruiting in certain sectors and the exclusion

experienced by various groups of the society. This is also discussed in Section 3.2. Four areas for reform have been identified:

- (a) encouraging the acquisition of career management skills;
- (b) facilitating access to guidance services for all sections of the population;
- (c) developing the quality assurance of guidance provision;
- (d) encouraging coordination and cooperation between all the stakeholders at national, regional and local levels.

The Resolution also provided a political mandate for the work of the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) and Cedefop.

In addition to political commitment, the Commission has also provided a range of funding opportunities to enhance and upgrade guidance policies, systems and practices. Resources have been made available through the European Social Fund, Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci and Phare, enabling exchanges of good practice within Europe, and the further training of guidance professionals (Cedefop, Sultana, 2004). It has also supported several initiatives: formulating the European CV; developing Ploteus as the EU's Internet portal of learning opportunities (Ploteus, 2009); creating the EURES website to link all public employment services in Member States; and mobilising the Euroguidance network as a source of information, responding to the needs of guidance workers to be familiar with other countries' education, training, guidance and labour market systems and programmes (Cedefop, Sultana, 2004).

2.2. Mainstream guidance for young people

Schools are one of the main settings for formal career guidance services. Historically, school-based career guidance services have concentrated on schools at lower secondary level and have targeted young people making choices about their educational pathway (Cedefop, Sultana, 2004). Five models of curriculum-based guidance delivery are apparent in the study countries (Cedefop, Sultana, 2004; EACEA et al., 2008):

- (a) guidance as a separate subject in the curriculum, including space in the weekly or semestrial timetable (e.g. Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Finland, Greece, Norway, Romania and Spain);
- (b) career guidance embedded in other broader, specialist subjects concerning personal wellbeing and social education (e.g. Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Malta and Poland);

- (c) career guidance integrated in most subjects of the curriculum (e.g. Denmark, Estonia and Hungary);
- (d) career programmes covered through seminars and workshops (e.g. France, Malta and Poland);
- (e) optional career guidance subjects for young people (e.g. Portugal and Slovakia).

The review carried out as part of this study of mainstream school-based guidance provisions has confirmed that the traditional career guidance via personal interviews is being replaced by a curriculum-based approach, a trend highlighted already in 2004 by the OECD and Cedefop. Guidance services are also increasingly being delivered by schools, together with external partners or by establishing career information centres. Guidance can also be provided through a variety of media and there is an increasing tendency to make use of the Internet for such services. These services are discussed in greater length in Chapter 6.

Public employment services also play an important role in providing career guidance. First, the work of PES is to help jobseekers, particularly persons from disadvantaged groups, move towards employment. However, in recent years there has been a trend towards a personalised approach, providing a service tailored to the needs of the individual jobseeker. This includes an assessment of each individual and the provision of targeted support. In particular there has been an increase in the range of services that include career guidance elements.

Across Europe, the role of the PES in supporting young people varies greatly (Sultana and Watts, 2005). In some countries, such as Germany, formal arrangements exist between PES and schools. In other cases the role played by the PES is less formal. The support and services provided includes:

- (a) delivering career guidance and information in schools and educational institutions, including presentations about the labour market, employment opportunities and the services available to them through the PES;
- (b) managing careers information offices for groups or individual young people;
- (c) coordinating, often in collaboration with other partners, specific programmes for certain groups of young people, such as early school leavers and drop-outs;
- (d) providing student work-related programmes that involve work skills development.

There are a number of challenges for PES providing career guidance in schools. Differences in the style of career guidance between PES and school personnel have been recorded in several countries, with guidance in schools

emphasising open choice, while PES staff tend to focus on the more opportunity structures available and stress realism in decision making (Sultana and Watts, 2005). Further, the delivery of career guidance to young people in schools may be considered more an additional or extended function of the PES and, in times of high unemployment, it is reduced or stops altogether. This has been the case in Cyprus, Norway, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

Another important point to note is the increasing focus on self-support. Within the context of personalised services, there is greater emphasis on the rights and responsibilities of jobseekers, acknowledging that individuals should take responsibility for their own job-search activities. Selected groups, however, may require additional support in identifying their skills and interests in the labour market. The move to a self-service system has freed up time in PES to work with more at-risk groups, including persons with low skills and early school leavers.

3. Background

Both the personal and social costs of early school leaving have increased in the last few decades. It is now widely recognised that business and society benefit when young people are able to leave school with the qualifications they need to succeed in the world of work (CBI, 2008).

As a result, school completion is viewed as a major policy objective in Europe. There is considerable European and national emphasis on increasing school completion rates and achieving ever higher levels of education and training, with the target of achieving universal completion for upper secondary education. The rationale is clear. Europe's economic future does not just depend on ensuring there are enough highly qualified graduates: to secure long-term prosperity, all school leavers, not just high achievers, must be well equipped for success in life and work.

The European Union has introduced a range of measures geared towards supporting young people to complete upper secondary education. These measures are linked to the Lisbon Agenda, which identified the European Union's intention to make the EU the most competitive economy in the world by 2010. The Education and training 2010 work programme developed as part of the Lisbon Strategy introduced a series of five benchmarks, including one for reducing the EU early school leaving average to 10 % by 2010. The follow-up to the 2010 work programme, the Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, adopted by the European Council in May 2009, states that the proportion of early leavers from education and training should be less than 10 % by 2020.

This section of the report outlines the context for the study by:

- (a) discussing the definition of early school leaving and the variations in national and international definitions;
- (b) assessing the scale and scope of the problem of early school leaving in Europe, and summarising the consequences of early departures from the education and training system;
- (c) illustrating the increasingly complex transition for young people from education to work;
- (d) examining the role of guidance in the transition.

3.1. Early school leaving

3.1.1. Defining early school leaving

Although there has been a clear and growing focus on school drop-out, various definitions exist for early school leaving. It is not possible within the context of this study to go into detail about the differences but it is important to bear in mind that the EU definition differs from other international and many national ones. The European Union defines early school leavers as 18 to 24 year olds who have only lower secondary level education and are not in further education and training ⁽⁵⁾. However, the OECD definition encompasses 20-24 year olds with education below upper secondary education. The situation is further complicated by variations in the length of compulsory education across the different national education systems. This study uses the EU definition of early school leaving but takes account of national contexts in identifying and discussing good practice examples.

3.1.2. Scale of early school leaving

When the Education and training 2010 benchmark was established in 2001 at 10 %, almost one in six young people aged 18-24 were early school leavers. Since then, there has been a reduction in the rate of early school leaving of three percentage points, from 17.6 % in 2000 to 14.8 % in 2007. By 2007, every seventh person was classified as an early school leaver and around six million young people finished schooling with less than upper secondary education. Progress has been slow and the target will not be achieved within the current timeframe ⁽⁶⁾. As a result, the EU continues to encourage the Member States to allocate significant resources to student retention efforts, as well as reintegration and second-chance measures.

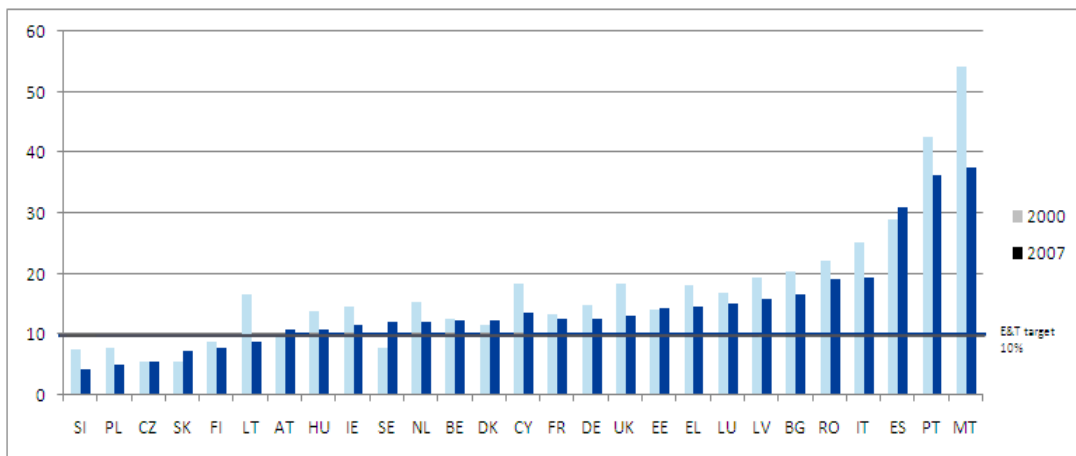
The patterns of progress are diverse between EU countries (see Figure 1), and Europe tends to show a north/south divide on this issue (European Commission, 2009b). In 2007 only six Member States had reached the

⁽⁵⁾ According to the Eurostat definition, early school leavers are the percentage of the population aged 18-24 with, at most, lower secondary education and not in further education or training. It refers to persons aged 18 to 24 in the following two conditions: the highest level of education or training attained is ISCED 0, 1, 2 or 3c and respondents declared not having received any education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey (numerator). The denominator consist in the total population of the same age group, excluding no answers to the questions 'highest level of education or training attained' and 'participation to education and training'.

⁽⁶⁾ The benchmark must be seen as indicative due to the associated caveats (see GHK, 2005 for further information about shortcomings in statistics on early school leaving). Further, 12 new countries have joined the EU since the introduction of the benchmark. The increased levels of mobility and migration must also be taken into consideration.

benchmark target and five of these were already below the target in 2000. Five of these six countries joined the EU in 2004: the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. Finland is the only longer-standing EU country, where the early school leaving rate was below the Lisbon target throughout the reference period. Early school leaving rates are also below the target in Iceland and Norway. The southern European countries Spain, Italy, Malta, and Portugal, followed by Bulgaria and Romania, which recently joined the EU, remain furthest away from the EU benchmark. Some of the greatest reductions in the proportion of early school leavers have been seen in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Malta, Portugal and Slovenia. A reverse trend has been witnessed in six EU Member States, with the most significant reversal in Sweden.

Figure 1. **Early school leaving in the European Union, 2000-07**



Source: European Commission, 2008e.

The rates for candidate countries Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey are not included in Figure 1, but they also vary significantly. Croatia has the lowest level of early school leavers in Europe; in 2007 the figure stood at 3.9 %. In contrast, in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, every second member of the population aged over 15 years has little or no formal education and national data indicates that there are only two students per 100 inhabitants (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Ministry of Education and Science, 2004). In Turkey, the rate has reduced drastically since 2000 (from over 58 % in 2000 to 48 % in 2007), but it is still significantly above any rate in the EU. The early school leaving rates have improved as a result of the extension of compulsory education from five to eight years.

Figure 1 does not show regional differences, which in some cases are substantial. For example, the differences between the Spanish autonomous communities are vast, with some regions having achieved the 2010 target and others having some of the highest rates of early school leavers in Europe. Societal attitudes towards education and training, historical context and differences in education and welfare regimes are some of the factors contributing to regional and national differences in early school leaving rates.

3.1.3. Scope of the problem

Many young people do not persist with education or training that rejects them (Stokes, 2000), or where they do not feel comfortable, or feel they do not belong. Some simply react by dropping out. The young people who respond in this way come from diverse backgrounds; not all of them leave or 'underachieve' for the same reason, and the reasons are not even always negative (Dhillon, 2007). This means that early school leavers are not a homogeneous group. Indeed, many respond to a mixture of push and pull factors, though there are some who are considered more at risk of dropping out than others.

For example, gender has a significant influence on rates of early school leaving and young men are more likely to be early school leavers than young women. In 2007, the early school leaving rate for young women in the EU-27 was 12.7 % while the rate for young men was almost 17 %. Only in Bulgaria is there a slightly higher number of young women than men who leave school before completing at least upper secondary education. Gender differences across Member States varied from small variations (0.1 percentage point difference in Romania, 1.4 in Austria, and 1.5 in Germany) to significant variations (7.9 percentage point difference in Greece, 8.1 in Luxembourg, and 10.5 in Spain).

There is also evidence that minority ethnic and migrant groups are over-represented among early school leavers in most study countries. In 2005, the rate of early school leaving among non-nationals, as defined in the Labour force survey, was 30.1 %, while the rate for nationals was 13 % (European Commission, 2008e). Non-national early school leavers make up over 40 % of all early school leavers in Greece, Iceland, Italy, Malta and Spain. The smallest differences between nationals and non-nationals are found in countries which have comprehensive education and training systems that prioritise equity, equal access to education and permeability of study pathways (European Commission, 2008e) ⁽⁷⁾.

⁽⁷⁾ It is essential to bear in mind that in some countries an important proportion of young people who are classified as early school leavers may not have been educated in the host country's

Young people from the Roma and traveller communities have been identified as at-risk groups in numerous study countries. Drop-out rates are high among Roma students for example in the Czech Republic, Latvia, Hungary and Romania, where members of this community often live in socially and economically deprived areas. For example, children from poor families in Hungary face serious barriers to enrolment that originate from the selective education system, in which schools are encouraged to favour children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Szira and Nemeth, 2007). There is also a tendency to place children from disadvantaged backgrounds, Roma children in particular, in special education institutions. Segregated education is often characterised by low expectations and many teachers are not sufficiently trained to work in heterogeneous multicultural classes (ibid.).

Young people from travelling families regularly feature among early school leavers in Ireland. This small community, which represents little more than 1 % of the school-age population, accounts for one in six of all unqualified early school leavers in the country. A range of complex factors leads young people from travelling families to drop out from education: lifestyle, cultural, economic and social reasons. A key factor is the perception among the adult traveller community, particularly with regards to young adult males, that they should be earning an income rather than participating in formal learning (WRC Social and Economic Consultants, 2007).

There appears to be a noteworthy geographical dimension to the problem too (Nevala, 2008). In most European countries, early school leaving is an issue for inner city areas. In France, for example, urban areas with high levels of unemployment and poverty are more likely to have high numbers of drop-outs than other parts of the country. Young people in Austrian towns and cities are twice as likely to drop out early as those in rural regions, with drop-out rates standing at 12 % and 5 % respectively ⁽⁸⁾.

In contrast, young people living in remote rural areas of Romania have lower school completion rates than their peers living in cities. A national study concluded that, at the end of 2006 almost 20 % of pupils in lower secondary schools in rural areas were registered as drop-outs in comparison to only 5.5 % in urban areas (Ministry of Education, Research and Youth, 2008). This trend is also pertinent to small, isolated villages in Hungary.

education system. This is particularly relevant for countries which have seen a more recent influx of immigrants from outside the EU, such as Spain.

⁽⁸⁾ Based on information provided by the Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture (BMUK) in April 2008.

Other factors impact on disengagement from school, those commonly associated with early school leaving are often related to the individual, the socioeconomic background and the external environment (GHK, 2005). Young people who are not in education, employment or training are disproportionately likely to have experienced poor attainment at school, low motivation, truancy, homelessness, poverty, lack of family support, health problems, special educational needs, disabilities or unemployment in the family. Many have had negative experiences of school and faced issues such as bullying, exclusion, behavioural difficulties, and stress. Some young people from relatively poor backgrounds find it difficult to progress into further education or training as they struggle to cope financially or they feel pressure to begin contributing to family finances. For some young people, finding an opportunity to earn money, by whatever means, becomes a priority over continuing their education or training.

Individual schools also tend to differ greatly in terms of the number of early school leavers and the educational performance of students (Traag and van den Velden, 2008). This implies that the school environment (physical, social, school atmosphere) and the teaching staff (expectations, style of delivery, understanding of the needs of and experience in working with marginalised groups) play a part in raising aspirations and supporting school completion. Further, a significant proportion of young people leave school early as a result of disaffection with the system, skills limitations (such as poor basic skills) or due to the lack of availability of alternative forms of learning opportunities (BCA, 2003). Many drop-outs, and sometimes their parents too, have low expectations for themselves. They tend to have short-term life plans and cannot envisage a future career pathway, only an extension of their present situation (Stokes, 2000). Some researchers argue that some young people make a conscious 'choice' not to participate, for example, by adopting an 'anti-learning culture' as a means of gaining credibility and status with peers (Spielhofer et al., 2009).

The Community Health Systems Resource Group (2005) supports this perspective by identifying that early school leaving is typically not based on a single decision made at a specific moment; usually young people choose to leave school even though they know that education and training can increase their chances of getting better jobs and higher earnings in the future (European Commission, 2008e). Employment conditions for young people have an important role to play in their decision, as the availability of employment opportunities for the low-skilled can be a disincentive for young people to stay in school. The strong economic climate of the early part of the current decade pulled many young people prematurely into the buoyant labour markets of countries such as Ireland. Tourism, traditional maritime sectors, retail and agriculture provide jobs

in the Mediterranean coastal communities even for those who have not completed compulsory education. In Greece, one of the primary reasons for an early departure from education is involvement in a family business or another family related matter. Early school-leaving is relatively common among pupils whose parents run a micro business or are self-employed.

Labour market opportunities can provide a comparative advantage for the low-skilled in contexts where employment opportunities are geared towards the skills and interests of the early school leaver (Eckstein and Wolpin, 1999). A number of studies point out that early school leaving is not a negative choice in all cases; it can allow some young people to focus on their real career interests and start their career early (Youth Forum Jeunesse, 2008). However, evidence implies that, in the long term, earnings and employment opportunities are more likely to be constrained (Walther, 2002a) and that labour market experience does not make up for an initial deficit of educational credentials (OECD, 2005). Young school leavers tend to become locked in a cycle of recurrent unemployment and low-skilled, short-term employment more often than young people with higher level qualifications (Stokes, 2000). Female school leavers tend to be particularly vulnerable to this (OECD, 2005). In fact, few people seem to benefit from leaving school early, and many suffer from 'multiple disadvantage', being affected by more than one of these issues. The next section takes a more in-depth look into the social and economic consequences of early school leaving.

3.1.4. Consequences of early school leaving

Early school leaving has far-reaching individual, social, economic, cultural and political implications. These include short-, medium- and long-term effects and can be direct or indirect (Psacharopoulos, 2007; Walther and Pohl, 2005). Private costs impact on individuals and are easier to observe than other costs impacting on society as a whole. A feasibility study on the cost of school failure, carried out by the European expert network on economics of education (Psacharopoulos, 2007), demonstrates that the trend of young people dropping out can result in lower employment rates, increased welfare payments, lower productivity, and lower tax revenues (see Figure 2). These social and economic costs and implications are briefly discussed, although it has not been possible to discuss wider social implications, such as the impact of early school leaving on active citizenship, family, etc., in this report.

Figure 2. **The cost of school failure**

Private
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Higher unemployment incidence and unemployment duration. Higher own discount rate, i.e. valuing less present relative to future income, thus be willing to invest in human or other capital• Lower initial and lifetime earnings, and own health status• Less risk aversion and lifelong learning participation• Lower lifetime satisfaction
Social
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased criminality• Lower positive spillover effects on coworkers and lower rate of economic growth. Lower intergenerational effects on children and parents, and lower public health status. Lower social cohesion• Higher unemployment
Fiscal
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lower tax revenues• Higher police and criminal justice expenditure

NB: 'Higher' or 'lower' is defined relative to a control group situation of non-school failure, however the latter is defined.

Source: Psacharopoulos, 2007.

Many young people who leave school early want to work to earn money. However, one of the main barriers young people came across when looking for work is their lack of experience. Many school leavers are unable to find a job until they have experience, but they struggle to get a job to get experience in the first place. For this reason, unemployment is far more common among school drop-outs than their more highly educated peers. According to the 2007 Labour force survey, unemployment among lower secondary school graduates in the EU at 13.2 % was more than five percentage points higher than that of young people who had obtained an upper secondary level qualification (7.9 %). Once in employment, the earnings of those who have completed upper secondary education are approximately one-third more than the earnings of those who left after completing lower secondary level (Psacharopoulos, 2007). Others have estimated the rate of return on a year of schooling at between 10 % and 20 % (Carneiro and Heckman, 2003; Psacharopoulos, 2007).

Supporting the acquisition of high level skills is even more important in the context of the current economic climate. In financially difficult times, companies downsize their recruitment campaigns and benefit from the greater availability of qualified candidates on the job market (European Commission, 2008a). Unemployment has been rising sharply in the European Union since March 2008 and the statistics show that young people have been particularly vulnerable (Eurostat and Hijman, 2009). Youth unemployment increased by 3.9 percentage

points between the first quarter of 2008 and the first quarter of 2009 in the Euro area, to reach 18.4 %. In the first quarter of 2009, 4.9 million persons aged 15-24 were unemployed. In the first quarter of 2009 youth unemployment ranged from 6.0 % in the Netherlands to 33.6 % in Spain.

Higher unemployment rates and the associated social costs (e.g. increased welfare payments) are not the only type of negative consequence of early school leaving. Eurostat statistics show worrying results on the health and wellbeing of school drop-outs. In Lithuania, nearly a third of people with a lower secondary qualification at most have a long standing illness while the proportion is only 12 % for people with an upper secondary qualification. American studies have shown that the life expectancy of early school leavers is 9.2 years shorter than that of high school graduates (Youth Forum Jeunesse, 2008) and the mortality rate of high school drop-outs is more than twice that of those with some college education (Cutler and Lleras-Muney, 2006). There are several ways in which more and better education influences health outcomes. For example, education can change health-related behaviour, including decisions regarding diet, smoking and alcohol consumption, and the better educated are more likely to exercise and obtain preventive care (Psacharopoulos, 2007).

Young people not in education, training or employment also run a higher risk of becoming involved in crime and anti-social behaviour than those engaged in learning. A British study has found that nearly three in ten (29 %) male and one in twelve (8 %) female drop-outs at the age of 16-18 were involved in crime between the ages of 17-30, three times the rate among all young people (CBI, 2008).

It is also important to invest in support for this age group. Children and young people represent the highest leverage point for investments to build human capital because the benefits of investments have the longest possible period to accrue (World Bank, 2009). This has been confirmed by many national studies. For example, Ecorys in the Netherlands has calculated that the cost of early school leaving for Dutch society can reach EUR 1.8 million per person over the course of his/her lifetime.

3.2. Education-to-work transitions

The decisions a young person makes in the first few years after leaving education have a huge impact on their future prospects. Although the initial transition is only the beginning of a working life that normally lasts several decades, many studies have shown that initial job outcomes have a lasting effect

on career development. Transition is a significant step, and it is essential that young people are equipped with the knowledge and support they need.

Defining the transition process helps to understand the nature and scope of the difficulties it can encompass. Müller and Gangl (2003) describe the process as 'the period between the end of individuals' primary involvement in education or training and their stable settlement in a work position'. Brauns et al. (2001), distinguish between two stages in the transition period: first, the search for initial employment after leaving education and training and, second, the early career stage after initial employment experience. They define two types of risk for young people within the transition from education to work: access to first employment and instability of initial employment.

3.2.1. The length of transition

Table 1 offers an illustration of the length of school-to-work transitions in selected OECD countries, for 1995, 2000 and 2005 (Quintini, 2007). It shows that more than half of European young people are without work one year after leaving school. It often takes one to two years or even more for young people to find their first job after finishing education, and there are large differences in the average length of the transition across countries. The average time taken to find a permanent job ranges from just over a year in countries such as Belgium, Ireland, Luxembourg and Austria to over four years in Iceland. The length of school-to-work transition in Iceland, Italy and Norway is over three years.

While the EU average (unweighted) remains relatively stable, the situation varies across individual countries. Between 2000 and 2005, more than half of the countries saw an increase in transition period length. The increases varied from two months (Belgium) to 32 months (Iceland). Countries such as the Czech Republic, Germany and Norway also saw an increase in the length of transition (10, 10 and 11 months respectively). In contrast, countries such as Italy, Slovakia and Finland all saw a significant reduction in transition (19, 23 and 23 months respectively).

The factors affecting transition from education to employment are diverse and policy developments require flexibility to tackle them. Challenges range from the increasing choice of study and career pathways, and the destandardisation of youth transitions, the types of entry level employment available (temporary and part-time work and also low-paid work) and external influences such as the processes of internationalisation and globalisation underpinned by ICT frameworks. Responding to the rapidly changing conditions of the wider economy is necessary for both educational and employment structures, and the risks of a mismatch in the interface between education and employment, which can be

exacerbated by the fact that the pace of change within education is slower than that of the world of work. The principles of participation and active citizenship have been identified as affecting youth transition (Walther, 2002b), with youth policy across Europe and beyond incorporating these elements in terms of community and social, political, educational and, ultimately, employment participation.

Table 1. **Excepted length of school-to-work transitions in selected EU countries, 1995, 2000 and 2005**

Country	Duration in months			Country	Duration in months		
	1995 ^(a)	2000 ^(b)	2005 ^(c)		1995	2000	2005
AT	6.2	7.5	16.7	IE	21.0	20.9	16.8
BE	15.5	11.3	14.3	IT	62.4	70.5	51.3
CZ	19.9	19.9	29.3	LU	6.1	16.0	15.0
DK	41.4	30.9	22.0	NL	19.4	11.9	17.2
FI	28.0	56.8	34.2	NO	44.6	30.7	41.8
FR	22.3	17.2	23.0	PL	45.7	45.7	36.3
DE	22.7	29.4	39.2	PT	25.8	19.6	24.8
EL	37.9	32.3	20.5	SK	60.1	60.1	37.2
HU	40.8	30.2	28.5	ES	59.8	28.1	30.1
IS	21.5	26.6	58.0	UK	33.9	30.7	31.8
				EU average ^(d)	31.7	29.8	29.4

(a) 1993 for Denmark and the UK; 1994 for Luxembourg and Portugal; 1996 for Finland, Germany and Norway; 1997 for Hungary.

(b) 2001-05 for Czech Republic and Poland; 2002 for Ireland and Slovakia. 2003 for Norway.

(c) 2003 for Denmark and the UK; 2004 for Germany, Luxembourg and Portugal.

(d) Unweighted average.

Source: OECD Secretariat estimates based on the European Union labour force survey.

Education-to-work transitions are also affected by a range of contextual factors. In each country, influencing variables are different: labour market conditions, industrial structure and occupational change, population skills levels and education system structures, employment protection legislation and youth cohort sizes. Other related issues include the levels of young people leaving school without a basic education qualification, as well as the nature of skills acquired in school and their suitability for the world of work. All these factors influence the length of the average transition period and can contribute to the differences between European countries in transition times.

The current economic crisis has made the transition from school to work even more difficult for young jobseekers, in particular early school leavers (OECD, 2009a). Youth unemployment rates have increased substantially in the

past 12 months. As a result, even many graduates from FE, VET and HE institutions, who normally would find jobs relatively quickly after graduation, have now struggled to make the transition into the labour market. Consequently, young people with low levels of education are the ones having the toughest time finding a job, as they now have to compete for a smaller number of available jobs against their qualified and skilled peers.

It is expected that countries will continue to be affected by the consequences of high and persistent youth unemployment for some time after the recovery is well underway. This is likely to make school-to-work transitions longer, across European countries.

For these reasons, employment and labour ministers in the OECD countries (OECD, 2009a) have called for:

- interventions to help young people to get a firm foothold in the labour market, while improving their skills to promote their career prospects. This includes job search assistance and guidance for young jobseekers;
- appropriate education and training policies, which are seen as essential in ensuring smooth transitions from school to work. These should include actions to prevent early school leaving.

The consequences of a problematic transition for young people from education into the labour market can be varied and far-reaching (OECD, 2009b): youth unemployment, underemployment, risk of recurrent unemployment through the lifetime of an individual and associated problems relating to social exclusion (OECD, 2005).

3.2.2. Aiding effective transition

The transition of young people into the labour market has been a central policy question for a number of years. In 1996, the OECD's Education Committee launched the Thematic review of the transition from initial education to working life (OECD, 2000), responding to increasing levels of concern about youth unemployment and those at risk in the transition from education to working life.

The review found that there is no standardised policy response to the problem; countries tailor their policy development according to their specific situation. The review identified six key features of effective transition, towards which countries should direct their policy-making:

- (a) a healthy economy;
- (b) well-organised pathways that connect initial education with work and further study;
- (c) widespread opportunities to combine workplace experience with education;

- (d) tightly knit safety nets for those at risk;
- (e) strong or effective information and guidance;
- (f) effective institutions and processes.

In some countries, reforming the system supporting transition is seen as a partial solution. This can include introducing initiatives such as accreditation of prior learning that recognises experience and competences, and implementing the school-to-work or transition curriculum (OECD, 2004a). The latter can include elements such as teaching about work and further education and training routes, self-awareness, and such transition 'life-skills' as decision-making, self-presentation in curriculum vitae and selection interviews.

The Review and other studies (including Cedefop, Sultana, 2004; OECD, 2004b), outlined the importance of guidance services in supporting young people in key transition points, which is especially true for those who leave school early, without qualifications. Indeed, for the vast majority of young people across Europe, the transition from education to the world of work is relatively smooth. However, for some, transition can be difficult and these young people may require additional support and guidance to navigate their way successfully through the various pathways leading from education into work. The next section goes on to explore the role of guidance in supporting education-to-work transitions. This issue is becoming increasingly important, given the changing nature of education, learning and employment opportunities and the blurring of boundaries between them.

3.2.3. Guidance in education-to-work transitions

The increasingly open nature of access routes to employment have created a complex range of pathways from learning to work. Further, young people tend to enter the labour market and start a family later in life, and they switch backwards and forwards between work and learning (European Commission, 2001a). The choices facing young people today can be overwhelming as they have more options and more freedom than at any time in history. Stokes (2000) argues that there is also less structure, less certainty and less support in making the transition to adulthood. Young people appreciate their freedom and choice, but they also want, or need, a framework that offers support and guidance (Stokes, 2000). Guidance services are integral to the successful progression of young people from education to the world of work but they must respond to the wide range of needs of today's young people.

Schools are one of the main settings for career guidance services for young people. Historically, school-based career guidance services have concentrated on schools at lower secondary level and have targeted young people making choices

about their education pathway (Cedefop, Sultana, 2004). School approaches to guidance have been seen as too limited, as such provision tends to be a personal service provided by schools themselves (OECD, 2004a). The limitations of mainstream guidance services at schools include high costs, focus on short-term educational decision-making, and poor links to the labour market. OECD has suggested that school-based career guidance must adopt a broader approach that takes into consideration the need to develop career management skills (OECD, 2004a). This means the ability to make effective career decisions and implement them. Such an approach, according to the OECD study, must be embedded in the curriculum, incorporate learning from experience and involve the whole school.

The concept of education-to-work transition is shifting from an approach that simply tries to match the skills and interests of young people to particular jobs or courses to one that places more emphasis on active, continuing career planning and management. A variety of different personal support systems, career-related services, arrangements and agencies are required to assist young people in the transition process. Further, not only does guidance need to address the initial needs of young people to support their transition into work from education, but also to offer a grounding for their longer-term career development, and to ensure they have a solid foundation on which they can base a lifetime of learning and professional development.

Tailoring the delivery of guidance measures for young people to facilitate their transition is a key issue for those implementing youth policy. There are many examples of innovative approaches which have been developed to support and guide young people into the labour market or back into education or training. Some operate in mainstream settings, such as schools and formal education systems, while others are delivered in a community, assisting those young people who are excluded or at risk of exclusion, e.g. through community outreach centres. All have the central aim of easing the progression of young people as they leave the world of formal education systems and embark on their working lives.

This study explores the variety of these policies, project and programmes available for young people in European countries to access mainstream and specialist guidance services, including Internet-based information systems, collaborations with public employment services and other partners to deliver joined-up career and support services, and other tailored support services to potential and actual school leavers. The following sections will show that guidance does not work in isolation but it often works alongside social exclusion, education and training, and employment policies. The remainder of the report will also demonstrate that guidance is not always a dialogue; it also about actions to prevent exclusion and provide routes out of exclusion.

4. Supporting school completion

4.1. Introduction

The reasons for disengagement are varied and young people who drop out of school come from diverse backgrounds. Most disengaged school leavers are usually the hardest to reach and the most unwilling to respond to the services and opportunities provided for them (Britton et al., 2002). This is one of the reasons why EU and national policies pay growing attention to the need to develop a more proactive and preventive approach to school engagement. The Commission's Communication on efficient investments in education and training highlighted the cost of inaction as another important reason to adopt a preventive approach (European Commission, 2002a). Since then several European and international studies have confirmed that, while there is clearly a cost involved in any preventive action, the cost associated with high numbers of drop-outs can be much greater (Wößmann and Schütz, 2006; Psacharopoulos, 2007; European Commission, 2002b). This was also confirmed by the recent Communication on new skills for new jobs, which states that preventing early school leaving and improving the educational attainment of young people is crucial if they are to acquire key competences necessary for progressing their skills (European Commission, 2008d).

The over-arching goal of preventive approaches is to increase school completion by helping those who are likely to drop out of education or training. This can be done by raising aspirations, improving the wellbeing of all young people at school, and identifying those at risk of disengagement early and providing targeted intervention. Such approaches seek to address the reasons why young people disengage from school and usually target either the individual or the education and training system. Person-centred approaches address individual circumstances, motivations and capabilities to stay in education or training and cope with transitions between different levels of education. Preventive approaches target structural aspects of education and training systems, addressing issues such as giving young people opportunities to succeed in alternative forms of education, increasing permeability of study pathways, availability and quality of mainstream guidance and counselling services, and the length of compulsory education. Preventive policies should not be seen as add-on extras to the 'core business' of schools but central to the retention of young people. However, in practice, many early interventions rely on

project funding; this study has looked into both mainstream and project-based examples of preventive approaches.

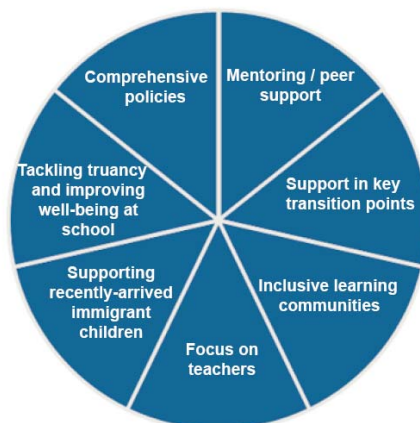
The study has focussed on examining specific guidance-oriented approaches to prevent early school leaving. A range of different guidance-oriented policies, projects and programmes have been introduced to increase school completion. Investment in guidance and counselling services is seen as one of the key preventive strategies to reduce rates of school drop-out because policies with strong guidance elements can motivate learners, help them to overcome problems, and prove effective in raising aspirations. Guidance can also help young learners to find their place in increasingly complex learning systems and can provide them with relevant information to inform future career choices. Therefore, guidance, support and counselling can have a significant impact on young people's decision-making and can reduce the possibility that they will make premature or ill-informed decisions that could lead to drop-out.

Guidance-oriented approaches to supporting school completion are discussed, followed by an analysis of the factors that can help to make these policies successful. There is some degree of overlap between approaches and it must be taken into consideration that the role of guidance is stronger and more apparent in some cases than others.

4.2. Types of guidance-oriented approaches

Guidance-oriented approaches introduced with the aim of reducing early school leaving have been divided into seven categories in this study. These range from

Figure 3. **Types of preventive guidance-oriented approach**



Source: GHK Consulting, 2009.

grassroots level mentoring and peer support projects to the provision of training to teachers and comprehensive national policies to prevent early school leaving. This section starts by looking at the role of mentoring.

4.2.1. Mentoring

Mentoring has become an increasingly popular method of providing support and guidance to those in need and projects can now be found in different settings across society, targeting a wide range of people. Mentoring programmes aim to provide a structured and trusting relationship, bringing young people together with caring individuals who offer guidance, support and encouragement (Youth Mentoring Network, 2009).

EU policies have also recognised the value of mentoring. The new EU strategy for youth, 'Investing and empowering' promotes mentoring as an effective tool in empowering young people in their personal, academic and professional lives (European Commission, 2009a).

There are many different definitions of mentoring. Megginson and Clutterbuck (1995) define mentoring as 'offline help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking'. Mentoring can be split into two main categories: natural mentoring and formal mentoring. In natural mentoring a sustained relationship develops naturally between a coach, teacher, neighbour, or other adult and a young person. Formal mentoring consciously creates a relationship between a mentor and a mentee to help the young person to access support which may not otherwise be available. This study has examined formal mentoring programmes in school-based settings ⁽⁹⁾, which aim to improve wellbeing at school and to support education transition, thereby preventing young people from leaving school early.

Relevant mentoring projects and programmes are universally present across all European countries. As part of this study mentoring projects were reviewed from countries such as Denmark, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the UK. They were found to provide concentrated support for a range of young people, all of whom have different needs and requirements. Examples were found of mentoring projects that target specific groups, including:

⁽⁹⁾ Mentoring projects can take place in a variety of different settings, depending on the project, the people involved and the local facilities. These can include: school-based mentoring programmes, juvenile detention centres, adult prisons, faith-based organisations, community centres, the workplace, other community settings (such as, cafes and libraries), or in the virtual community. Mentoring can also be provided by a range of different providers from community groups, companies, NGOs to state authorities and schools.

- (a) young migrants and young refugees (e.g. the Nightingale project in Sweden);
- (b) young people at high risk of disadvantage and social and economic exclusion (e.g. the mentoring activities of the Rainbow Association in Slovenia);
- (c) young people from ethnic minority groups, including young members of the Roma community (e.g. the scholarship/mentoring projects in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Hungary, Romania, Serbia);
- (d) young people making the transition from school to further education, training or employment (e.g. Rise and follow your dreams, Denmark).

Through mentoring programmes, these specific groups of young people can access targeted and individualised guidance and support, which may not be available to them elsewhere. They can benefit from external advice and contact with people who may be from outside their usual social, economic and cultural background. Mentees can gain an insight into the different opportunities open to them, which they may not have known about or known how to access in their day-to-day lives. The projects can also bring together people who may not have otherwise met, enabling them to learn about different people's lives, which can have a positive impact on their aspirations and understanding of the world. For example, mentoring represents one way of familiarising children and young people from under-represented groups with the opportunities higher education can bring. This is illustrated with an example from Sweden which also identifies how mentoring programmes targeting immigrant families can support wider social goals by fostering dialogue between established community members and new arrivals and by enhancing the understanding of mentees and mentors of different cultural, religious and social realities.

Research has shown that young people with strong support networks are more likely to be resilient in the face of life difficulties, as well as more socioeconomically successful than those who have no one to turn to (Werner, 1993). One Danish mentoring project, the mentor as a network creator (*Mentor som Netværksskaber*) was established around the ethos that mentoring should teach young people to build and use their own support networks. Young people at risk of dropping out of their vocational studies were supported by trained mentors whose fundamental aim was to engender independence, teaching young people to learn to help themselves. One of the key activities was to create a supportive network, for example by asking them to identify people related to their education, free time, family and friends that could support them. Follow-up

confirmed that three-quarters of participants established and used their own networks to find support; most (70 %) remained in education.

Nightingale, Sweden

The Nightingale mentoring programme was first introduced by the University of Malmö in 1997. The rationale was for university students to provide support to children aged between 8 and 12 who come from schools with large numbers of pupils from ethnic backgrounds.

Today, the aim of the scheme continues to be based on the concept of 'mutual benefit' by fostering interaction and solidarity between students and children from different ethnic and social backgrounds. The idea is that the mentor acts as a positive role model to the child and helps to build up their self-confidence. The founders of the project believe that this form of activity can enhance the understanding of the similarities and differences between people from different cultural, social and ethnic groups. Further, to improve diversity in Swedish universities there is a need to recruit students from different cultural and social backgrounds, which have little or no tradition of continuing into higher education studies. The Nightingale scheme is one way of familiarising children from disadvantaged backgrounds with the opportunities that higher education studies can bring them. The goal is that the child will perform better in and out of school and will be more likely to apply for a place at a university later in life.

The mentors meet the child once a week for two or three hours during one school year. They then take part in leisure activities together. Around 90 university students act as mentors every year and each student has one mentee.

So far, around 1 000 children and 1 000 students have participated in the scheme. According to Malmö University, the project has generated clear and visible benefits for both mentees and their mentors. Positive results for the children include an opportunity to have access to an adult who listens and is able to offer support. Other benefits include improved self-confidence and an opportunity to do things, which some children would not have been able to do without the project. Participation has also helped to improve many children's Swedish language skills.

Positive results for mentors include opportunities to gain new experiences and an insight into the lives of people and children from different socioeconomic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The project has also enabled many mentors to address their own ideals and prejudices and they have recognised the important contribution they have made to the education of their mentees.

The Nightingale project is still hosted by Malmö University but related Nightingale projects have been introduced in Lund, Helsingborg, Kristianstad, Växjö and Borås. In 2005, the university received EU funds (Comenius) to initiate the project in six other European countries: Austria, Germany, Norway, Slovenia, Spain and Switzerland.

Based on information from <http://www.mah.se/thenightingale>

Mentoring does not have to be a static process. Many mentormentee partnerships cover a range of different activities from discussing school and homelife issues, to compiling CVs and making future career and/or education and training plans, organising work experience and arranging outings together. Activities should be tailored to the individual and should take into account the needs, age and interests of the young person to ensure their full participation and to promote a sense of enjoyment in taking part in the programme. The mentoring project run by the Rainbow Association in Slovenia gives mentors and their mentees the freedom to decide on the activities they want to pursue during their

weekly meeting. Many of the activities are informal. They go to a park, gallery, sports centre or swimming pool where they have the chance to get to know one another, build a relationship based on trust and discuss issues affecting the young person.

The combined scholarship and mentoring project *Ultravaló* (For the journey) in Hungary is an example of a mentoring project which takes account of the needs of young people at different education stages. Students at lower secondary level are supported by their mentors in applying for upper secondary studies. Upper secondary level students are guided through activities that equip them with knowledge about further study, training and employment options. Young people in vocational schools are supported in their efforts to find a work placement, which is usually an important part of their studies. These activities have been put in place to prevent young people from disengaging from school.

These examples have shown that mentors can play a key role in assisting Roma students in schools, and thereby their academic performance. The mentors also monitor student progress and help control their attendance. They are able to understand better the student's personal situations and potential problems. Indeed, many mentors often act as 'second parents', encouraging and motivating students and providing help and advice to overcome personal or school-related difficulties (Roma Education Fund, www.romaeducationfund.hu/).

At first glance these mentoring projects seem very similar. There is, however, anecdotal evidence to suggest that, in practice, small changes in project approaches can have a far-reaching effect on the way they support most vulnerable young people from the Roma community. The first difference concerns the selection process. The Hungarian mentoring project led by the Soros Foundation, accepted students from the Roma community only, whereas the new national programme selects students on the basis of their socioeconomic background. This means that a larger number of young people have the potential to benefit from additional support and the selection decision is no longer linked to ethnicity. However, the larger target group can reduce the opportunities for the most vulnerable members of the Roma community, who are often in most urgent need of support, to benefit from the programme.

Whereas the Soros Foundation project accepted joint applications from students and their chosen mentors only, the new national project accepts applications only from teachers who are in charge of the selection process. This takes away the flexibility of the project and the ability of students to choose their own mentor. Further, as schools are responsible for applying for funding (instead of the mentee and their mentor) the attitude and initiative of the head teacher

Scholarship and mentoring projects, Hungary

One of the successful approaches to tackling education disadvantage faced by Roma children in Hungary has been the introduction of combined mentoring and scholarship projects. This approach has a relatively long history in Hungary, having been run in the past by several different agencies before it became a mainstream activity funded by the State in 2005.

The first Roma mentoring/scholarship project was introduced by the Soros Foundation, a non-governmental organisation (NGO), in the mid 1990s. It targeted disadvantaged Roma students, for whom it:

- offered scholarships for secondary level students;
- funded, recruited and trained mentors whose main task was to help young people with their homework, build up their aspirations, help them to understand the benefits of education and training and support their progress to the next education stage;
- organised summer camps for students and mentors;
- arranged networking events for participants.

The project ended when the foundation closed in 2005. It was a very successful project that managed to reach Roma students in most need of support. Students were able to 'select' their own mentor (one of the school teachers) and then submit a scholarship/mentoring application together with their chosen mentor. The group activities organised as part of the programme allowed young people to socialise together and created a sense of team spirit among all participants, mentors and mentees alike. Such activities also allowed Roma children to strengthen their Roma identity. The project also acted as a positive catalyst to improve the relationship between schools and Roma children.

In 2002, building on the success of the Soros Foundation project, the Budapest City Council decided to fund a similar project in the greater Budapest region, targeting children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The project is still running and benefits some 250 students and 80 teachers each year.

In 2005, the Hungarian government decided to mainstream this practice of combining scholarship and mentoring activity, based on the broad principles of the Soros Foundation project. The programme is known as *Ultravaló* (For the journey) and the goal is to support young people from poor socioeconomic backgrounds. It has three eligible student groups:

- students at grades seven and eight receive help with their homework. During one-to-one or small group sessions mentors provide step-by-step explanations so students can easily understand how to solve problems and homework questions they might find difficult. In addition, the mentors are expected to help with the selection process for secondary level studies;
- students in grade nine continue to receive help with their homework. Another important area of work for mentors is career advice. They help students become more self-aware and to identify the options available to them in terms of education, training and employment;
- mentors of students of vocational education and training establishments help them with their homework, offer career advice and support young people in their efforts to find a work placement, which is usually an important part of their IVET studies. The mentors help young people to identify companies and organisations where they could complete their placement.

All mentees receive scholarships ranging from EUR 13 to EUR 17 a month (HUF 3 500 to HUF 4 500). Mentors also receive payments for their participation of similar amounts. In 2005, 20 045 students in 1 675 schools participated in the programme. They were supported by nearly 8 000 mentors.

Based on information from the Roma education fund (<http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/>).

plays a significant role in the opportunities for children from disadvantaged backgrounds to take part. Some schools in the most disadvantaged areas have less information and less capacity and skills to write applications and therefore require support in these efforts, which the national programme does not have in place.

Many of the mentors who take part in these programmes are volunteers. This can often be an important factor in building a positive relationship with mentees; for some young people this is the first time an adult has actively chosen to interact with them without being paid for their time. In other cases, such as the Hungarian *Ultravalo* and the Danish projects, mentors are paid for the service they provided to the mentees. However, the payment is usually nominal and is a way of thanking the mentor for their participation.

In most cases mentors are adults: guidance counsellors, qualified teachers or social pedagogues. In other cases, young people are guided either by older students, former mentees ('buddies') or even their peers; this last approach helps young people to help each other. Students develop an encouraging and supportive relationship with other students, usually younger in age, for the primary purpose of providing broad support, guidance, and friendship (Mentoring + Befriending Foundation ⁽¹⁰⁾). Peer mentoring can range from being target focused to informal 'buddying'. It can be used to tackle problems related to school work, social issues (such as pressure to drink or smoke) and other typical problems associated with growing up which can hinder progress and even lead to school failure.

Peer mentoring can also be used to resolve disputes, encourage friendships for children who may otherwise struggle to fit in their school and help address problems caused by bullying. Examples of such mentoring/mediation schemes can be found in Belgium (Flanders) and Austria. Peer mentoring can also be used to support school completion by raising aspirations and promoting career development. 'Rise and follow your dreams' is a mentoring project based in Copenhagen that aims to prevent early school leaving. It targets young people from grades six to nine who are supported by an ethnically diverse group of 20 to 29 years old individuals.

Many mentoring projects are small and they are often run by individual schools, education establishments or community organisations relying on volunteer support. Project budgets tend to be limited and a systematic, longitudinal approach to evaluation is often out of the question. Plenty of

⁽¹⁰⁾ Mentoring and Befriending Foundation. *What is mentoring and befriending?* Available from Internet: <http://www.mandbf.org.uk/about/definitions/> [cited 1.3.2010].

anecdotal evidence is available to illustrate benefits of mentoring but formal evaluations are rare.

RISE CPH (Rise and follow your dreams), Denmark

Rise and follow your dreams, based in Copenhagen, is a mentoring project that works with young people from the sixth to the ninth grade of school. Its purpose is to ensure all young people enrol on, and complete, a youth education programme. Although the project supports young people from all backgrounds, most participants come from ethnic minority groups or immigrant families.

Generally, mentoring consists of a group of three mentors who work with a class in a school. Each mentor has 20 minutes to talk to the class and share their personal stories with the group. Stories can focus on how the mentor overcame some of the barriers the young people in the class may be experiencing. For example, they might explain how they convinced their parents that the career path they wanted to pursue is a viable option. Young people are interested in hearing about such experiences as it gives them ideas of how to deal with similar issues in their own lives.

The 'story sessions' are followed by questions and answers from the young people. Mentors are aware that not all young people like asking questions in front of everyone and so they are allowed to write questions and drop them in a hat; this approach generates more questions which are then discussed by the group.

There are no specific rules for this kind of mentoring activity. A teacher can book the mentors for a two-to-three hour session. The mentors may return to the school every few weeks or may only visit the school once a term. The frequency of mentoring activities depends on the school's wishes and the availability of mentors and the young people.

Alternative methods of reaching young people have also been explored. Ideas from the mentors themselves have been introduced as a way of engaging with young people. One mentor developed and now delivers rap music workshops to young people.

Mentors are also active participants in educational fairs and careers events, where they talk to young people about their ideas for their future and the opportunities available to them. Having mentors on hand at formal events is an excellent way of engaging with young people. Sometimes at such events, young people are too nervous to ask adults any questions. By having other young people there, it may encourage young people to access the information provided and discuss the opportunities available to them. As well as working with the young people, and their parents, other project activities also include work with teachers.

There is a lot of anecdotal evidence to show that mentors have generated a number of positive impacts. Young people have thanked them personally for sharing their stories, describing how the mentoring has inspired them to pursue education and career opportunities. Teachers have also been pleased with the project's activities, as demonstrated by teachers requesting that mentors return to schools. Mentors have reported seeing real progress with some young people, particularly young people who have been considered as unmotivated by their teachers. In the workshops, mentors report that young people are more talkative and are openly thinking about the range of educational opportunities available to them.

By having mentors from all nationalities, the project is able to demonstrate that anyone, from any background, can access material on their education and their future. By sharing their experiences, mentors have inspired young people to think about the range of available opportunities and how they can pursue them. This process encourages young people to reflect on their education and their futures, through the provision of different experiences. Young people are able to apply these stories in their own lives and develop coping strategies for issues they may be facing. Exploring different ways of communicating with young people is also an element of the project's success.

However, studies have concluded that young people involved in mentoring are likely to experience a range of benefits, including improvements in their relationships with family and peers, an increase in their overall communication skills with others and a reduction in anti-social behaviour (Blaber and Glazebrook, 2006). Some feel less isolated and more resilient and therefore better able to tackle setbacks in life. Others benefit from increased options and opportunities for participation. The Nightingale project demonstrated that mentoring programmes can provide positive influences for younger people who do not have a good support system available to them, increasing their self-confidence and self-esteem. The Danish Rise and follow your dreams project indicated that peer mentoring gives young people the opportunity to share ideas and concerns with other young people whom they feel they can relate to better than teachers, guidance counsellors and other adults. One of the project's success factors is the diversity of their mentors, with most of the participants coming from different nationalities and ethnic minority groups. They also appreciate having mentors relatively close to their age because young people tend to value mentors who share and are willing to discuss similar backgrounds and experiences Philip, 2004 ⁽¹⁾.

Mentoring projects run by NGOs in Hungary, and subsequently the Roma education fund in countries such as the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania and Serbia have shown that mentors can play a key role in promoting Roma students' academic performance, by providing additional support during regular extra-curricular sessions. This support can start from a basis of encouragement and going over what the student has learnt in class, to make sure they have fully understood the lesson and its content; it then progresses into other areas such as information, advice and guidance concerning career opportunities. An evaluation of a mentoring and scholarship programme in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, funded by the Roma education fund, found that mentoring has positive effects on the retention, achievements and transition rate of Roma secondary school students. Access to mentors has lowered early school leaving rates, the number of students with lower grades has decreased, and there are more Roma students achieving good results in all of the participating secondary schools (Roma education fund, www.romaeducationfund.hu/). The retention rate of first year Roma students, who are traditionally the most at risk of dropping out of education, has risen from below 85 % to just under 100 %.

⁽¹⁾ *Mentoring for vulnerable young people*. Available from Internet:
<http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/324.pdf> [cited 1.3.2010].

