CoMWork

![Erasmus+]

Report on strategic informal and non formal competences of social and educational professionals

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

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Summary

Introduction

An ambitious goal aims this first output of COM_WORK *Exchanging practices for recognize and validate competences of social and educational professionals*: on the one hand it reports the most significant recount of information and analysis gathered by teams on the field in different countries, on the other hand it is also meant to elaborate common criteria to define the validation and qualification of the strategic competences for social and educational operators.

Common work, *comwork,* started with partners discussing the main issues outlining the research's schemes of reference.

Afterwards, they have been debating over the problem of transparency of qualifications in a European context and then about the concepts of competences, and the role this concept can play in the innovation of training patterns and national's guidelines for evaluations.

Through the theoretical framework, *DRAFT_TF_COMWORK_FEB_2015.doc, partners could exchange opinions and experiences about the NEET situation in their own countries and in Europe.*

The building of a common proposal first needed to intercept other's views and experiences in each context, so a template has been realised Template_NATIONAL_RESEARCH.docx, to involve national experts and socio-educational operators, in order to set off from the beginning the contributions of the main beneficiaries of the project.

Aware of the considerable organizational differences between countries as Bulgaria, Italy, Spain and Portugal, whether about the role of socio-educational services or about their organization, it has been decided only to suggest the procedures to meet the protagonists and not to standardize them.

Thus, each team organized the meetings with 5 key actors and 20 socio-educational operators in the country following the procedures they felt more appropriate.

A focus group with Italy and Spain's operators took place, while in Spain and Portugal group-meetings were preferred.

All four National Reports are available on internet in English and in others languages at www.comworkproject.org. The reporting has been possible thanks to the enriching face-to-face encounters between partners, which took place during the second Transnational Meeting and Mutual Learning Session in Sophia (28-29 May 2015).

All along the whole process of realization, from the Theoretical Framework, to the National Research until the Comparative Report, teams have been involved in a continuous debate, comparing and co-evaluating to finally address some critical issues, which from the beginning have revealed the complexity of this research and of an appropriate action.

The following report highlights the core of the qualitative comparison between the four national researches with the idea to enhancing collaborative work and open new practices in the light of the collaborations, on the bases of the new findings and testimonies of the different primary actors.

A collective discussion

In COM_WORK, collaboration and exchanges is the key, thanks to the different experience and perspective of the various partners in the social work.

That's why a great attention has been paid to roles, politics and expertise of the participants at the *step* O1/A2, National Research.

The interviews realized with all key-witness, *stakeholders* and decision-makers, revealed their perception over the real capacity of planning and activating solutions, as well as reflections about the main obstacles founded to the full application of the Youth Guarantee[1].

Taking into consideration the ECA's Special Report n.3/2015[2] about the structural obstacles hindering the program, here we present few excerpt from interviews with responsible of labour services, training and guidance centre from Bulgaria, Italy, Spain and Portugal:

*"There aren't two separate educational systems. Formal education and informal education are two inseparable parts (elements) of the educational system. Realizing this connection (rather that differentiating or opposing one to 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."*

"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

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[1] The Youth Guarantee 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 within 4 months of them leaving formal education or becoming unemployed. The good-quality offer should be for a job, apprenticeship, traineeship, or continued education and be adapted to each individual need and situation. EU countries endorsed the principle of the Youth Guarantee in April 2013.

[2] Special Relations n. 3/2015 http://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR15_03/SR15_03_EN.pdf

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.

"The employment services are not an example for young people. They are general services. Young people do not use them. There should be a reformulation regarding the behavior of this collective: these services are not attractive for young people with low levels of education; these services are basic for those with higher levels of education. There should be reinforcement on a good academic dossier, or this collective should achieve compulsory education to start an individualized itinerary for the incorporation in the labor market."

During the comparison phase with the 80 socio-educational operators, if on the one hand we focalized on their way of describing the phenomenon (of NEET), on the other hand we stimulated reflections about what competences that can be activated, those which needed to be improved, and about the real capacity of services agencies to react appropriately.

Even in the considerations expressed by the socio-educational professionals it's possible to trace out common points for the four countries.

"The suitability of professional profiles is not so much the professional profile per se but the acquisition of other skills and sensibilities towards the collective. In some cases, depending on the project or the NEET's profile, the empathy and closeness with the collective is more valued than a previous formal training, since the methodological tools can be acquired through other paths."

"Also, the projects should have continuity; stops, because of problems with funding, damage the relation with young people, eliminating the idea of mentor or model. It could also be interesting the encouragement of mentoring with young NEETS who have been in that situation and they have found a way to leave it."

"I think the critical point is to establish a relationship between training and work, for example, to follow the German school-work model, or a training to obtain the first educational level in order to integrate young people in the labor market (although in alternation). A new approach should permit to acquire the necessary knowledge to be skilled for the job market at the end of the training».

«The classical strategies (interviews, interventions in the classroom, lectures) are no longer entirely appropriate for engaging with young people, especially if there is a significant age gap

between operators and » potential NEET, limiting the capacity of dialogue. Perhaps using « peers », presenting their experiences with their language, could represent a possible strategy, or even with a reference « adult » operator, but less « structured » and flexible in the report».

Many of the professionals involved insist over a *cross-disciplinary* approach, and they request changes in the formation, training and updating supply.

The Target Net/NEET

The principal objective of COM_WORK is to form Learning Units which will be able to give strategic skills to young socio-educational operators, to activate projects for the NEET.

Such objective demands to sharpen the view of the NEET phenomenon, that keeps growing in many European Countries, and whose characteristics supersede the traditional categories of as the "social disadvantaged" interpretation.

From the *Theoretical Framework: 'At this point it is worth proposing a reading of the 'status' no longer from multiple negatives (not-not) but by statements. And this means that in the reading of the problem variables come into play not only as a result of the economic crisis but also educational, social, political factors. Youth unemployment and inactivity are both particularly worrisome, given their permanent effects on employability and future productivity of the persons concerned. The current divergence of the youth unemployment rate is likely to fuel a difference even more pronounced, in the long run, of socio-economic fundamentals both in monetary union and in the EU.'*

The comparative work leads to new points of reflection, as we can read in the Italian Report: '... *an operator that provides guidance to the work of young people in socio-educational nature argues: "in my opinion there is no such clear-cut classification of young people who are considered N.E.E.T. According to my experience, it is not a "class", it is a period of transition, "stalemate", between one experience (e.g. training or work) and another, so it's not a "homogeneous group" but life stages of individual people". Another operator who works in more traditional job guidance and who is also working in the frame of "Youth guarantee" stress in a provocative way: "The category is totally invented, it is a rhetorical category that probably serves to justify the shifting of the responsibility for the problem outside the system, placing it in the motivation and inability to take action. A problem that is internal to the system in the labor market".*

The comparative views in the Reports emphasize how describing NEET by negations (not/not) turns out to be useful to measure statistically the phenomenon, but it doesn't add anything to help understanding their situation.

COM_WORK, gathering commentaries and experiences from those professionals who are called to plan services and take actions, helps in focusing all the aspects of the phenomenon and helps to consider it through many different perspectives.

The territorial government point of view over the NEET says:

➢ They substantially match with the group of individuals who have abandoned or have been rejected by schools or in the best scenario, those who achieve the basic grade of education, but didn't continue afterwards. On a larger scale it represents a layer of society with little, or in extreme cases, no education.

➢ They are selected by their ability to study, their job and formation more than their professional and/or scholar curriculum. From this perspective they are classed in two groups: "pure" and "smart", both of them are NEET. The first category designate those who have a resigned, passive attitude, presenting a social "scotomization"; the second category instead concern those who acquired a greater knowledge and are generally more motivated, they properly use technology to accomplish their goals and they are more flexible in the work market.

The NEET seen from the front-office operators:

➢ They are cropped, not well identified, they are represented by a temporal condition, the sum of phases in personal lives or at least defined as un archipelago of notched islands;

➢ They are a "false category", a "rhetorical definition", "a label for a functional stigmatisation in order to hide the real problem", that is the lack of vision in work-policies and the distortion of economy politics.

This "cropping" of the image by the operators induce less ability to act properly and it disqualifies the competences. That's way it has been a crucial point in our research.

For the utility of the project, we thought to keep the division in "pure" NEET and "smart" NEET.

Then we focalised the attention over the first category, the "pure" ones: we analysed which competences and skills where expected from them by the operators, and those expected by them from the operators who are designed to tutor them in the process towards autonomy.

To accept and introduce this distinction underlines how the NEED definition involves various generations (15-29), and between those we can find the first "digital generation".

The employment of digital technologies as pedagogical tools at school, as well as in their free-time and socialization' spaces since a very early age, surely has a strong anthropological and social impact we must take into consideration.

In our exploration we adopted the *domestication* approach: according to it, media and people are a relation, not separated entities. In this key we tried to set up a biography of a potential last beneficiary of Com_Work.

This approach – introduced by the Yankelovich Institut – schematically outlined few social categorisations, now currently used, as the distinction between "Matures" (born before 1945), "Boomers" (born between 1946 and 1964), and "X Generation" (born after 1964). To these generations afterwards has been added the "Y Generation" (born after 1980).

In this context, a generation is considered as a social segment where consumer's attitudes and behaviours are coherent and unitarian, in a collective shared conscience.

More recently, sociologists talk of a "digital native generation" (Prensky, 2001a; Id., 2001b), also called "Net Generation" (Tapscott, 1998; Id., 2009): this to underline the special familiarity with new technologies peculiar to those who belongs to the cohorts of the Millennials generation (born after 1985)[3].

Mentioning the term of "generation" introduce us directly at the complexity of elements and conditions which are generically resumed in the NEET definition. It could be that all this overlapping made slippery and confused to target and focus beneficiaries, even for socio-educational professionals.

The young Millenials actually represent the bigger generational gap, having experiences that are not familiars to past generations.

With the end of XIX century's traditional narrations, the generational issue needs a new key to understanding: the crisis of the progress (development) ideology and the transition to a post-growth society give in some measure reason for the absence of conflicts, a peculiarity of the Millennial generation. They are "politically apathetic" compared to traditional expectations, but they are very active in the life-style and consumer sphere.

Unsurprisingly, the "micro-narrations" as journals, blogs, facebook pages replace the past schemes, this is youth self-production, no more bounded to the private or limited social space, it's something

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[3] Quaglizza G., *Generazione Facebook*, EUT Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2012

appearing now in the public sphere, thanks to affordability and simplicity of technologies and to the spread digital alphabetization. [4].

The Millennials, or Y Generation, have built a specific life-style, linked to the affirmation of new technologies permitting to improve speed, brevity, density.

Moved by insatiable appetite for instantaneous gratifications and frequent rewards, (Trendwatching, 2006), living focused on the hic et nunc, Millennials are used to live in a "just in time" universe with immediate availability, where the slogan is "jump on chances". In fact, Wired magazine coined the term "snack culture" to define this generation consumer's behaviour: they are based on little bites of everything (sms, tweet, web-episodes, podcast, etc.), called to fill every day empty moments, as a snack (Miller, 2007).

According to the best researchers on the argument, Neil Howe and William Strauss, these are the distinctive features of this generation: they are all grown up with the idea of being special, born by adult parents very keen on parenting, they have always been protected from dangers, thanks to a light net of norms and prescriptions, structured occupations, all organised by over-protective parents; so they are trustful, satisfied of their life, optimistic about the future; they are good for team-work, thanks to new educational methods, which emphasize collaborative learning and egalitarianism; they strive for their professional goals, for which they are able to make long-term plans, but they live continuously under stress to accomplish their family's expectations, believing that success come as a natural result of personal commitment; they respect norms and conventions, ready to accept everything that can strengthen the family link. The danger is to remain locked in a golden box, avoiding a real confrontation with the diversity of situations and cultural stimulations. (Quaglizza, p.58).

Other studies[5] (cfr Twenge 2006) use another interpretation by incorporating a larger base and a different age categorization (those born between 1970 and 1999): in fact, the distinctive feature of this generation – called *Generation Me*- is the gap between their expectations and reality. Often treated as "little kings" when growing up, taught to always believe in themselves and always go for the best option, today's 20 and 30 years olds have become "teenager-adults", who are not adults yet, unsecure and narcissists, used to have unlimited aspirations and dreams, put to a severe test by the difficult economic situation and a job market more competitive than ever. Cynicism, the need of affection, anxiety and depression, seem to be the direct emotional result to their condition. Twenge explains as well that their economic situation influences their ecologic and civic sensibility, which is the opposite of the expected scenario formulated by sociologists for the Millennials generation. (Quaglizza, p.61).

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[4] Colombo F. (2012). Come eravamo. Il ruolo dei media nell'identità generazionale. In: Colombo F., Boccia Artieri G., Del Grosso Destreri L., Pasquali F. e Sorice M. Media e generazioni nella società italiana (pp. 13-32). Milano: FrancoAngeli.
[5] Twenge, J.M. (2006). Generation Me: Why today's young Americans are more confident, assertive, entitled—and more miserable than ever before. New York: Free Press.

This is the context for COM_WORK to propose an interpretation of the NEET phenomenon as a social and economic status, cross-cutting different generations (each one owner of different languages, experiences, aspirations) and to address the attention to a better known segment: the Net/NEET youth.

We could find some common traits to confirm the distinction in pure and smart NEET, even if not so precise as willed to be.

From the analysis and comparison between the four countries, we could see how this typology has been the target of important interventions in the UE area.

The transition from Net to NEET is all in some assumptions, ontologically included in its birth: in the absence of a constructive dialectic from our social system, in the deafness of educational systems, in the inadequacy of family's contexts confronted to big changes and less financial resources. The dialogue towards them has been closed, institutions refused to discuss, keeping applying unsuitable categories.

In this way a distance is created, discourage take place over long-term planning, visions are not nursed and become confusion.

That's probably why an operator (inside the focus group) says: *"Working with NEET is* going *upstream the river like salmons, or it is like composing a puzzle with many pieces. Working* with the static and the confidence in the world of education and work but also with the strength to listen that often schools, companies and institutions to the difficulties of young people often it raises operators faced with a sense of helplessness and worthlessness. An experience that concerns probably more so those who work in guidance to the work by competing with a mandate which is to effect integration and not only the motivation / activation of the boy. The theme of the projects and the future seems to return in the words of this educator that during the focus tells us: *"There is one thing that scares me a lot, is that the size of the dream for some kids there, there is no future, you can do any project of life ... but he at most plans tonight with who comes out."*

About numbers and their trender shell

Numbers and life diverge, a case is not a person. Numbers give data over life, and they can't give interpretation and contextualisation. They give indications over that safety that we lost, over a widespread misery, but unities are not rebuilt and isolation is not broken" (U. Beck)

If transition moments increase, an excess of opportunities and episodes can become a factor making inequality bigger, especially about the capacity and the medium necessary to individuals to manage these passages

Therefore, even if, as Beck says …numbers and life diverge…, to carry out a description of the NEET phenomenon in the four partner countries (Bulgaria, Italy, Portugal and Spain) it's essential to make use of numerals indicators, despite many problems due to the differences of legislations, of educational and work politics, as well in the welfare system founded in the various country analysed.
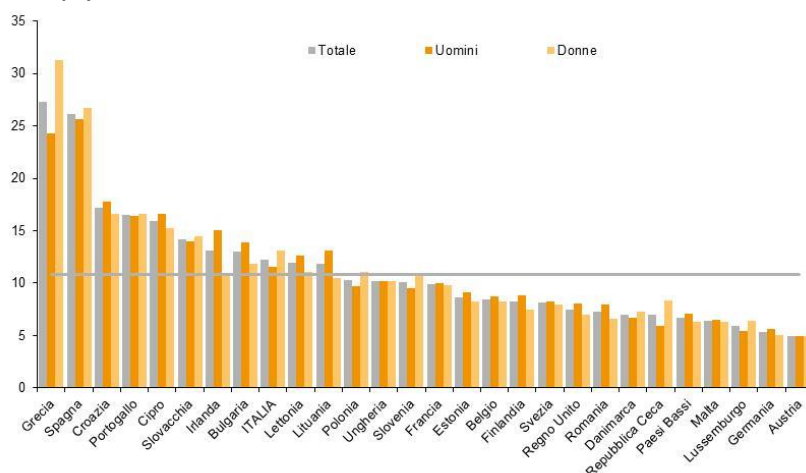
Rising of unemployment

The EU's job market was severely hit by the economic and financial crisis which, since 2008, increased unemployment in Europe, the only exception being Germany. Between 2008 and 2013 the unemployment rate augmented by 56,5 % in the Ue28 (from 16 millions and 741 thousands in 2008, to 26 millions 200 thousands in 2013, it means +9 millions 460 thousands units).

This has increased the unemployment rate from 7,1 in 2008 to 10,8% in 2013. Even thought this is a phenomenon present in the whole of Europe, the number of unemployed has doubled in the biggest southern states such as Spain (26,5%) and Greece (27,3%), where unemployment rate attain 25 (Fig. 1).

It even affects founding members of the EU as Bulgaria (13%), Portugal (16,5%), and Italy, where the unemployment rate is 12,2 % (5,4 points more than in 2008) , with a big increase mainly in the southern parts where it can go as far as 19,7% which is one of Europe's highest rate after Greece and Spain.

Pict. 1(%)

Legend: Totale — Uomini — Donne

PARTNER COUNTRY	тoT	MAN	WOM.
Spain	26,1	25,6	26,7
Portogallo	16,5	16,4	16,6
Bulgaria	13,0	13,9	11,8
Italy	12,2	11,5	13,1
Ue28	10,8	10,8	10,8

Eurostat, Labour force survey (2013)

Worsening this situation is the increasing of *the long duration unemployment* rate, the continued lack of work is not only a considerable social problem, but also a worrying example of the job market's distortion. Rising of the unemployment rate concerns every EU country (the average UE rate being 47,5%), with an increase of nearly 3% more in 2015 since 2012. Slovakia has the highest rate 70,2%, however, between the seven countries having more than 50% of the total unemployed elements, we can find Bulgaria (57,3%), Italy (56,9%) and Portugal (56,3%), while Spain is ninth with 49,7%, and Sweden remains the only country in Europe whose rate still remains below 20% (18,5%).

Over high rate of unemployment and the difficulty to get in to the labour market

Numbers testify how this crisis impacted on youth unemployment – more vulnerable to the economic cycle variation than adults – reducing opportunity for young people to become independent and exposing a big number of them to the risk of social exclusion. Youth unemployment rate in the Ue28 attain 23,3%, with sensible differences between countries: youth condition looks especially critical in Greece, (57,3%), followed by Spain (55,5%) Croatia and Italy (40%).

Slovakia and Bulgaria are placed at the eighth place, with 28,4% of unemployment, just before Cyprus and Portugal (37,7%).

Young male's rate unemployment in Ue28 reaches 24,0% and female is attested to 22,6%, but for Greek, Spanish and Italian young women the situation is much worst, being attested respectively to 64,2%, 54,6 % e 41,4% (Pict. 2).
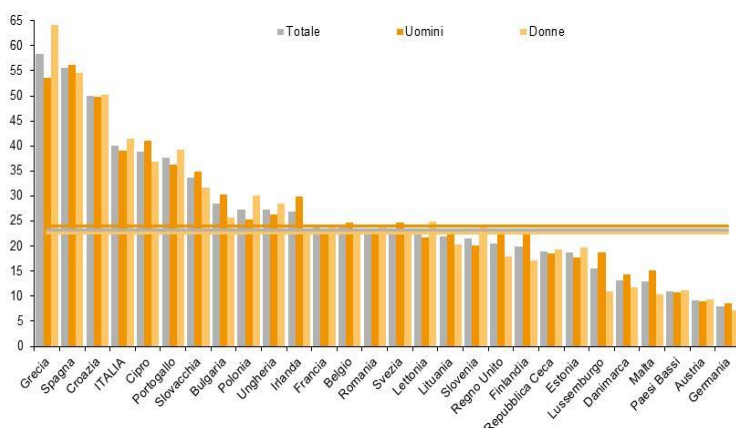
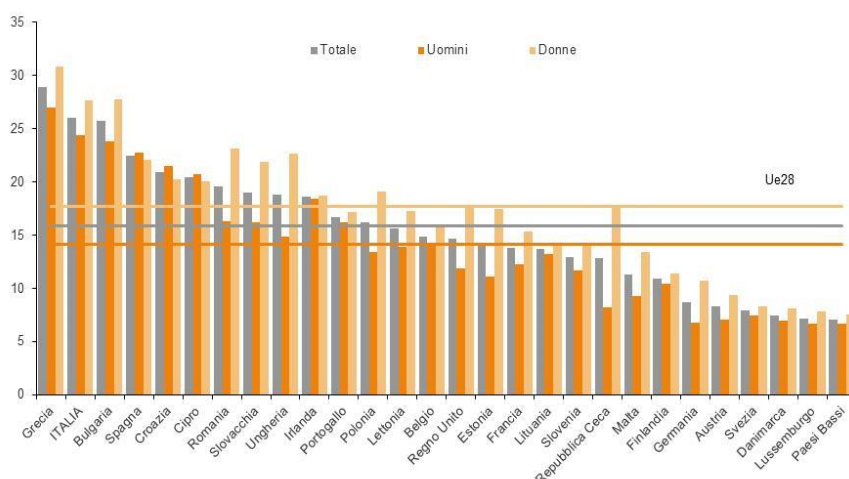| COUNTRY PARTNER	TOT	MAN	WOM.
Spain	55,5	56,2	54,6
Italy	40,0	39,0	41,4
Portogallo	37,7	36,3	39,3
Bulgaria	28,4	30,2	25,7
Ue28	23,3	24,0	22,6

Fonte: Eurostat, Labour force survey (2013)

Young NEET in numbers

In the OCSE community there are 39 millions of young aged between 16 and 29 who, in 2013 didn't have a job and neither were following some kind of studies or formation: 5 millions more than before 2008 . Other worrying aspect is nearly 20 millions young NEET, that is about the half of them, they are not included in any educational or formative system, and they don't look for job.

Numbers are especially high in the southern States of Europe, where crisis hit harder: Greece at first (28,9%), then Italy (26%) , where the percentage of NEETs is signally higher than the Ue28's average (15,9%); also in Bulgaria (25,7%) and Spain (22,5) the situation is not encouraging, while Portugal goes a bit better (16,7%). Women are particularly involved in this phenomenon (they represent the 17,7 % over 14,1% for men) and about the half of NEET people are looking for job, with peaks over 70 % in Greece, Spain and Portugal (Pict. 3).

Pict. 3 (%)

PARTNER COUNTRY	TOT	MAN	WOM.
Italy	26,0	24,4	27,7
Bulgaria	25,7	23,8	27,8
Spain	22,5	22,8	22,1
Portogallo	16,7	16,2	17,2
Ue28	15,9	14,1	17,7

Like the rest of Europe, where unemployed and inactive are equally divided in the NEET rate of the segment 15-29 aged, in Italy inactive NEETs are predominant, with a peak during the economical crisis. This data about young Italians is often explained with the "discouragement" factor (see after), linked with difficulty to find a job. It represents an vicious circle, 'because arriving at 25 years old lacking of any work experience, even if actively searched, means to live in a condition of frustration, which growing up with time, can become chronic and cause the exit from the labour market.

Having in the productive system a waste catchment area of young labour supply, often not exploited or sub-exploited, gives a perception of insecurity over the future, the anxiety of making choices and planning, and all this bring to the high risks of wasting the investments States dedicated on education and formation.

The discouraged

High number of potentially employable people (non-participation rate) suggests the persistence of discouraging mechanisms, depressing the access to the job market for wide ranks of population.

For example, during 2013 in Italy 3 millions 91.000 of unemployed wanted to work but they didn't look for it. A big percentage of them, 46,2%, are "discouraged": they affirms not be looking for job because they think there isn't any.

Such a kind of data can be very important for those countries characterized by an high rate of people not actively looking for job, consequentially they are not registered at the unemployment service and they don't appear in statistics.

In the Ue28 zone the average of non-participation is 14,1%, the lower rate being in Germany (6,5%), the higher one in Spain (29,6%), and Italy is at the fourth place with a percentage of 21,7%., after Greece and Croatia. In the European average, women come first than men (14,9% comparing to 13,4%), with a sensible difference between Greece and Italy, where about a quarter of female population interested to work has no occupation. Conversely, in Bulgaria the male's indicator is decisively higher than the woman's one (Pict.4)

Pict. 4: Non-participation rate in percentage for the population aged 15-74, by gender and for each country.
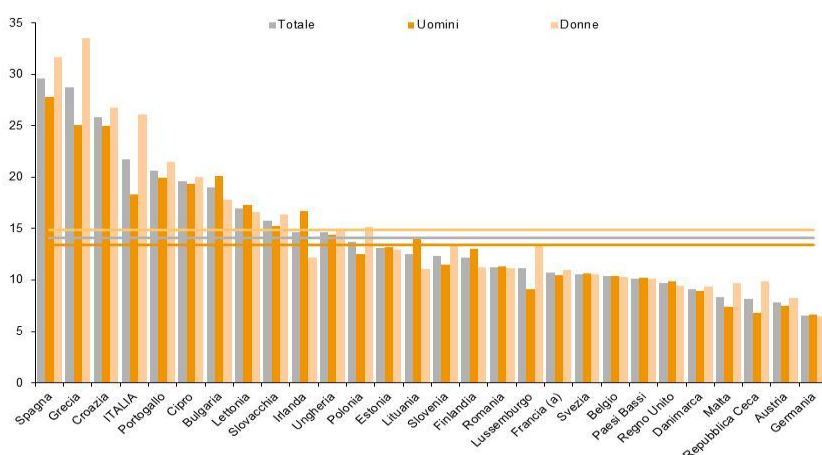
PARTNER COUNTRY	TOT	MAN	WOM.
Spain	29,6	27,8	31,6
Italy	21,7	18,3	26,1
Portogallo	20,7	19,9	21,5
Bulgaria	19,0	20,1	17,8
Ue28	14,1	13,4	14,9

A reflexive elaboration of the experience developed between various transitions become the *medium* to connect and recompose fragments, and to achieving this give young people technical or specialised competencies, if they are not joined with capacity of interpretation and give sense to the whole process of changes of society. Then tolerating insecurity could be functional for building some strategies and looking for direction, in order to rebuild a personal sense.

Competences of socio educational operators and training scenarios

What are the key competences of professionals who are supposed to interact efficiently with the NEET? But first of all: what is their professional profile?

And in this regard - not wanting to evade an even more radical question - can we really talk about professionals? Or, it is preferable to settle cautiously for the less binding term of "operators", strictly in the plural? At the risk, however, of crediting indirectly an idea of professional "cut in two", unfinished, behind which hides a number of "emergency" figures that are structured and are sized according to local understanding and for different social contexts, institutional and political?

And in fact, these questions have arisen either from national reports prior to this report and from the transnational Sofia meeting (May 2015). Of course, more or less directly; certainly, with emphasis and different accents depending on the cultures and sensitivities to the phenomenon of the ComWork partner countries.

The reflection and research work have resulted in converging answers on methodology and relevance.

Methodologically wise, if we follow Schon (1983 and 1987), the theoretical option of relevance of the "technical rationality" model was rejected regarding the paradigm of definitions of socio-educational operators in general versus to the ones particularly confronted to the NEETS issues.

In terms of relevance, a double goal was pursued: one in favour of a more reflective professional (in the words of Shon) and one of a 'competence approach' based on the profile of the operator as well as the suggestions on training patterns (Goleman, Le Boterf, Boutinet, between others).

Beyond technical rationality: reflective rationality. The "technical rationality" model pretends that professional activity consists in providing instrumental solutions to problems classified by theories and scientifically supported techniques.

Two main corollaries of this definition: 1) the coincidence of professionalism and specialization; 2) the reduction of the prototypes of the professional expertise to a very limited number of professions, the so-called "learned professions", such as medicine, law, business administration and engineering. According to Glazer (1974), one of the leaders of this school of thought, these professions can also be defined as "greater jobs". They are distinguished from "minor professions" such as those of social work (by the way, they will fall in many operators of this project), teaching, priesthood and even city planning. But as noted by Schön, who leads a critique and theoretical background to this address - you see in Glazer one of its greatest exponents - the greater professions such understood are characterized by the fact: a) of having a clear aim (health, overcome the causes, profit, etc.). b) operating n stable institutional contexts; c) of being based on fundamental systematic knowledge. In contrast, the "minor professions" are affected by the changing and

ambiguous purposes, operating in contexts where professional activity is unstable; they do not develop a professional base of systematic or scientific knowledge. Hence, the definition of "minor professions" used as the equivalent of "no jobs".

Shon underlines the shortcomings of the "technical rationality" model for the development of adapted professional epistemology in the political and cultural field of a society in profound transformation as was the US in the nineteen eighties. Which today, as we see it, appears as a "Radical Modern" society (Giddens, 1990), that englobes the phenomenon of the NEET. But moreover, Shon underlines the importance of a "reflective rationality" that enables professionals to recognise themselves and re-think themselves as active and creative artificers of their own acts, of their own choices and decisions in the different contexts of their professional practice.

The training of a professional with this profile implies and supposes a **deep revision of the training models.** In ways to allow new teaching and learning paths for empirical knowledge sustained by "reflective rationality", indispensable for the construction and the use of knowledge based on, and described by action. In this way, we give dignity and educational value to forms of non-systematized knowledge which emerges empirically from the professional practice. This disrupts the traditional training model that assigned dignity in training only to forms of organized knowledge systematized, empirically transferable through technical procedures.

We think that this theoretical model offers a legitimate ground to reflective operators/professionals that are called to provide a multi-purpose function of training, education, accompaniment and orientation with a complex and fragile public as are the NEETS. Providing this model is supported also by the 'competence' approach as elaborated in the "Draft Theoretical Framework".

Competences model for operators

The theoretical model on competences nourishes the one on reflective professionalism and vice versa. In the sense that competence seen as a conceptual construction and method provides regulation in reflective professionals in general, and more so, if the professional works in the field of education and guidance.

As described in the "Draft Theoretical Framework" the paradigmatic construction of   competence can be defined as a mix of resources, specific to each individual, made of:

a) Knowledge (formal or informal, systematically and local)

b) Appropriate action according to this knowledge (how to apply the knowledge in practice)

c) Personal characteristics and behaviours (be able and willing to act in the appropriate way in divers situations and contexts; but also be able to become and re-invent oneself (Boutinet, 2004)

A mix that is the basis of each effectively professional service. The competence is the "raw material" that is "processed" in the "workshop" of the social professions.

As a method, the paradigm of competence introduces a new general point of view on the whole range of issues concerning the training, guidance, management and development of human resources; a new point of view and approach based on the significance of the subject; on the enhancement and reconstruction of the experience (of the ways, forms and meanings that it takes); the logic of empowerment and development of the individual capacity to plan.

The subject in the centre. In the competence approach the individual is the protagonist, weaving his/her own tissue of life course on his/her loom. On the epistemological level of the definition of the profession, it means overcoming the model of technical rationality; while on the level of work, it overcomies the Fordist-Taylorist mantra based on the trilogy of machine-job-execution where the person does not appear except as a body and as a terminal aphasic (Virno, 2001) and not as a thinking machine. Here, however, in view of the competence, the person is an active and proactive subject who holds the reins of their own projects, with the aim to expand the space of possibilities within which to invest its wealth of resources.

History and biography. A person who misses a history, a biography or the awareness of having one, is in a scotomization process, a being with no past, no present and no future. He/she lives in suspense, like in a kind of a-social and timeless sphere. In the competence approach one's life story plays an essential role: one recovers the threads from the past, no matter how strong or subtle, and binds them to todays' and future weaving work. And all this is made possible by the fact that the biography is the "black box" which records the traces of the experience. And the biographical approach, typical of the approaches by competence, is the key. It helps us reconstruct the structure of a person's competences through the reconstruction of the ways of their acquisition, their development and their management in the context of the value systems of reference of individuals (Alberici & Serreri, 2009).

The project and the competence. Competences, as a mix of resources called into action by an individual, contain by themselves an anticipative and predictive value of the individual's own success in his/her work. A value that isn't contained by any of the single resources on their own, neither as a result of a simple addition of the resources (as a stock). The quantity and the quality of fundamental systematic knowledge and specific professional procedures that teachers master, on their own, are no guarantee for the person being a good teacher. In other words, more than the project in itself (that is always present at all levels in the competence approach), what matters is to develop a "conduct adapted to project"(Boutinet, 1999). That means being able to make things clear in your discursive scenario; know how to be in the situation; able to move in the complexity and turbulence; knowing how to cope with the unexpected; be able to develop their professional and personal self according to a perspective view. Because concepts such as work, education, social actor, innovation, change, identity, crisis and attribution of meaning are numerous profiles of complicity and kinship with design concepts and "conduct in the project."

In the last two decades, the concept of 'individual project' and of 'individual in transition' has emerged in the theories on 'Lifelong learning' and 'Lifelong Guidance'. These are two key concepts for thinking in individual solutions, like those that should be privileged for the NEETS, paths that define both their meanderings (v. Today the turbulence of the crisis or, more generally, the process of flexibility and / or insecurity) and their goals: in the double form of '"domestication" of the present moment and anticipation of a future desired. In a form that is both "autopoietic" (the individual is the author and actuator of their project) and "praxis" (which concerns the praxis) and inspired to action based on self-regulation of action by the individual.

The reflective rationality paradigm nurtured by the epistemological construction on competences as a method, is what this project defines a cornerstone of the social and educational operator's training. Foremost when he/she is active in the field of the "pure" NEETS, imprisoned in what we called already a bubble in a state of "social withdrawal" (out from education, training and work-free motivation to resume the study or training and get back into the labour market: without history and without a project).

Strategic skills of socio-educational operators and vocational guidance counsellors and NEETs

The project development process, through its various stages passed so far (surveys, interviews, reports, transnational seminars, etc.), has allowed us to accurately delimit the scope of the research. Besides, it also has made possible the identification (for conventional agreement) of the areas of strategic competences of socio-educational operators and vocational guidance counsellors which need, first and foremost, to be dealt with. Intervene as a priority through the development of appropriate Learning Unit think along the lines of reflective training.

The areas of strategic competences identified are three:

1. **The area of the collective competences of a team and a network;**

2. **The area of motivational and empowerment competences;**

3. **The area of planning and change management competences.**

Furthermore, both the research work and the co-planning done by the group of COM_WORK revealed some concrete suggestions and some operational guidance that will be explained in the next phase "Guidance and Vocational" Model (Output 2) and briefly shown below:

✓ an experiential training for professionals who through this method can also acquire the tools to re-transfer the experience;

✓ an active training which is able to communicate with concrete contexts and therefore flexible;

✓ a formative path, for each Area of Competences, which includes Learning Units achievable in a number of hours that range from a minimum of 20 to a maximum of 35 overall, depending on the applications and the skills of the operators;

✓ a formative path in which each Learning Unit is planned in a self-consistent manner and therefore it is able to engage in different moments, contexts, paths.

1. The area of the collective **competences** of a team and a network

In socio-educational work and in guidance activities in general, especially when dealing with a barely identified and hardly approachable audience such as "pure" NEET, the temptation of the solitary hero must be prevented from the beginning, that is someone who is armed with empathy, who is willing to sacrifice himself for the cause, in line with his value reference frameworks and mainly relying on his own more or less pronounced pro social aptitude.

This kind of work takes place/should take place in facilities where a multiplicity of operators and professionals operate. The optimisation of the work lies, therefore, on a mastery of the collective competences of a team as well as, of course, on the individual core competences.

What do we mean by collective competences of a team? Following in Le Boterf's footsteps we talk about collective competences of an organization or a service organised as a network of competences. The concept of collective skill is then not merely reduced to the expertise of an enlarged liability team or a team made up of different elementary units. Nor collective competences can be considered the sum of individual competences. Collective competences emerge whenever criticality occurs, or rather a new problem arises, a new project starts or a quality audit has to be carried out. They represent the intelligence of the organisation and the collective memory in action. They are forged through experience and collective commitment facing the test bed of reality. Their operation greatly depends on the quality of the interactions between people.

The collective competences of a team (*équipe*)

The main features of the collective competences of a team are:

• Having a common operational picture; that is, having a common representation of the problems to deal with (planning and solution). A common operational representation is achieved if each individual assimilates the overall picture. The whole is contained within the part. The framework of meanings is shared and integrated;

• Having a common code and language; that is, having a "dialect" of the organisation built through the experience made within the organisation itself. This allows to "read between

the lines of the organisation" and to intercept both rational dynamics within the group and especially the irrational ones that are lying in all organisations;

- The ability to cooperate. Knowing how to work together presumes collaboration among people with different cultures, resources, statues and roles. It allows, for instance, to know how to manage and resolve conflicts while, at the same time, it promotes – acting on a higher level – the development of the ability to learn from experience. It is about learning from and through action in a collective form and through the organisation. Basically, it is about learning from considerations made during and after the action carried out in terms of organisation or service.

The collective competences of a network

They mainly rely on having the ability to work in a network, in local networks of services and in social networks; this ability adds up to those that are at the basis of the collective competences of a team about which we just talked.

The more effective models of social services organisation are characterised by their systemic-local-integrated planning which makes them work as "networks of competences", where the skills of each compose and integrate network expertise and vice versa. Furthermore, network competences convey and enhance "precious" skills such as those that promote innovation from the knowledge assets owned (formal and tacit) and the accumulated experience. In this way, by the way, they brake down boundaries between competences and enable their mutual permeability without which there is no value added on a professional level (see the role of the interface competences mentioned for instance by Le Boterf [1994]).

2. The area of motivational and *empowerment* competences

The area of motivational and empowerment competences plays a pivotal role in the different areas of competences of the socio-educational professional and/or the guidance counsellor who are involved in social activation of NEETs. Precisely because the lack of motivation and empowerment represent the two main barriers to be removed in "pure" NEETs. In fact, these two barriers separate them both from education and training, and from work and job seeking. To the NEETs these barriers are perceived as absolutely insurmountable walls which can take different and extreme forms. As in the case of the self-fulfilling prophecy that often hangs over them: on the one hand they do not perceive themselves as able to be trained and employable (they are rejected from school and therefore they refuse training; they are expelled or rejected from work and therefore they refuse to look for a job), and on the other hand society (politics, institutions, etc.) perceives them as hard core subjects who can hardly be helped by effective policies. Yet, the correct use of appropriate motivational and empowerment strategies can be the keystone of effective interventions and policies for the NEETs,

Motivation. The term motivation is relatively recent. As a matter of fact, it appears both in the philosophical and the psychological vocabulary only in the first decades of the last century (Quadrio Aristarchi, 1996). Despite its previous lack, it has become very common especially in psychological sciences. Psychology has devoted increasing attention to the term social and individual motivation so that some scholars (Cofer, 1972) went so far as to say that, in psychology and in other behavioural sciences, the 20th Century can be defined as a motivational period. It's not our task here to account for the different theories and approaches that have been adopted in the area of motivation. It will be enough here to recall the two main approaches that refer to two different "fields of competences" equally crucial for our operators as they outline two different profiles and two different professional models. The first approach, which we could call "experimental" and "unhistorical", aims at defining the immediate causes of behaviour, and at specifying and determining the connections between the different variables involved, thus building behaviour models. The second approach, which could be defined "clinical", aims instead at rebuilding in a more global way the sense of individual experience – both the present and the past one -, at identifying the ways an individual pursues his social adaptation and his personal fulfilment, and at grasping the reasons that prompt an individual to act or not to act, and possibly the sense attributed to it. This second perspective opens to horizons of competences which are relevant to socio-professional educators who work according to a holistic approach that drives a person to transcend his given balance in order to open up to new experiences, to design projects and to mentally anticipate reality, according to the thesis of Nuttin (1959).

Empowerment. If the term motivation is relatively recent, the term empowerment is even more recent. And it also spread widely in a short span of years. That occurred both in studies of scientific approach and in public debate on facts and social processes involved in various areas starting from the sphere of labour. Although often the discourse on empowerment has been trivialised and over the past three decades this construct has been overworked, it would be a mistake to neglect it. This fact, if anything, can be seen as indicative of a major change in human resources culture, and an essential element in competences culture. Synthetically, we can define empowerment as the process through which "disadvantaged" people strengthen their capability to choose, enhance self-determination and self-regulation developing a sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy and reducing the feelings of helplessness and distrust (Piccardo, 1995). This definition takes us already to the core of the discourse on NEETs. However, it could lead to a kind of semantic misunderstanding and therefore to a misinterpreted approach to the beneficiaries of empowerment because they would risk being considered as individuals somewhat lacking of empowerment.

Actually, the term empowerment has a far wider meaning such as "enhancing, enabling someone to" or "increasing opportunities" in terms of competences and capabilities as mentioned by Amartya Sen. It is a complex construct that is configured as a multiplicity of elements organised between them, and it defines both a result (a psychological construct, that is a characteristic of the subject in his interaction with the environment) and the operational process that generates it.

This complexity is introduced from the etymology the word that suggests a division into three separate sections: *em-power-ment*. The prefix *em* is used to mean "put in a position" or "go to", referring, then, to a purposeful movement toward something. The noun *power* is usually literally translated as "power", "be able to", and "power to". Finally, the suffix *ment* defines, at the same time, both a process that enables individuals to enhance the ability to actively control their life and the result of this process. Generally it relates to the set of knowledge, competences and relational ability that allow an individual or a group to set goals and develop strategies to achieve them by identifying and utilizing the many existing resources, internal and external (Nicoli, Pellegrino, 2011).

Furthermore, empowerment is closely related to the concept of change but not in the meaning of replacing the old with the new. It rather regards change as an additional process that while proposing new alternatives it doesn't force to abandon the already known but it encourages to combine new opportunities with those that are already known. Empowerment is, therefore, a method for planning and acting in a realistic and effective way, a technique to take back control of one's own life, and to gain that feeling of "leadership" given by the fact that the person can choose between his different opportunities. Even more represent an applicative guidance approach that guides methodologically and procedurally on the" making operating" (Bruscaglioni, 1994), a new epistemological approach, a new capability to think the change as increased ability of choices and therefore of freedom and not finding the best solution (Bruscaglioni, 2007).

In this sense, empowerment serves the function of a connective tissue of a wide range of resources constituting the personal and social competences according to Goleman's model (1995). Personal resources such as, for instance, emotional awareness, appropriate self-assessment, initiative, optimism, etc. Social resources such as empathy and social competences as, for instance, the ability to initiate and lead change, the ability to promote and nourish useful links, and team work (see previous section on emotional competences).

3. The area competence for management of the change

The last few years not only have left a legacy of costs, inequalities and contradictions; they also have left the ability (still to develop and strengthen) to rethink their own priorities at European level, to evaluate with a critical approach the ambitions contained in Europe 2020, and to re-launch a new governance cycle based on partnership and reforms. That is, a new cycle that clearly points out the directions that need to be taken.

We reckon that for our project we need two key elements:

- ✓ targeted initiatives, priorities selection, achieving the commitments made;

- ✓ The need to support the change, which is creating the conditions so that the implementation of reforms becomes the basic issue of the political debate within each member states.

To be credible and viable these two directions should have some priorities among which:

- to ensure that knowledge and innovation at all levels, represent the heart of European growth;
- Develop policies that allow European businesses to create more and better jobs that result in the need to attract more people into work, modernize social protection systems, increasing the adaptability of workers and enterprises, increase investment in human capital through better education and qualifications.

These are very ambitious goals that revolve around the word *change.* As a result, there are two questions no one can elude: what tools can we use to support the change, and what are the competences required to professionals who work in the area of change management, that is not only to highly specialised professionals of the knowledge society but also to trainers, teachers and socio-educational operators?

It is quite evident that the training level, into the perspective of lifelong learning rather than only in the formal education, plays a decisive role. And since training and learning come to life through the professionals who work there, what is the wealth of resources expected of these figures (in terms of knowledge, abilities, competencies, meta-competencies). Obviously, taking for granted the wealth of methodological and teaching resources? Several European documents and other research from various institutional sources and of various scientific backgrounds, converge in identifying the following capabilities:

- use strategies of systems analysis in the design of programs;
- use the needs assessment, statistical data, the documents produced by the organization, research, etc. to adapt the programs to the needs and specific clienteles;
- Making effective the use of the mechanisms of design, such as councils, committees, working groups, etc. .;

- design or implement a program within the constraints of a limited budget and according to specific quality standards; be convincingly interpreters at policy makers of the modern trends in adult education;
- Prepare requests for financial support and identify potential funding sources.

It is quite clear that we are talking about abilities that mainly nourish soft and behavioural competences. In addition to the technical and professional competences, of course. More precisely they feed the meta-competences such as learning to learn and learning to know; learning to do; learning to live together (discovering the other, tending toward common goals); learning to be, according to the fourfold of the four "pillars of education in the 21st Century" (Delors, 1996).

We can define meta-competence a class of logic order higher than competences which highlights the quality linked to the consideration made with regard to competences, and which has the following features (Pepe-Isfol, 2077):

- ✓ it concerns general, broad and open cognitive competences;

- ✓ it has non-specific characteristics, as it transcends the job, the position and the role within the specific work context, although it is expressed precisely in the latter;

- ✓ it involves mainly reflective mental processes;

- ✓ it can be considered a competitive value in the training of human resources;

- ✓ it guarantees flexibility of the professional profile of the employee;

- ✓ it enables self-updating, enrichment, and continuous improvement;

- ✓ it contains profiles of high portability in different contexts (work and life);

- ✓ It allows facing highly complex, uncertain and variable situations.

These features of meta-competence expand in five large meta-competences that are strategic for change management (Pepe-Isfol):

1. management of emotional resources and development of self-empowerment meant as a process that tends to widen the range of choice, and makes transformations feasible and achievable at individual level;

2. sense-making and development of generative thinking: learning to learn meant as the ability to consciously change behaviour and cognitive models in order to interact in a more appropriate way with internal and external environments;

3. development of networking competences: being able to interact and work within a network enhancing the opportunities provided by communication systems on the network;

4. development of evaluative thinking and assessment of complexity meant as a cognitive process aimed at building and using evaluation systems on complex situations/processes/projects;

5. Planning and evaluating meta-competences meant as the ability to detect the need of training to gain meta-competences in various types of recipients, and therefore the need of implementing learning paths to gain them.

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