



BULGARIAN NATIONAL STUDY
on strategic non-formal and informal
competences for social and
educational professionals.



Exchanging practices to recognize and validate competences of social and educational professionals.



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Part 1: National context

Key documents used for the analysis of tendencies in the educational and social sector of the Republic of Bulgaria:

Updated National Employment Strategy 2013-2020

National Action Plan for Employment in 2015

National Plan for Implementation of the European Youth Guarantee 2014-2020,

National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2014-2020

As of 31 December 2013, the population of the Republic of Bulgaria was 7,245,677 people, according to data of the NSI. The population of Bulgaria continued to diminish through 2013, but at a slower rate. The aging of the population continues. This tendency causes changes in the basic age structure of the population, the people under, in, and over the working age. As of 31.12.2012, the working-age population was 4,472 thousand, which constituted 61.7% of the total population. Despite the increasing retirement age, the working-age population diminished by 33 thousand, or 0.7% compared to the previous year. The shifting working force profile due to demographic imbalances and the aging of the population must be taken into account when implementing policies in the social-economic field.

The educational structure of the population at or over 7 years is improving, according to data by the NSI. Furthermore, the number and share of population with secondary and higher education increases at the expense of the population with basic or lower education. The number of people with higher education is 1,348.7 thousand (19.6%), while those with secondary education are 2,990.4 (43.4%). The size of illiterate population remains alarmingly high due to the change of the population structure. The number of people who have never visited school is 81.0 thousand, or 1.2% of the population above the age of 7.

Illiterate people number 112,778, while their relative share in the population at or over 9 years was 1.7%. According to data of the NSI for 2013, the share of early school leavers in Bulgaria between 18-24 years was 12.5% (compared to 12% EU average). The share of people engaged in different forms of lifelong learning remains low. Only 1.7% of the population between 25-65 years had participated in some type of lifelong learning compared with the EU average of 10.5%. According to data of the NSI, the unemployment rate is decreasing. The average number of unemployed individuals for the first nine months of 2014 was 394.5 thousand, or 40.6 thousand fewer compared to the same period in 2013. The unemployment rate was 11.7%, 1.2 percent lower than the first nine months of 2013. Unemployment decreased for men and women alike; the average number of unemployed from both sexes in 2014 was 227.6 thousand and 166.9, correspondingly. The unemployment rate was 12.6% for men and 10.7% for women.

There is a positive tendency for decrease of unemployment among young people between the ages of 15-24. Their number for the nine months of 2014 decreased by 17.8 thousand compared to the same period of 2013, reaching 48.4 thousand. Unemployment rate among young people between 15-24 years was 23.9%, a 4.5-percent decrease in comparison with the nine months of 2013.

The monthly average of unemployed young people under 30 was 65,532, 9,597 fewer than the nine months of 2013. They constitute 17.7% of all unemployed individuals. The monthly average of unemployed individuals under 24 was 29,715, a decrease of 5,822 compared to the January-September 2013 period. Unemployed individuals below 24 years were 8% of all unemployed registered in the Labour Offices. 12,377 young people under 24, or 47.1% of all unemployed young people under 24 registered in September 2014, were registered since less than 4 months. The average monthly number of unemployed young people under 24 years for the period January-September 2014 was the highest for the regions of Plovdiv (2,740 individuals), Blagoevgrad (1,772 individuals), and Sliven (1,736 individuals), and the lowest in the regions of Gabrovo (237 individuals), Kardzhali (403 individuals), Pernik, and Smolyan (524 individuals). According to preliminary data of the National Representative Study among Employers between June-July 2014 conducted by the Employment Agency, 12.2% employers wanted to open new workplaces in the next 12 months.

The Convergence Programme of the Republic of Bulgaria for 2014 requires Bulgaria to take the following actions during the period 2014-2015 in the field of labour market. Bulgaria should improve the efficacy of the Employment Agency by developing a system for monitoring the implementation and better allocation of the efforts to the most vulnerable such as unskilled and aged workers, long-term unemployed individuals, and members of the Roma minority. Moreover, Bulgaria should expand the scope and efficacy of active employment policies in order to increase their ability to find workers with suitable profile and reach the unregistered young individuals, who are neither working, nor studying or in education, in accordance with the purposes of the Youth Guarantee. In addition, it should increase the effective scope of social support and unemployment compensations and their relations with the activation measures. Bulgarian should also perform a wide-scale review of minimal insurance thresholds in order to guarantee that the system is not making the hiring of unskilled individuals too costly. In the end, after conducting consultations with the social partners, Bulgaria should make recommendations for changes in the legal amount of the minimal wage, while accounting for the effect of employment and competitiveness.

While taking into account the need of more effective bond between education and training and the actual working environment, Bulgaria took actions to develop vocational training (dual education) in the national system for vocational education and training. After such education was made possible by the Vocational Education and Training Act in mid-2014, a separate Regulation determined the order and conditions for performing vocational training (dual education). The actual implementation of vocational training (dual education) must commence in 2015; funding from the ESF will be used as well. The effective utilization of financial instruments on a national and European level will be strengthened in order to implement the employment, education and training policies. A new period for utilizing the European structural funds and the European programmes started in 2014, it will end in 2020.

The vision of the National Action Plan for Employment in 2015 (NAPE) has the following definition:

“Accelerating the transition from unemployment to employment in the real economy, including disadvantaged groups on the labour market, with priority on the most poorly developed regions, and decreasing the discrepancy between workforce sought and offered.”

A key priority is the implementation of the European Youth Guarantee. In 2015, all young people below 25 years, who have been unemployed and not in the process of education/training for up to 4 months, must be included.

Including the target groups and increasing the effect of programmes, projects and measures of active labour market policies, and increasing the efficacy and quality of the services of the Employment

agency are also among the priorities. In 2015, the active labour market policy will be aimed at the following key target groups: unemployed young people under 30 with a subgroup of young people under 25; young people, who are Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEETs); unemployed over the age of 50; long-term unemployed individuals; unemployed individuals with low or undesired professional qualification and lack of key competencies, including unemployed with low educational status (including those from the Roma community); individuals with disabilities; and individuals outside the work force who want to work, including discouraged individuals.

The actions, programmes, and measures in NAPE comply with the long-term priorities of the Europa 2020 Strategy and the need of improving the Bulgarian business environment. These will help achieve and implement the recommendation of the European Commission. As a tool for implementation of the Employment Policy for 2015, NAPE contains information about:

- Employment and training programmes, measures, and schemes and the actions according to the National Plan for Implementation of the European Youth Guarantee;
- The funding, sources of funding, types of stimuli and their amount for both the employers and the participants in the subsidised employment, training, or mobility encouragement;
- The institutions and their partners responsible for implementing the plan in the country in the field of labour market.

The forecasted annual average unemployment level is 11.8%, which is 1.2 percent lower than the 2013 value. In accordance with the expected delay of the economic activity in 2015, labour demand will be suppressed and the number of employed individuals is expected to decrease with 0.2% on an annual base. Unemployment level is expected to decrease slightly to 11.7% due to the limited work opportunities and the expectations for weaker participation on the labour market compared to the previous year. The EU forecasts for employment growth and unemployment rate in 2015 are comparable; it is expected that the level of employed individuals will decrease by 0.2%, while unemployment is expected to drop to 11.4%.

European Youth Guarantee

The European Youth Guarantee, which started in 2013, is a new approach to tackling youth unemployment which ensures that all young people under 25 – whether registered with employment services or not – get a good-quality, concrete offer, which is adapted to their needs, within 4 months of them leaving formal education or becoming unemployed.

Member-states of the EU have been applying the European Youth Guarantee since 2014 by implementing their national plans (<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1090&langId=en>). At EU level, the European Commission assesses the implementation of the state commitments within the European Semester by multitargeted reviews, during which member-states are assessed both by the EC and by other member-states. The monitoring process will continue next year, and each country, which received a specific recommendation for young people, should present its advance in the implementation of the European Youth Guarantee. A key accent and requirement in regard of its implementation on a national level is the close cooperation with public authorities, employment services, educational and training institutions, social partners, youth NGOs, etc.

In 2015, the active labour market policy will be aimed at the following key target groups:

- Unemployed young people under 30 with a subgroup of young people under 25, who are not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEETs);

- Unemployed over the age of 50;
- Long-term unemployed individuals;
- Unemployed with low or low-demanded professional qualification who lack key competencies, including unemployed with low educational status (including those from the Roma community);
- Individuals with disabilities;
- Individuals outside the work force who want to work, including discouraged individuals.

Priority target groups according to 2014 EU Council Recommendations:

- Low qualification;
- Aged workers;
- Long-term unemployed individuals;
- Roma community;
- Unregistered young people, who are not in Education, Employment, or Training in accordance with the purposes of the Youth Guarantee.

The following result is expected from the implementation of all set actions, programmes, projects, and measures in the National Employment Action Plan 2015, considering a favourable development of the business environment:

- Employment rate for the group (15 - 64) – 61%;
- Employment rate for the group (20 - 64) – 65%;
- Employment rate for older individuals (55-64) – 50%;
- The unemployment rate (according to NSI data) should not exceed 11.7%;
- The unemployment rate for the group (15 - 24) should not exceed 24%;
- Providing employment with funds from the state budget to over 26,000 unemployed; providing training to over 12,000 unemployed.

Specifically for Bulgaria, the recommendation regarding the implementation of the Youth Guarantee is the following: (...). Extend the coverage and effectiveness of active labour market policies. For the purposes of the Recommendation, “informal economy” refers to all economic activities performed by workers or economic units, which are legally or in practice out of the scope of formal agreements; and does not include illegal activities. “Economic units” include “workers from unrecognized or unregulated employment relationships and reaching unregistered young people, who are not in employment, education, or training, according to the purposes of the Youth Guarantee (...)”

The purpose of the National Plan for Implementation of the European Youth Guarantee (NPIEYG) is all young people in the 15-25 years range to get good-quality proposition for work, education or training, or apprenticeship within 4 months of their registration in the Labour Office. After Bulgaria took advantage of the opportunity for gradual implementation of the Guarantee in 2014, in 2015 all young people within the target group are going to be included. In addition, there will be work will all

young people under 29 regardless of the duration of their registration in the Labour Office, in accordance with the available funding and the work force demand in the real sector.

The main challenges identified by the European Commission for Bulgaria in implementing the European Youth Guarantee include:

- Insufficient focus on second chance education for the very high number of early dropouts from the educational system;
- need to strengthen apprenticeship and dual training initiatives, which are very important for making a suitable offer to young people considering the fact that such proposals would have a positive impact on young people;
- insufficient outreach to NEETs who are not registered in the Labour Offices and insufficient mechanisms for encouraging their registration in the Labour Offices;
- need of scaling up and diversifying the active labour market policies to match the profiles of job-seekers, and to develop the capacity for identification and compliance with the required skills;
- Need of measures specifically targeted at the very low skilled, including the Roma population.

In addition to the programmes and measures for young people in 2014 that proved their effectiveness, as evidenced by the positive evaluation by both the employers and the included young people, new initiatives for targeted work with inactive young people (NEETs) will be added in 2015. Funding will be provided by the HRD OP 2014-2020 as well. The “Youth Employment” initiative will provide funding for more than 8 thousand young people below 29 so that they can gain their first professional experience or they can train at their workplace. A new scheme for activation, training, and employment of unemployed and inactive young people will start as well. This process will be further developed with state budget funding according to the National Programme “Activation of Inactive Individuals”. Its new component will give opportunity to hire young people to work with unemployed and inactive young people in municipalities with high level of unemployed young individuals. Reaching inactive young people and activating them will be performed by the Youth Information and Consultation Centres, funded by the National Youth Programme of the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

The activation of inactive young people (NEETs) will continue with the organization of specialized youth job fairs, open door days, etc. Each young person, who registers in a Labour Office, will receive an individual action plan adapted to his or her profile. The actions of the labour intermediary and the young person will comply with the individual plan, which will be updated if there are changes in the profile and/or changes in the attitudes and desires for realization of the young person. The services provided by the labour intermediaries such as information, consultation, orientation to a subsidized work place or the primary labour market, will be complemented by the case managers and psychologists, who will provide the following services: psychological support, career consultation, professional orientation, job seeking ateliers, intermediary activities for solving complex problems that distance young people from the labour market, etc. These services proved their effectiveness and their implementation would continue. They will be further complemented by modern forms of communication such as texts and emails.

The youth unemployment rate at the end of 2015 is expected to be lower than 24% and to reach 20% in result of the implementation of the NPIEYG. The relative share of young people between 15-24, who are not in education, employment, or training, is 5% from the total number of young people in

the same age range (NEET rate). The relative share of registered unemployed young people under 25 years is expected to rise due to the work for activating the inactive young people.

Several national programmes to be implemented throughout the 2014-2020 programme period are planned as part of the implementation of the National Employment Strategy.

NATIONAL PROGRAMME "ACTIVATION OF INACTIVE INDIVIDUALS"

PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION FOR ALL – CHANGE FOR SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION TO EMPLOYMENT (PRO-CHANCE)

REGIONAL PROGRAMMES FOR TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Figure: INTEGRA

Figure: LET'S MAKE SCHOOL ATTRACTIVE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

NATIONAL PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN YOUTH GUARANTEE

2014 – 2020

Inactive young people, who are not in education or employment, and who are not registered in the Labour Offices will benefit from planned actions, which will be implemented with a partnership approach. Young people, who did not enrol in the next stage of education or the next grade, will be identified and contacted using data from the Ministry of Education and the USCRASP Services (Civil Registration and Administrative Services Directorates) of municipal administration in order to obtain the addresses of the young people. In 2014, labour intermediaries from the Labour Offices will inform each of these young people about the services provided by the Labour Office; after 2014, this information would be provided by other organizations as well. The activity of the labour intermediaries, Roma mediators, who are working at the Labour Offices, will be aimed at the Roma young people. There will be cooperation with non-government organizations working in the field of Roma integration, which could be useful for establishing contact and intermediation with the community.

The implementation of the National Youth Guarantee started in January 2014 with state-funded measures and programmes. Youth ESF-funded schemes targeted at young people are scheduled to start in 2014, including funding of the Youth Guarantee in accordance with the Youth Employment Initiative.

Until 2020, the state budget and European funding will fund these activities in accordance with the National Action Plans for Employment for the current year. The implementation of the NPIEYG in the Southwest region is generally not financed by the Youth Employment Initiative, but mostly with funds from the state budget.

It is possible to use 10% from the Youth Guarantee funding for regions at a lower than NUTS 2-level (planning region) within the unqualified Southwest region in accordance with the Youth Employment Initiative.

The implementation of the National Plan for Implementation of the European Youth Guarantee 2014-2020 would have achieved the following results at the end of 2015.

- Reduction of the youth unemployment rate (15-24) to 27.2%.

- Reduction of the relative share of young people between 15-24 years who are not in employment, education, or training in the total number of young people in the same age period (NEET rate) to 20.5%.
- Increase of the relative share of registered unemployed young people (15-24), who are included in training or employment in the total number of registered young people to 50%.

The agreement will determine the responsibilities and obligations of the corresponding institutions and organizations, including in regard of the identification and activation of younger people, who are not in education or employment, and who are not registered in the Labour Offices, including those, who had never been part of the education system. Some of these key engagements include:

- organizing an information campaign for the purposes and nature of the National Youth Guarantee within the context of the European Youth Guarantee; dissemination of materials, brochures, media information, Internet pages, social networks, etc.
- procurement of information from the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy regarding young people, who had left the educational system prematurely;
- support from the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria (NAMRB) for identification of young people, who had dropped out from the educational system, and of those, who had never visited school;
- the active participation of the Ministry of Youth and Sports will help identify active non-government organizations in the country, which implement youth activities and services for the identification of young people, who are not in education, employment, or training. These organizations will take actions to activate such young people to register in the Labour Offices; such services will include local services performed by young workers (active dialogue with each young person by providing information and individual consultation, organization of workshops for change of attitudes and social inclusion). A concrete methodology will be developed in cooperation with the partners, which will concern working within the partnership network, identification and activation of young people, and which should account for the specifics of working with the different groups of disadvantaged young people, who are not in employment or education, and who are not registered in the Labour Offices, while complying with European documents.

The Employment Agency is the institution, which cooperates with the partner organizations for the activation activities and which makes contact on its own with the young people to encourage them to register in the Labour Offices and to take advantage of the education and employment opportunities. The active work of labour intermediaries, Roma mediators, psychologists, and case managers with the young people is crucial for this process, as well as their communication with employers in order to provide workplaces and constant exchange of information between employers and young people. In order to fulfil the labour market integration measures, the Employment Agency will work purposefully to implement the National Guarantee, i.e., in 2014, the priority will be on funding for education and employment of young people under 25 with basic and lower education (who had left the educational system prematurely), who had been registered in the Labour Offices no longer than 4 months. Young people with secondary and higher education, who had been registered in the Labour Offices for under 4 months, will receive funding to start their first job (apprenticeship).

The implementation of the first scheme for implementation of the Youth Guarantee will begin in 2014 and will include modules for the activation of inactive young people (including NEETs), provision of education and subsidizing employment and apprenticeship. 23,412,345 BGN have been allocated for implementation of the scheme in 2014, which could provide employment and/or training to more than 7,000 young people under 29. In addition, the implementation of three schemes under the HRD OP 2007-2013 will continue in 2014, which will include 1,270 new young people, with 25,000,000 BGN in funding.

Part 2: Services and professionals

Following interviews of 5 experts, representatives of an entire range of stakeholders such as NGO providers of social services, professors from the Faculty of Pedagogy of the University of Sofia, and the municipal social service, we could summarize their opinion on the questions in the following way:

1) Your opinion on the NEET phenomenon (do you think that it exists)?

This phenomenon is strong and widespread in Bulgaria. The country holds one of the first places in the percentage of young people, who are not in employment, education, or apprenticeship, about 17%. In 2011, the country lost about 3-3.5% of its GDP because of these young people who are not in employment or education.

In its essence, NEET is a group of society comprised by mostly young people, whose age parameters may vary and change depending on various society factors: social, economic, demographic, etc.

The NEET phenomenon are young people, who do not want to be part of society in any way; they do not want to contribute to its development; and they are not able and/or do not want to tend to themselves.

2) According to you, what are the features of the NEET condition (what do you think they have in common):

NEET is a collective image for people, who:

- do not participate in educational activities in formal educational institutions;
- do not participate in additional forms of education;
- are not employed and are Economically inactive;
- are not engaged in their career development;
- have no motivation or ambition
- possibly have their own family
- are possibly people with disabilities, etc.

These groups are not mutually exclusive; some young people could be classified in more than one group. NEET groups generally refer to these young people, who are within the mandatory school age range and who are under risk due low current achievements, or young people, who are currently not NEET, but risk becoming unskilled personnel with few or no training opportunities.

The reason for the appearance of the NEET groups and the formation of their features is the following: the lack of support networks (preventive, timely, and if necessary), which can support these people effectively by interagency support, availability and provision of information for people with special needs, and change in the public opinion regarding the existing stigmas and the NEET phenomenon in general.

3) Negative/positive features of mandatory education and higher education systems, which reflect on the NEET phenomenon.

Positive features:

- mandatory basic and primary education (1st- 8th grade, 7-15 years);

- understanding the need of change of the educational system in regard of accessibility and social (educational) inclusion;
- specialists in the field of education and social work, who are motivated to take part in and to support the social inclusion and integrated education of children and young people in risk;
- developing normative framework aimed at social inclusion and integrated education.

Negative features:

- secondary education is not mandatory;
- vocational education does not fulfil the requirements for high quality, direct connection with the labour market, practical apprenticeships in a real high-quality working environment;
- insufficient understanding of education, apprenticeship, and employment as a right of each child and young person, which is the responsibility of state, institutions, family, and community;
- insufficient understanding of the scope of the term “accessibility” and the right of accessibility: access to school, information, and knowledge; access to support for learning and development, etc.;
- insufficient understanding of the nature of the “individual approach” and the need of flexibility of the entire educational process, with an emphasis on the strengths of the specific child or young person, rather on their limitations;
- attitudes regarding children with learning difficulties, children with disabilities, and children in social risk as a “problem” of the educational system, which cannot be solved with the available support and intervention tools, resulting in neglecting the risk of dropping-out and termination of the learning process for a large group of children and young people with disabilities and young people in risk;
- short-term character of the social and educational inclusion programmes, despite the available strategies on the subject;
- lack of an unified dropping-out, unfinished education, and unemployment risk assessment approaches and tools that could lead to timely educational exclusion prevention and intervention actions;
- lack of a systematic approach and coordination between the responsible institutions in regard of the timely support for successful start in school and for the different educational degrees (kindergarten, basic and primary education, secondary and higher education);
- lack of a close coordination between education and employers, and lack of connection between the educational purposes and practices and the needs and purposes of the labour market;
- ineffective system for career consultation and development, both at school and university level (in most fields, at the workplace, too).

4) Reasons and social conditions, which may prevent or change the NEET condition (have you noticed influence from the circle of friends or family).

Reasons:

- economic crisis;
- attitudes of alienation, neglect, demotivation for change in a situation of economic and social crisis;
- lack of long-term and sustainable educational and employment policy.

On a state and institutional level:

- sharing common values based on the rights of children, human rights, including the rights of people with disabilities;
- purposeful, timely, and sustainable measure for prevention of dropping-out of school and in support of integrated education and social inclusion of each child and young person;
- educational reform with the purpose of accessibility, quality, and connection with the labour market for all children and young people in social, economic, or health risk, people with disabilities, people without sufficient support in the family, people in a situation of crisis, etc.
- continuing training of specialists (pedagogues, psychologists, social workers, speech therapists) for direct work with children and young people is risk of dropping-out from school and the labour market.

At a family and community level:

- sharing common values in regard of the child and the young person;
- understanding development as learning, sharing experience, practical skills, etc.;
- support for learning, education, and development;
- seeking the support of specialists or the community for the development of the child or young person;

5) What activities have you undertaken to cope with the NEET condition? (activities on the level of organization, connections, and cooperation with other organization, etc.)

NGOs implement projects and activities in support of:

- the development of children and young people with limited access to education due to disability or social risk;
- social integration of adolescents and young people with disabilities;
- career consultation for choosing and preparation for employment for young people in risk and young people with disabilities;
- training for developing social skills and skills for independent living of children, adolescents, and young people who leave the social institutions;
- training the staff in human and children's rights;
- cooperative activities with schools, the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", the New Bulgarian University, cultural institutions (community centres, puppet theatres, libraries, etc.) for continued education and training, lifelong learning, sharing experience and good practices, transfer of competencies, etc.

- cooperative activities with other suppliers of educational and social services with the purpose of developing policies in the field of education, employment, healthcare, leisure time, etc.

The educational system (The Sofia University). The effects of this condition are not visible in an academic environment. NEET is a more social phenomenon, which may be caused or reinforced by the activity of educational institutions, but its social dimensions are evident outside the institution. NEET is a way of life, as well!

The municipality of Simitli implements and seeks opportunities for informational campaigns, round tables with local private businesses, and generally discusses the problems for people with disabilities and their opportunity to join the labour market. The municipality develops projects, implements national employment programmes, which also include and ensure the participation of young people. The non-government sector, separately and jointly with local authorities, also takes part in the fight against the NEET phenomenon by implementing projects in the field of dropout prevention, lifelong learning, qualification and re-qualification courses, and sports activities and initiatives.

6) What are the educational and labour market orientation aspects of the NEET phenomenon?

- school dropout prevention;
- ensuring the quality of education and balance of professional and social competencies;
- connection between vocational education and apprenticeship with the labour market;
- increasing the access and quality of career consultation and development;
- connection between career consultation and the labour market;
- state policy and partnership with employers in regard of career development in different professional fields.

7) What are the required competencies of the separate staff member, which help avoid/change the NEET condition (technical skills, basic competencies, combination of personal and professional competencies, contacts, etc.?)

- information research and analysis skills;
- skills for forming and maintaining a support network;
- basic competencies;
- skills for changing the attitude to work;
- work skills (planning, organization, consistent actions, self-evaluation, learning through doing, etc.)
- skills for adaptation to a working environment (learning rules, procedures, applying the learnt material;)
- teamwork skills;
- technical skills in the specific area;
- specific professional skills with increasing complexity and responsibility;
- others.

8) Please, describe your experience for successful and failed cases (describe real cases, how they became or ceased to be NEET, what strategies were applied).

NGOs have experience in:

1. *Training for acquiring skills for provision of services in a family environment.*
2. Our team has positive experience with young people with disabilities, but they have suitable education and continue to train.

We have had NEET cases during our work with children from social institutions, who had not continued into secondary education despite that they completed their basic education, which puts them into a high risk of social isolation and dependence on social support, or in danger of risky behaviour.

The positive approaches in these cases were:

- continuing support for development of social skills through training and learning by doing;
- supporting the motivation for learning and training;
- informal education;
- professional education, courses for specific competencies, which are part of a profession, etc.
- support for development of labour skills;
- direct work for organizing meetings between adolescents and employers for seeking work and employment;
- support for preserving the employment, especially in critical situations, isolation, etc.

The experience of the municipal administration

The only examples of good practices are through the implementation of different ESF projects related to prevention against the NEET phenomenon.

9) In your opinion, what are the needs for adaptation of the formal and informal educational systems (changes needed in the mandatory educational system (high/higher education/professional education and training)?

Opinion of the NGO representatives

Needs for adaptations of the formal educational system

- voting the new law on vocational education and training with earlier referral to vocational education;
- development of new learning and methodological approaches and practical materials related to the real life and employment;
- balance between theoretical and practical competencies for participation in the labour market;
- balance of professional and social skills for labour and employment;
- providing knowledge of the labour market and the employers' requirements;
- preparation of specialists in support of education and employment: social workers on employment, mentors, and trainers; both representatives of the educational system and representatives of employers;

- monitoring the results of vocational education and apprenticeship of young people in relation with their realization on the labour market, which leads to further development of the system of education, training, and lifelong learning.

Needs for adaptations of the informal educational system

- development and work with thematic programmes and attractive forms of continued learning, learning from experience, development of social skills, development of work and team work skills;
- development and implementation of programmes for employment preparation, inclusion in teams, and workplace support;
- including the adolescents in the development and testing of programmes for development and implementation of the acquired skills.

Opinion of the representative of the educational system

There are no two separate educational systems. Formal education and informal education are two inseparable parts (elements) of the educational system. Realizing this connection (rather than differentiating or opposing one and the other) is one of the factors, which may affect the dissemination of this phenomenon. **This lack of a clear purpose, demotivation for success, and failure to engage (inaction) in young people can be overcome if they are presented with opportunities to make choices that would give meaning to their life. Each action of personal value, which is considered as such by the person, may affect the behaviour of the person in a positive way.** One of these opportunities is the validation of competencies acquired through informal learning and self-learning.

10) What do you think is the professional profile of the employee working in the field of social services? Is it suitable for communication with discouraged young people?

The current profile of the social service employee is suitable, but it may be improved with modern and innovative approaches for communication, motivation, continued support, and support in time of transition (from kindergarten to school, from primary school to secondary school, and from school to employment), in a situation of crisis, or a new situation.

Employees must have competencies for diverse approaches for support of groups of children and adolescents in different kinds of risk (without or with low education, lack of motivation, with negative school experience, with disabilities, Roma, from families with unemployed members, emigrants, immigrants, etc.) - short-term (risk assessment, prevention, or intervention of a specific problem in the process of training or job seeking) and long-term (for developing skills, planning, and lifelong learning with the purpose of personal and career development).

Employees, either specialized personnel or auxiliary personnel, engaged in the field of social services, have a profile that includes competency; they possess key competencies, which comply with the specific work characteristics for the specific jobs they hold in social institutions. The skills, which each person engaged in social services must have are related to skills for communication, active listening, information research, meeting and event organization, problem solving, risk assessment and analysis, skills for influence, adaptability, guiding, and leading. Personal characteristics include qualities and abilities, which are acquired by each person in the course of their life and which affect their

individual abilities for coping with the challenges of the work environment. Each employee in the social services should have an established style for working with the individuals, which are the subject of the social work. This style must be individual, emphatic, social, convincing, teamwork-oriented, effective, independent, stress-resistant, active, decisive, and motivated.

11) Are there any references to the set of competencies developed and implemented in Europe; were any additions made in compliance with the European Guidelines?

An integral systematic programme for preparation of specialists in the field of education, social work, and employment is required. This programme must have common goals, methods, coordination, and cooperation based on the European guidelines for working with NEET.

In Bulgaria, dropping out from school or the labour market is still regarded as a failure of the child, adolescent, or young person and their family, without recognizing and purposefully eliminating the deficits of the system. The problems of the specific child or group of children do not serve as an indicator for change and development of the educational, social, and labour environment, which makes the system rigid, suppresses development, and does not contribute to the personal progress of young people.

Bulgarian studies regarding dropping out of young people from school and the labour market must become the basis for the development of a general systematic approach for change and coordinated development in the three main fields: education, social work, and employment.

Part 3: Finding strategic competencies

The main results from the focus group are the following:

Question 1: What are the innovative practices in your job?

Labour Offices Directorates (LODs):

Programme “Activation of inactive individuals”:

Roma mediators: The Programme includes labour intermediaries, who work in it after training. They are Roma mediators at the Labour Offices Directorates, who are registered unemployed individuals, self-defined as Roma and who have at least secondary education. The individuals selected for the Programme are appointed as labour intermediaries (code 3333-3003 of the National Classification of Occupation and Duties (NCOD), 2011) and are called “Roma mediators” for the purposes of the Programme. Two Roma mediators are appointed in each Labour Office Directorate.

The component implements the following activities in relation to the Roma mediators:

- selection of registered unemployed individuals of Roma ethnicity and at least high education to employ them as Roma mediators in the Programme;
- training for acquiring professional qualification as part of the profession Job Market Intermediary (Code 762010 of the List of Professions for Vocational Education and Training, approved by the Minister of Education and Science), or introductory training on the workplace.
- Those who complete the training successfully are employed at the LODs;

The Roma mediators perform the following activities (separately and in cooperation with other LOD employees):

- organization and implementation of informational campaigns “Come and Register at the Labour Office” in cooperation with other LOD employees. These campaigns present the legislature regulations and inform about different legal cases regarding the status of employed, unemployed, and inactive individuals; their rights, obligations, the opportunities, and referring the persons to active behaviour on the labour market;
- Organization of previously announced informal workshops with the purpose of building skills of participants for effective job seeking, preparation for applying for jobs, and attending interviews with employers. These workshops are organized in cooperation with other employees of the LOD. these workshops help participants associate with active job seekers in an informal environment.
- identification of groups of inactive and discouraged individuals and their needs with the help of informal meetings, individually or in groups, regarding matters of employment, vocational information and consultation;
- Individual work with beneficiaries; giving advice to unemployed in need of help for finding job, while complying with their individual needs: help for CV preparation and editing; analysis of different job seeking techniques, selection of suitable training. one of the key purposes of the Roma mediators in their individual work is to determine whether there are objective (surmountable or unsurmountable) obstacles for job-seeking individuals, who want to start work (obstacles that put the individual in an disadvantaged position on the labour market; these may be related to:

personality – sex, age, ethnicity, profession (whether there is demand on the local labour market); lack of qualification and work history; personal qualities);

- inclusion in motivational training following the registration of the individuals;
- developing job-seeking skills and habits and supporting employment inclusion; seeking announcements in different sources such as newspapers, magazines, and the Internet; while performing this activity mediators use the available equipment (computer, printer, copy machine, fax machine, telephone, etc.) in the Labour Offices;
- providing practical guidelines for job seeking;
- Establishing active mediator-beneficiaries relations.

Youth mediators in municipalities

Youth mediators work actively on different places, which are locally known as gathering spots for young people: community centres and libraries, (Internet) clubs, cafes, shopping centres, cinemas, etc. An important aspect of a youth mediator's job is to go on the field, in the environment of inactive young people, where they feel more confident and where communication would be more fruitful.

Youth mediators organize (either alone or together with the LOD staff, and also in cooperation with NGOs working for/with young people such as the Youth Information and Consultation Centres (YICC), voluntary youth organizations, etc.) and **perform the following activities:**

- Identification of young people under 30, who are not in employment, education, and who are not registered in the LODs, people who are inactive, including discouraged individuals and their needs by collecting information and organizing informal meetings, both individual and in groups, with the purpose of forming active labour market behaviour on the issues of employment, vocational education, and information and consultation.

Supporting the establishment of active communication between the Programme's beneficiaries and institutions;

- providing information and consultation to young people under 30, who are not in employment, education, and who are not registered in the LODs in regard of the legal regulations for the status of employed, unemployed, and inactive individuals, their rights, obligations, the opportunities, and referring the persons to active behaviour on the labour market (at the LODs, schools, vocational training centres, private job markets, temporary employment agencies, etc.);
- cooperation with representative of the local authorities, schools, employers, NGOs (including those working for/with young people such as YICC, voluntary youth organizations, etc.), after establishing contact and working with young people under 30, who are not in employment, education, and who are not registered in the LODs;
- participation in establishing and the operation of cooperation networks between interested institutions/school/NGO with the purpose of effective communication and work for implementation of different horizontal policies in regard of young people under 30, who are not in employment, education, and who are not registered in the LODs;
- group and individual work with the Programme's beneficiaries, young people under 30, who are not in employment, education, and who are not registered in the LODs with the purpose of providing counselling and help to unemployed, who need help for job seeking and finding, inclusion

in employment and training in compliance with their individual needs; help for CV preparation and editing; introduction to different job seeking techniques, selection of suitable training.

Consultation of unemployed individuals

One of the goals of the Programme is providing support for unemployed individuals from vulnerable groups on the labour market when seeking and starting work. In order to achieve this goal, the Programme includes the provision of specialized services, which include researching the needs and potential of the individuals and the conditions of the environment, in which they are located; identification of the major obstacles to their labour and social integration; determining a suitable set of services with the purpose of overcoming the identified obstacles, the institutions that offer such services, the terms of access to these services and the actions that individuals should take to receive these services. When applying this transition-facilitating approach between the different labour market situations, e.g., from inactivity to labour activity, from unemployment to employment, from unemployment to training, the unemployed individuals use the services of specially trained specialists called case managers. Case managers perform an intermediary function between individuals and institutions that provide the suitable social, health, educational and other services, which effectively add to the intermediary services provided by the LODs. In order to achieve this, they are working together with specialists from different fields to offer a service package, which could completely satisfy the needs of the specific unemployed person, and to plan and coordinate the provision process.

PHSC: Programme “SUCCESS” – Let’s Make School An Attractive Place. Projects are aimed at extracurricular forms, which could attract those students, who are not very interested in the activities.

Partnership between business and school. Positives: students can gain actual knowledge of active business from their field of education. Weaknesses: everything depends of the specific principal.

Question 2: Provide examples of successful practices and emphasize what competencies you have used to inspire motivation, proactivity, decision-making, or work on a project in discouraged individuals (NEET).

BT: One of the participants in a temporary employment programme, a long-term unemployed individual with high qualification, a landscape engineer, began work as a landscape engineer at the municipality (second qualification degree). At the end of the period, he was approved and signed a permanent contract as a person in charge for landscaping.

Question 3: How were these competencies acquired? Were they part of the formal qualification?

LOD, EA: Theoretical preparation training follows the selection and employment. They were not part of the formal qualification. Mentoring is also available. A lot depends on personal qualities, as well.

PHSC: Unfortunately, continued education is very unpopular with teachers. It is not regarded as necessary and is not considered serious.

Question 4: Any strategic and effective skills with added value, which you have identified as actually necessary for the field in which you work or teach?

- Organizational skills, especially for larger events;

- Negotiation skills;
- Skills to speak in clients' term;
- Empathy
- Stress management;
- Work with difficult clients;
- Patience;

Question 5: Do you think that this kind of competencies must become part of the formal education and qualification system?

EA: It would be nice to be able to validate our employees' skills as a "labour intermediary", for their own satisfaction.

VTC Knowledge: It could be validated in a module, it is not necessary to differentiate an entire profession; it could be a part of another profession.

SU: It would be nice to measure the entry and exit skills, in order to evaluate which part of education would be relevant.

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