

Overview of Structure and Topics for Newsletter No. 5 – Mai 2018

Editorial

Dear Readers,

We are glad to present you the fifth Newsletter of the project YOUNG_ADULLLT with which we want to keep you informed about current events and outcomes of our project.

YOUNG_ADULLLT aims at critically analysing current developments of LLL policies in Europe in order to prevent ill-fitted policies from further exacerbating existing imbalances and disparities as well as at identifying best practices and patterns of coordinating policy-making at local/regional level.

Currently, many young adults face difficulties in their transition from schooling to working life and a large number of them leave formal education either too early or lacking the necessary and adequate qualifications and skills to enter the labour market successfully. Against this background, YOUNG_ADULLLT focuses on Lifelong Learning (LLL) policies across Europe as they are aimed at creating economic growth and social inclusion especially for those groups in vulnerable positions. In particular, the main objective of the project is to yield insights into their implications as well as intended and unintended effects on young adult life courses.

For the last 27 months, we have made considerable progress in implementing our plans by successfully completing the fieldwork. Fifteen partner institutions from nine European countries, representing a variety of institutional and national contexts, have been working together to finalise the project's second phase on data collection, treatment and analysis. It has been challenging and enjoyable and we have happily created a strong research and operational alliance as we were drawing together the projects results for both, the comparative analysis and its public communication and policy information.

You can find more information about our consortium, work plan and progress, expected impact and current news at the project's website: www.young-adullt.eu .

Best regards from the YOUNG_ADULLLT dissemination and coordination team

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1. Project News

Data collection, treatment and analysis completed

With the project entering its final year this last winter (February 2018), the fieldwork was completed and the research activities turned towards the data treatment and analysis, paving the ground for drawing together the projects results for both the comparative analysis and the public communication and policy information.



In detail, over the last months, all research teams have been busy analysing the collected data in form of interviews with young adults, experts as well as quantitative data on the young adults living conditions. These were followed by the regional/local case studies, analysing and bringing together policies and policy-making including data and results from the previous empirical phase. In doing so, the projects second phase is completed by three sub-studies including quantitative analysis of young adults living conditions (WP 4), qualitative research with young adults (WP 5), comparative analysis of demand and supply of skills (WP 6) and, simultaneously to the publication of this Newsletter, the regional/local case studies (WP 7). The Figure below illustrates the three phases of YOUNG_ADULLLT:

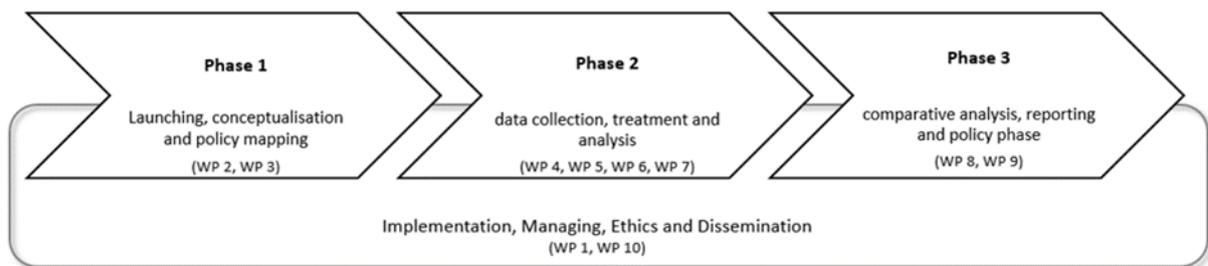


Figure 1 Phases of the research process in YOUNG_ADULLLT

The following paragraphs provide more information on each step taken in phase 2 as well as main results:

With the completion the sub-study *Cross-national and Cross-regional Report Quantitative Analysis* (Working Package 4), we gathered information on how (and to what extent) the living conditions of young adults mediate and influence LLL policies in the different European regions. The aim was to understand, how the development of specific regional contexts influences the lives of the young adults. Understanding these contexts involved examining data on the

economic development and material living conditions, on demographic trends, on the interaction between education systems and labour markets and on the health coverage within in specific regions. One of the main achievement of this sub-study has been to consider regional specificities (for instance migration/mobility) in relation to LLL. In doing so, the analyses showed that for a better information of evidence-based policies the current available databases, such as OECD and Eurostat, need to develop richer context-based information at regional and local level, for instance at NUTS 2 and 3 levels. The identified data gaps as well as additional data sources – such as considering measures beyond education and labour market status (e.g. social and political participation, individual well-being, etc.) – would allow describing the living conditions of young adults in a more holistic manner. Such an approach could improve substantially the availability of information for better-targeted policy and would refine nation state-based data.

Parallel to analysing the structure young adults are embedded in, we interviewed young adults and experts of each chosen LLL policy in order to complement the perspective of the young



Future – Where Art Thou? Young adults face uncertainty on the value of their acquired skills

adults (Work Package 5). The sub-study *International Qualitative Analysis Report* completed the analysis of young peoples' learning histories and allowed us to see, how the local context can shape their needs, interests and opportunities, what kind of experience they have and which uncertainties their face. Overall, the partner interviewed over 150 young adults and more than 100 experts to understand the policies' fit and potentials from their perspective.

One main results was, that most young adult interviewees were exposed to conditions of social vulnerability such as early school leaving, unemployment, disease, weak mental health, precarious migration status or income poverty – and mostly attributed their current adversity to their own previous behaviour and hardly to wider structural factors. A great majority of these young adult interviewees declared they wanted to get the most out of lifelong learning policies, especially for improving their CV. However, the alignment of the skills development with local and regional labour markets is often problematic, not least because many youth are happy with these policies but remain uncertain on the value of the skills they are acquiring.

Accordingly, we also analysed how countries govern the relationship (match and mismatch) between the demand side of the labour market and the supply side to support the transitions of

young people across the education, training, and labour market systems (Working Package 6). The results of the sub-study *International Report analysis of skill supply and demand* show, that the transitions of the young adults vary and can pose barriers for them. In some countries, the main threat refers to rigid educational pathways leading to dead



ends, which becomes a trap for skills upgrading for the most disadvantaged youths. The education and labour market spheres are largely disconnected in several regions. While in countries with less-developed VET systems and apprenticeship schemes its development is regarded as the only way to smooth youths transition to the labour market, those regions where VET and apprenticeships have a long-standing record struggle with the scarcity of vacancies in which to place students, and the quality of the training. Especially, the relevance of skills formation for the regional labour market is a recurrent topic. In most regions, the tension identified is to what extent the publicly funded skills formation system should serve the needs of the private employers, even if it promotes youth employment.

The results of those three working packages are published in in three Policy Briefs, which can also be found on the [projects website](#). The Policy Briefs provide recommendations from the projects research aiming to inform policy-makers, stakeholders, professionals, practitioners etc. on a European scale.

The results of these sub-studies are being integrated in a subsequent study of regional/local case studies (Work Package 7). In this sub-study, we conduct a comparative analysis of policymaking networks that include all social actors involved in shaping, formulating, and implementing LLL policies for young adults' lies at the heart of WP 7. Analysing the intersections between the social and the economic dimensions aims at recognizing strengths (and best practices) and weaknesses (overlapping, fragmented or unfocused policies and projects), thus identifying different patterns LLL policy-making at regional level, and investigating their integration with the labour market, education and other social policies but also their impact on the target groups.

Based on case studies, the analyses integrate results from previous WPs in order to provide a regional review of politics and programs, networks of actors and individual life projects of young adults for an ideal-typical modelling. The analysis is expected to contribute to developing innovation strategies for social inclusion based on real needs and real resources of youth.

In this Newsletter, we present two exemplary case studies from the Functional Regions of Portugal and of Bulgaria. See below: “Policies under the magnifying glass” – Highlighting two case studies from the policy analysis.”

YOUNG_ADULLLT project reviewed by the European Advisory Board

In our [last Newsletter](#), we introduced you to our European (EAB) and National Advisory Board (NAB) of YOUNG_ADULLLT. Our board of internationally acknowledged experts, who – as critical friends – provide the project a Feedback Report with inputs and new or wider perspectives to the activities of the project. The EAB Review Report – Milestone 4 marks the successful completion of the first two years of the project’s lifetime. The objective of the review report is to provide advice on the progress of the research project with regard to its accomplishments and to suggest eventual improvements, as well as critical recommendations.



The EABs provide inputs and new or wider perspectives to the activities of the project.

The EAB members were asked to submit a critical review on the National Reports of the Work Packages 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. Overall, the EABs feedback is highly positive and concerned four areas of the project:

- ***The projects overall progress:*** They praised the project’s overall progress as well as its implementation and good management practises.

- ***Questions as to how the issue of vulnerability has been dealt with in the different sub-studies:*** Generally, they positively assess the projects' framing of the concept vulnerability not as a 'static category' or an 'attribute'. However, it is implemented to a different extent in each sub-study.
- ***Recommendations to enhance visibility and sustainability: of the project's policy recommendations on a European policy level:***
 - Produce concise summaries in form of a "fact-sheets"
 - Identifying (different kinds of) coordination policies, considering the interplay of national and regional/local levels.
- ***The Project's important results, which the EAB considered of fundamental importance and recommended to communicate them to European representatives of policy and practice:***
 - Avoiding notions of vulnerability as a natural category
 - Considering the level of autonomy of the regions
 - Involving young adults in the LLL policy design
 - Involving employers in the LLL policy design
 - Avoiding notions of a standardised life course while designing LLL policies
 - Calling attention to the fact that regions matter for LLL policy-making

The key message of the feedback is that the overall progress is positive and the theoretical and analytical conceptualisation is well rounded, however, carried out to varying degrees in the single Working Packages. The depth of the implementation of the concept 'vulnerability' is varying, and a more critical view on the concepts could be fruitful as well.

The EABs recommendations are of valuable guidance for the project and is going to be taken up in the upcoming sub-study of comparative analysis and reporting (WP 8). We want to take the opportunity to thank our members of our EAB Board for their extensive and crucial feedback. The EAB members are:

- Lorenz Lassnigg – Institut für Höhere Studien (IHS), Wien, Austria
- Pepka Boyadjieva – Institute for the Study of Societies and Knowledge, BAS, Sofia, Bulgaria
- Renata Ozorlić Dominić – Education and Teacher Training Agency, Zagreb, Croatia
- Ilse Julkunen – University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland
- Alexandra Ioannidou – German Institute for Adult Education, Leibniz Centre for Lifelong Learning, Bonn, Germany

- Fabio Massimo Lo Verde – University of Palermo, Dipartimento di Scienze Economiche, Aziendali e Statistiche, Palermo, Italy
- Vitor Ferreira– Instituto de Ciências Sociais, University of Lisbon, Portugal
- Pau Serracant– Agència Catalana de la Joventut (Catalan Youth Agency), Barcelona, Spain
- Audrey MacDougall - Scottish Government Chief Researcher, Edinburgh, UK

Current activities

Now, the project is in full swing drawing together the projects results for both the comparative analysis and for public communication and policy information.

First, the projects results are going to be integrated in the comparative analysis and reporting (WP 8) with the aim to analyse structural relationships, functional matching(s) and specific forms of embedding of LLL policies in regional context. In doing so, it will analyse the impact of LLL policies on young adults' life courses, particularly of those, who are in vulnerable situations. In addition, the analyses will contribute to a better understanding of the structural relationships, functional matching(s), and specific forms of embedding of LLL policies in regional economies, the labour markets, and individual life projects of young adults.



Second, the projects results are going to be disseminated and communicated in Policy Roundtables (WP 9) as well as via European/ national/ regional/ local briefing papers with the aim to present debate and assist policy makers in deciding over future courses of action. In doing so, it takes the projects results to a new level as it integrates the inputs and debates with the relevant stakeholder and decision-makers in each projects country.

Next steps

In order to thoroughly prepare and discuss these two aforementioned steps, we are currently preparing the Fifth Consortium Meeting in Brussel, Belgium, to take place from June 13-15, 2018. The meeting is going to start with a European Policy Roundtable together with another Horizon 2020 funded project, named [ENLIVEN](#). This Roundtable will address two main questions:

- What kind of LLL/adult education policies are available to young adults across Europe, especially to those in vulnerable positions?
- What can be said about the participation of young adults in those policies?

We are looking forward to discuss these questions with renowned stakeholder and decision-makers on an European scale and thus, foster the projects impact and visibility.

In preparation for the dissemination of the projects results, we are currently planning the Final Conference, which will take place in Lisbon. The Calouste Gulbekian Foundation has kindly ceded meeting space for YOUNG_ADULLLT to hold a Policy Seminar and the Final Conference.

<p>Save the date</p> <p>YOUNG_ADULLLT Policy Seminar and Final Conference</p> <p>February 11 and 12, 2019</p> <p>Venue: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation</p> <p>Lisbon, Portugal</p>

2. “Policies under the magnifying glass” – Highlighting two case studies from the policy analysis

Enlarge – amplify – Zoom in: The use of a magnifying glass aims to produce a bigger, sharper and clearer pictures of small and detailed objects. Focussing with a magnifying glass on policies means to zoom into one specific measure to show what problem, matter, issue are tackled with it and which actors are involved on the European/ national/ regional/ local level to decide how is to be dealt with these issues. In the case of LLL policies, this means, we zoom into the problems that are identified in a region, both by experts and the young adults themselves that can hinder the transition for young adults into education and work. In doing so, we can see, that the LLL policies are embedded in a



complex environment of discourses, expectations and structures.

As there is no such a thing as a case that can be found. Case studies are rather being constructed, what we call ‘casing’ within the project, according to the researcher’s research questions, and objects in view of the social and scientific problems. This process of casing, the status and function of the LLL policies two regions, is described in the two following contributions. First, Tiago Neves, from the University of Porto, describes the casing for the two Portuguese Functional Regions. Second, Georgi Apostolov, from the South-West University in Blagoevgrad, presents the casing for the two Bulgarian Functional Regions.

2.1 LLL policies under the magnifying glass: the case of two Portuguese functional regions

Tiago Neves, University of Porto, Portugal

To present two case studies under the magnifying glass within the space constraints of a newsletter such as this is, quite definitely, a challenging task. I will do my best to address it by, first, drawing attention to contextual features that, for the most part, are similar in both studies. Next, I will highlight specific aspects of the LLL policies considered in each case. This piece will end with a brief comment on the status and function of the LLL policies considered.

In Portugal, a country with a history of strong centralisation, lifelong learning (LLL) policies, which are primarily focused on improving the educational levels of the population through vocational education and training, have a national scope. Thus, their overall mapping is identical throughout the territory. This being said, the two case studies that form the basis of this piece focus on national policies that get a particular emphasis in each of the two functional regions considered here, as a result of their specific features. These two functional regions have fundamental differences in their economic structure: Alentejo Litoral (in the south of the country) specialises in the energy industry and in logistics, while Vale do Ave (in the north) is one of the oldest and more renowned textile hubs in the country. However, these regions are similar in that, despite being well established in administrative terms, they have no political or financial autonomy; also, they face important education and employment challenges, and are located in the periphery of major metropolitan areas.



Figure 1. Alentejo Litoral Functional Region



Figure 2 Vale do Ave Functional Region

In both regions, the main institutions and actors involved in the governance of the skills ecology are public schools (under the tutelage of the Ministry of Education), and public training centres (under the tutelage of Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security). Also in both regions, the policy orientations of the actors and institutions involved in the governance of the skills ecology are mostly labour market oriented; local agents sometimes criticize this instrumental approach, emphasizing instead both the humanistic dimension of education and training systems. The two regions are also similar in that their intermunicipal communities and local development associations are key elements in managing the crucial EU funding and monitoring its use, as well as in diagnosing the regional skill needs and identifying the priority areas for education and vocational training. Furthermore, it should be stressed that both regions share a strong public commitment to the development of young adults' skills. A sign of this is the employers' involvement in skills formation markets through offering apprenticeship and internship vacancies, taking part in the boards of professional schools and in the advisory boards of training centres. It can be argued that the employers' involvement is even higher in Vale do Ave

than in Alentejo Litoral, as they are actively engaged in the elaboration of the SANQ (Forecasting System of Qualifications' Needs) report under the coordination of the intermunicipal community.

The Portuguese YOUNG_ADULLLT team focused on two specific LLL policies: the University of Porto team tackled the Professional Courses, in Vale do Ave, and the University of Lisbon addressed the Adult Education and Training Courses sponsored by the Institute of Employment and Professional Training, in Alentejo Litoral.

Professional Courses are an upper secondary vocational education provision that combines an upper secondary education certification with a professional certification (level 4). With upper secondary education being made compulsory in 2009, professional courses became the most important provision for the students that have no desire to pursue an academic education after the 9th grade. Indeed, in school year 2014-2015, 38,1% of the students attending upper secondary education were enrolled in professional courses. Despite this large proportion, these courses are still often regarded as a second-choice provision, targeted at low school achievers. These courses also have combined goals: on the one hand, they seek to prevent early school leaving and youth unemployment; on the other, they are directed at competitiveness, growth and employment, as they focus on matching the training offer to the priorities and needs of the different socioeconomic sectors and regional labour markets, thereby promoting the articulation between schools and enterprises. Importantly, while this measure is funded by the Portuguese Government and, to a great extent, by the European Social Fund, the companies and organisations where the curricular internships take place also contribute to its funding.

Although it is difficult to produce a precise assessment of the impact of the professional courses on employability, the most recent official evaluation report (Pereira, 2011) shows that 71,3% of the graduates were employed one year after graduation. Given that the unemployment rate of the Portuguese population aged between 15 and 24 was 27,8%, the unemployment rate of these graduates is similar to the national one (Pereira, 2011).

Adult Education and Training Courses were launched in 2000 and have become a central instrument for increasing adults' qualifications, namely by contributing to generalise upper secondary education as the lowest academic level of the Portuguese population. The courses vary according to the type of certification delivered: academic courses deliver an educational certification; professional ones deliver a double (educational and professional) certification. In addition to increasing educational and/or professional certifications, Adult Education and Training Courses also seek to reintegrate adults and support their progress in the labour market. As

such, their targets are working age adults, whether employed or unemployed, with qualifications below current compulsory education.

Following the recent economic crisis and the rise of the unemployment rate, these courses have become an active employment policy and a division of labour has taken place: academic Adult Education and Training Courses are mainly offered in schools, whereas professional ones are mostly offered by public training centres. The courses are funded directly by the European Social Fund and the Portuguese State, and indirectly by the companies involved in the in-job training.

The last national assessment of Adult Education and Training Courses took place in 2012 (Lima, 2012). The results showed that the probability of an unemployed person finding a job increased 14% for men and 2% for women who graduated from such courses, when compared to unemployed people who did not attend this type of courses.

From what was said above, it is clear that, in Portugal, there is a big faith in training and vocational education policies as being able to offer solutions to deal with young adults' LLL structural problems such as unemployment or early school leaving. It is open for debate whether this faith is simply naïve or such policies are strategically used as façades for not addressing more directly structural inequalities in the country. In any case, the over-reliance on the European Social Fund and the widespread understanding of professional courses as a second-choice provision are obstacles to a more successful implementation of such policies.

References and further reading

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Pereira, Catarina. (Coord.) (2011). Avaliação dos percursos pósformação dos diplomados de cursos profissionais no contexto da expansão desta oferta no sistema nacional de qualificações. Lisboa: IESE-ANQ.



Tiago Neves holds a PhD in Education Sciences from the University of Porto, where he is Assistant Professor in the areas of research methods, conflict management and social and educational inequalities. He has coordinated research and intervention on conflict mediation and on fighting poverty and social exclusion, and been a member of the research team in a number of national and international projects.

2.2 LLL policies under the magnifying glass: the case of two Bulgarian functional regions

Georgi Apostolov, South-West University in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria

Bulgaria is a South-East European country with a population of over 7 million people. After the collapse of the state socialist regime in 1989, the free market economy replaced the previously imposed centrally planned system. The country became a member of the EU in 2007.

Since the global financial crisis in 2008, the labour market in Bulgaria has been unbalanced, characterized with high rates of unemployment and inactive population as well as high levels of informal employment. The disparities of the labour market are growing simultaneously with the rapid decrease of resources available to address them by implementing appropriate policies. The education and training system of modern Bulgaria has been well designed and properly developed. During the transition period the system of LLL policies adopted some common European principles, programmes and measures while also preserving certain traditional characteristics related to the national perceptions of “education” as one of the most valued virtues. However, during the transition period it has been facing serious challenges related to: 1) decline of the quality of education; 2) mismatch between labour market needs and education provision (particularly in terms of practical orientation of studies); 3) high share of university graduates occupying job positions below their qualification; 4) high rate of NEETs between 15 and 29; etc.

For the purposes of the YOUNG_ADULLLT research, two functional regions (FR) have been selected from Bulgaria – Blagoevgrad and Plovdiv.



Figure 1 Functional Regions Blagoevgrad and Plovdiv

The two regions have several specific characteristics: Plovdiv FR has a central location in the country while Blagoevgrad is a border region; Plovdiv FR is an urban territory with higher concentration of services and industry in its economy; Blagoevgrad FR is mixed with rural and urban areas and has a higher share of service sector in the economy.

Blagoevgrad Functional Region



Figure 2 Functional Region Blagoevgrad

Blagoevgrad FR is the sixth largest district in the country. It has a relatively good demographic structure – the urban population in the district is 39% and there is a high percentage of people employed in services. The FR is characterised by diversified economic branch structure: food and tobacco processing, tourism, transport and communication, textile, timber and furniture, iron processing and machinery, construction materials, pharmaceuticals, plastics, paper and shoes production.

Blagoevgrad FR is a significant, economic, educational and cultural centre of Bulgaria. There are a total of 133 educational institutions which include 106 general, 3 special, 1 arts, and 18 vocational schools as well as 2 colleges and 2 universities. The youth unemployment rate in the main city is 5.3% for the age group of 15-24 and 22.8% for the age group of 25-35 (2014).

Plovdiv Functional Region



Figure 3 Functional Region Plovdiv

Plovdiv FR is unique in terms of administrative-territorial characteristics, e.g. Plovdiv Municipality is one of the three municipalities in Bulgaria, which comprises only the main city. The FR has a multi-sector economy providing around 7% of the national sales revenue of goods and services. The main economic sectors that shape the industry are production of food, beverage and tobacco products, ferrous casting, metalworking and machinery production, production of chemical products, cellulose, etc. The overall unemployment rate is 4.9%, as the youth unemployment rate in the main city is 19.4%.

Plovdiv has a well-developed educational system. There are nine universities and 78 primary, secondary and vocational schools.

“University Students Training Practices” case study

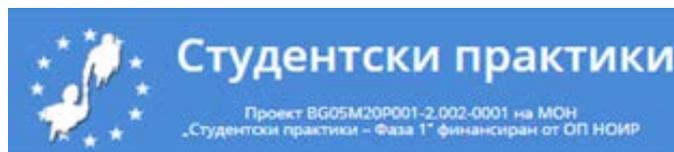


Figure 4 “University Students Training Practices” case-study

The project “University Students Training Practices” or shortly “Students Practices” aims at addressing employability of university graduates by providing opportunities for practical training in real work environment, thus facilitating their transition from studies to work. Furthermore, it is intended to encourage establishing of strong partnerships between educational institutions and industry in view of aligning curricula with particular needs of the labour market.

“Students Practices” is funded by the European Structural and Investment Funds and has been administered by the Ministry of Education and Science in partnership with all 54 higher schools in Bulgaria since 2013. At regional level, it is implemented by the Career Centre of South-West University “Neofit Rilski” (SWU) in Blagoevgrad.

Young people, aged between 18 and 29, carry out training practices in real work places for six months, while at the same time continue pursuing their studies at SWU. The traineeships are carried out in different public organizations and private enterprises named “training institutions”. This multi-actor network engage more than 500 entities from around the whole Blagoevgrad district. The practice is related to the student’s main field of studies and covers 240 working hours.

Support, guidance and counselling are provided to young people by a network of professionals involving: *a mentor*, an employee of the training organization; *an academic mentor*, a university professor; and *a functional expert*, a representative of the university ensuring coordination of

all activities. An amount of 5761 students benefited from the project during its starting stage 2013-2015.

Employers also benefit from the opportunity of having direct contact with their future employees and could select from graduates who have demonstrated appropriate skills, competencies and attitudes during their work placement.

According to a survey on the results during the starting period of the “Students Practices”, 320 participants were offered jobs out of whom 110 started work at the companies where they had practiced, 75 got extra payments by their training organizations, and 230 were offered extension of the practice beyond the contracted period.

“Youth Guarantee Scheme” (YGS) at FR Plovdiv



Figure 5 “Youth Guarantee Scheme” case-study

The “Youth Guarantee” project started in 2014 and since then it has been facilitating structural reforms related to youth unemployment. It is a commitment of all EU Member States and provides young people with a number of options among which are: vocational guidance and training; internships and practices; subsidy for temporary employment; entrepreneurship support; etc. Its overall goals are to reduce the inactive population, improve the efficiency of the local labour market and promote economic activity.

The policy is governed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, while the National Employment Agency and its regional branches are responsible for its implementation. Thus, the local office has a key role in targeting and activating youngsters. Through consultations with regional and local institutions, employers and public organizations, a flexible system is established to offer a wide range of opportunities.

The target group are unemployed or low educated young people up to 29 years old, although exceptions exist. They can register through the Labour Offices with the assistance of *labour mediators*. They have an obligation to activate the youths and lead them to the *workers* at the Office, where every young person goes through certain steps of assessments of personal needs, desires and plans in order to be provided with appropriate support.

At a company, the employer has to appoint a *mentor* and a proper position for the assigned participant. Participation in the “Youth Guarantee” enables young people to acquire knowledge

and skills, accumulate work experience, start work and even earn some money thus obtaining independency and security for a certain period. This regular income enables them to plan their life course, albeit in a relatively short term – from 6 months to 1 year. Meanwhile, youngsters get confidence, and an essential part of them continue working at the position of their placement. According to statistics, around 30-40% of them remain in the companies.

Concluding Remarks

The analyses of the two case studies and their comparison revealed important findings that need to be further explored.

Regarding “*Students Practices*” project, there is an obvious mismatch between demand and supply in terms of curricula (i.e., content, methods and pedagogical approaches) and concrete labour market needs. Higher education is quite theoretically oriented and somewhat inconsistent with expectations of employers, especially those from the region.

On the other side, the studied policy present a very good solution to include young people in real working environment in order to gain practical experience and equip them with appropriate practical skills and competencies thus enriching and enhancing their current studies. This often leads to curricula revision and adaptations to respond to real needs of the labour market.

Both projects are good examples of effective and efficient cooperation between public bodies and private organizations, establishing flexible networks of individual and group actors having mutual interests and common goals.

However, while the “*Students Practices*” has been considered a very successful policy, the “*Youth Guarantee*” is facing a number of challenges related to the high share of NEETs in the region, the quality of the services provided, heavy bureaucracy, etc. Besides, it appeared that young people have unrealistic assessment of their own capabilities, and that their expectations about a certain job or employer are too high. Similarly, employers have unrealistic expectations from young people.

A very important observation, made by researchers studying the two cases, refers to the fact that both projects aim at labour market integration through the same approach but guided by opposite viewpoints: the practice-based approach is favoured in the “*Youth Guarantee*” project “because policymakers assess young adults as not suitable for theoretical learning”, while in the “*University Students Training Practices*” programme not the young adults themselves are labelled as not suitable, but their ‘too theoretical’ studies”.



Georgi Apostolov is the Team Leader of the project. He is currently Vice-Rector of the South-West University, responsible for research and PhD studies. For the last 8 years, he was Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy. Dr. Apostolov is Associate Professor of higher education and science management and teaches graduate and post-graduate courses in Education, science and technologies; Quality management in education; Management of organizational culture and leadership; Management ethics; etc. He holds a doctorate in History of philosophy.

3. Being an Early Career Researcher in YOUNG_ADULLLT

3.1 Difficulties and Opportunities for an Early-Career Researcher in a Horizon2020 project

Judith Jacovkis Halperin, Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain

I have been involved in the YOUNG ADULLLT project for a bit more than a year. During this time, my experiences as a postdoctoral researcher within YOUNG ADULLLT allows me to expose some of the main difficulties and opportunities that a project such as this represent for me. I think that many of them can be common to other early-career researchers.

Among the opportunities that an early-career researcher has when participates in a big project such as the YOUNG_ADULLLT, one of the first thing that came into my mind is that I had the chance of meeting some relevant and recognised researchers in the field of education, lifelong learning, education policies, and so on. This implies the opportunity to see how they work and to discuss some interesting things with them, but also to have some informal chats in where to know a little on the person behind the big name.

The meetings and the daily work have also let me to gain some experience in working with large and international teams. Obviously, this is a great challenge for anyone, but the first time you experience it you realise of the tremendous effort it represents in terms of coordination. I am going to include some aspects related to this challenge in the side of the difficulties too, but for me it has been a great opportunity to keep in contact with different ways of doing and with different work teams. Moreover, it has shown me some of the tools that a big and international team could use in order to easy the work and the communication.

In addition, this is not only a big and international project, but also a Horizon 2020. I think that for any researcher working in Europe it is crucial to know how these calls work in terms of agreements, calendar, deliverables and commitments. My participation in the YOUNG ADULLLT project has shown me some of these things, which I think can be extremely useful for me if I have the chance of participating in other projects of this kind. Naturally, it has also some drawbacks that I am going to reflect a few lines below.

Finally yet importantly, we have been taught to make opportunities from obstacles, and a project like the YOUNG ADULLLT is a good chance to test our abilities on doing so. Specifically, I am talking about the need of facing practical problems often derived from a research that needs to be designed without resources, to get the resources required to execute it. Methodologically, this implies that some parts of the research have to be delivered before others that are needed to construct the former. And, this leads me to address directly some of the main difficulties that I have detected during this time. Some of them are specific to my particular position and stage of my researching career, but I think that some others are common to many of participants.

The time constraints we face in the milestones and deliverables (linked with the last of the opportunities) had sometimes hindered the depth of the analyses I had been able to do in some of the aspects I have worked with. Moreover, when coordination with other teams has been required to finish my own work it had not been always easy to reach the deadlines with the expected quality. However, I think that the fact of being many eyes reading each product has been a good way to overcome the potential problems.

I think that one of the difficulties most shared by early-career researchers in the project is the need to produce determinate results for our professional careers that do not necessary fit with the project deliverables. In this regards, for us it is an added demand to be able to take advantage of the work we have done within the project to write papers for peer-reviewed journals or proposals for conferences. I am pretty sure that all early-career researchers, but not only, would very much appreciate a closer link between H2020 projects requirements' and research career requirements'.

Before ending, I want to stress two more difficulties. On the one side, it has not been always easy for me to be updated about all the debates and documents that are shared both online and in the Consortium Meetings I have attended. The team I belong to is a small one, so we have not been able to divide much of the work and it had forced us to be focused on what we needed to produce rather than on what we needed to discuss. I think this has not only to do with the size of the team but also with the fact of my late integration to the project, almost a year after its start. This has forced me to catch up the rhythm in a shorter time and sometimes I have not been able of reflect enough on some of its dimensions.

On the other side, I realise that I have had some difficulties in the meetings not in speaking but in being as compelling as the senior researchers are when expressing their opinions on some discussions about procedures or focuses. In my own opinion, some discussions have taken place in too crowded meetings. For those of us who have less ability or experience to defend our

positions, it is easier to argue when we know in advance, what is going to be discussed and when we can discuss with those who are going to develop the tasks we are talking about.

All this said, and making balance between opportunities and difficulties of my participation in this project, I can easily say that the former are more relevant than the latter and that all learning is difficult and also represents an opportunity!



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3.2 Attending a Consortium meeting being an Early Career Researcher: Keys to get the most out of it.

Laura M. Guerrero Puerta & Domingo Barroso Hurtado, University of Granada, Spain

As an Early Career Researcher, having the opportunity to be part of a research project like YOUNG_ADULLLT, is something unique and really valuable. It allows you to grow, promotes the development of your skills and creates networks of work, while you learn from great academics in your area of study. Therefore, activities such as the Consortium meeting are of vital importance, and it is one of the Must-Go events that you cannot miss.

The consortium meetings are periodic reunions that are held among the different teams of the project. There, each one presents its preliminary findings, explains the work that remains to be done and proposes the activities to be carried out. It is a space for the exchange of ideas, discussions and planning that is essential for the proper development of the research project.

What do these meetings bring to the Early Career Researchers? How can we get the most out of these activities? Next we give you all the keys to take advantage of a consortium meeting.

What do these meetings offer to early career researchers?

Research has traditionally been considered a solitary activity, but nowadays this has been proven to be false. As it is commonly said, Rome was not built in a day, and we would add, that certainly was not built by a single person, and the career of research is a long journey, where acquiring experience and collaborating with others is vital.

In this sense, there is no better way to do this than in a consortium meeting, since many of your colleagues who are working on the same topic as you will attend. As a novice researcher, to have the opportunity to be involved in an event where you will be able to create a community of researchers who support you, give you feedback and may be willing to work with you will be invaluable in your future.

Also, you will have the advantage of the mixed level of expertise, since to this event will attend both researchers with a greater experience and maturity, as well as Early Career Researchers like you. This mixture of ideas and experiences can significantly enrich your own work.

Furthermore, you will also find the advantage of a wider range of diversity. Your colleagues belong to different regions of the world, so listening to their contributions, chatting with them, getting involved, will allow you to acquire a comparative view of the topic.

How can Early Career Researchers get the most out of a consortium meeting?

As mentioned in the previous point, a consortium meeting is an academic event of great importance, and like all events of this nature, it requires work around it. Such work can be divided into three stages: pre-meeting, on-site and post-meeting work.

Pre-meeting work

The consortium meeting will be more useful the more integrated you are in the project, so before attending the reunion:

Get involved: During the development of the project, try to participate in as many tasks as possible, make interviews, write, organize. The more activities you participate in, the more knowledge and experience you will acquire. Do not be afraid of taking on responsibilities!

Maintain coordination with your own local team: Collaboration with your local team will be important. The role of feedback is crucial in the research career, so having discussions with your team and listening to the advices of the team leader and the most experienced researchers will be of great importance for the development of your work in the project, and therefore for your future career.

Read the recommended bibliography for the meeting: The more informed you are about the topics to be discussed, the more you can participate later in the discussions and benefit from them.

Review the proposed activities for the consortium meeting and do not be afraid to make propositions: This can greatly help the teams that are organizers of the event and may lead to new activities. Thanks to this type of proposals in the YOUNG_ADULLLT project, an Early Career Researcher group has been created, and we even have our own specific activities!

On-site work

Discuss and if possible present one of the proposed topics: If you have made your best in your preparation for the meeting, you should not be afraid to expose the work that your team has done, and intervene in the discussions.

Create community: Speak with your colleagues from other teams, know them, know their work, get interested in them. Do not talk only with your team colleagues, you already know them!

Meet the city: Every consortium meeting is held in a different city in a different country, so take the opportunity to learn more about the country, its customs and its food, but be careful not to eat too much for lunch or you will not be able to be focused on afternoon activities.

Rest and enjoy: During the meeting it will be important to rest, so, in addition, these days can be used to disconnect from the routine, so take advantage of social activities to enjoy too!

Post-meeting work

If you want to make the most of a consortium meeting, the work will not end once the meeting is over. Post-meeting work will be useful in this sense.

Put all the relevant information in your own work/research: Use everything that you have worked on during the consortium meeting and that results useful and relevant for the research that you are developing or the lectures that you are carrying out.

Keep in touch with your colleagues: Write them emails, care about their progress, communicate yours.

Produce: An important part of the research is to communicate your results in the form of conference contributions, papers... So you should try to write about the topics discussed and on which you are working!

To sum up, get prepared, attend and take advantage of consortium meetings!



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3.3 Reflection on our first consortium meeting

Ralph Chan, University of Vienna, Austria & Mariana Rodrigues, University of Porto, Portugal

In November 16-17 2017, the Fourth Consortium Meeting of the project was held in Genoa, Italy. We – Ralph Chan and Mariana Rodrigues – are more or less the newest member of our respective project teams and since it was the first time we went to a consortium meeting of YOUNG_ADULLLT, we want to share some of our thoughts. Let us introduce ourselves first: my name is Ralph Chan, an early stage PhD student and the newest member of the Austrian team.

My name is Mariana Rodrigues, I am in the final stretch of my PhD in Education Sciences, and I am the newest member of the Portuguese Team from the University of Porto.

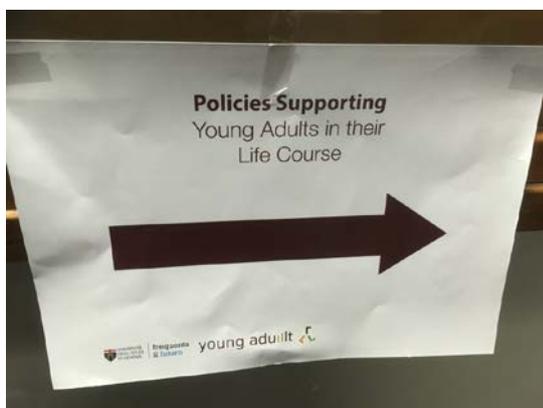


Figure 1: Direction to the Consortium Meeting (©Ralph Chan)

The overall issue YOUNG ADULLLT is dealing with is most interesting for us, since the main objective of YOUNG_ADULLLT is analysing different LLL policies in their respective countries from the nine different partners (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Scotland). Participating the project and to see how the different policies, initiatives and projects function in each country and region, we think though it is more interesting

to see how the different mechanisms and governance structures define the project regarding organization and financing.

Moreover, the international working environment as well the various academic backgrounds of the different scholars and researchers are also very impressive, so we got the chance to develop our skills in working in a big international project. Furthermore, what the project makes most interesting is the thematic match with our personal research interests. We had the opportunity to meet the consortium consisting of different scholars and researchers from across Europe and to get in touch with them from different research areas, specificity and knowledge. Getting such an opportunity is very important for an early career researcher as we get to know and to learn about the differences and similarities in the partner countries as well as the shared knowledge.

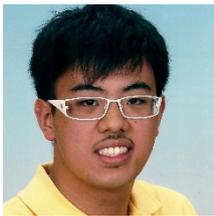


Figure 2: During the Consortium Meeting

On November 15, before the actual consortium meeting, the Early Career Researcher Meeting was planned for the exclusive participation of the early career researchers. Taking into account that this was our first experience in one YOUNG_ADULLLT consortium meeting, we had the opportunity to meet other young researchers from other partner countries. The Early Career Meeting worked as an icebreaker especially for the newest participants, since we all dealt with the same problems and shared similar experiences. This kick-off meeting had two main purposes: First, there was a workshop provided by Mauro Palumbo and Sebastiano Benasso on research methods paying particular attention to case study designs, which is particularly important for the operationalization of the research in the sub-study (regional and local case studies). Second, there was a moment for highlighting our research interests and ideas concerning future partnerships, not only discussing chances and obstacles for future joint publications, but also for sharing our differences and common constraints, possibilities, and aspirations concerning our future careers in academia. At the end of the meeting, there was a generally held view that the early career researchers, independently of their country, face many challenges, as the

constant need of publishing, funding, and networking places us in a very precarious and vulnerable situation.

At first, the load of ongoing work was impressive (e.g., getting into the topic, into the system how an EU project works etc.). However, since we are all confronted with the same challenges it was help to hear that we are all dealing with the same problems; especially, hearing it from those colleagues, who are also dealing with their PhD thesis, motivated us to face the challenges.



Ralph Chan is a junior researcher and a PhD student. He holds an MA in Sociology from the University of Vienna. His research interests are sociology of education, urban studies and social policy. His MA thesis is closely connected to the topics of YOUNG_ADULLLT since he has researched on the Austrian educational and training system and has experience in interviews with young adults.



Mariana Rodrigues is in the final stretch of her PhD in Education Sciences from the University of Porto, where she is exploring the impact of youths' participation in scouting on their social and psychopolitical development. She has been involved in research on citizenship education in formal and non-formal educational settings; forms and contexts of online/offline participation and the quality of these participation experiences. She has experience in qualitative, quantitative, and collaborative research methodologies.

4. 'Vulnerability' as a Relational Concept - Avoiding essentialism in Policy Research in YOUNG_ADULLLT

Jozef Zelinka, University of Münster, Germany

In the context of the goals of the European Strategy 2020, combining strategies that help secure economic growth in the face of “grand societal challenges of globalization-led economic, ecological and demographical change (Langfeldt et al., 2012; Pedersen, 2016, p. 2), while at the same time promoting social inclusion, put the significance of social sciences and humanities high in the European research and policies agendas (EC, 2010). In particular due to the changes introduced by the current European Research Framework Programme Horizon 2020, European research projects were asked to place more attention on groups characterised as ‘vulnerable’, ‘at-risk’ or ‘near social exclusion’ (cf. Pedersen, 2016). When regarding the educational policies, extensive investments have been made in every European country to reintegrate young people considered ‘vulnerable’ into educational systems and work (Brown, 2011; Brunila et al., 2017). For instance, much research and policy attention was devoted over the past few years on

decreasing the levels of early school leavers and dropouts, youths Not in Education, Employment or Training (so called NEETs), as well as on the numbers of people in – or at-risk of – poverty or social exclusion.

While the concept of ‘vulnerability’ has been useful in calling public and political attention to adverse situations faced by different groups across Europe, the usage of the concept in non-reflective or essentialistic manner risks exacerbating the social problems it intend to tackle in the first place. YOUNG_ADULLLT has gone great lengths in deliberating on the usage of ‘vulnerability’ in its research on how lifelong learning policies support young people in their life courses. In this contribution, a brief discussion of the concept of ‘vulnerability’ will be elaborated. In a second step, the application of the concept both in the conceptual and methodological frameworks of this research will be presented in order to discuss a number of key aspects of research with/about groups ‘in vulnerable positions’. The latter include deliberating on measures taken to prevent the risk of enhancing vulnerability of individuals/groups.



Vulnerability, a term derived from Latin (*vulnerare* = to wound, injure), has become current in the 1970s in bioethics and in disaster risk management and assessment. More recently, it was taken up in poverty/social exclusion research, where it is used to refer to groups or subpopulations worthy of protection or under higher levels of exposure to poverty or welfare losses (Vatsa, 2004; Luna, 2009; Alwang et al., 2000). Meanwhile, the disputes over the meaning and the analytical usage of the term have led to its manifold differentiations. One major problem arises from the fact that the term ‘vulnerability’ could be applied to various groups of people, who are facing some temporary difficulties. This often leads to a generalization of vulnerable experiences and, thus, diminishes the analytical role of the concept and the challenges it poses: “so many categories of people are now considered vulnerable that virtually all potential human subjects are included” (Levine et al., 2004, p. 46). Another debate departs from the observation

that vulnerability intersects with themes like risk, social marginalisation, and, especially, poverty. This kind of social class reading highlights the diverging life conditions, which create unequal life opportunities. Therefore, some researchers associate vulnerability “with the social disadvantages which simultaneously produce and are reflections and products of poverty” (Hogan & Marandola, 2005, p. 457). However, recent studies have paid much more attention to a “layered and inessential” (Luna, 2009, p. 129) understanding of vulnerability, considering it not “as a permanent and categorical condition, a label that is attached to someone given certain conditions (such as lack of power or incapability) that persists throughout its existence” (ibid.). In addition, the concept of vulnerability has to be analytically seen in a complementarity with and a reciprocity between other terms, such as resilience, normativity, dialectics, and ‘vulnerability’, meaning the specific conditions under which vulnerable experiences can emerge (Burghardt et al., 2017, p. 153). Apart from this, when applying the term one needs to consider that it can have “important implications for interventions and practices” (Brown et al., 2017, p. 498). Even more because vulnerability “is defined not by young people themselves, but by those managing, categorizing and classifying the aforementioned groups from the outside, for instance by ministries and education officials” (Brunila & Rossi, 2017, p. 289). To sum up, the most widespread usages and current understandings of the term could be defined under following three ways:

- “as a **policy and practice mechanism**, which plays out in interventions, sometimes overtly and explicitly, sometimes subtly or unnoticed;
- as a **cultural trope** or way of thinking about the problems of life in an increasingly pressured and unequal society;
- and as a **more robust concept to facilitate social and political research and analysis**” (Brown et al., 2017, p. 498f [emphasis added]).

In YOUNG_ADULLLT we have further conceptualized and methodologically developed the last of the above mentioned understanding, especially emphasizing its constructed and context-dependent nature. Crucial task within the project was to acknowledge the term ‘vulnerable’ not as an individual attribute that simply denominates or qualifies a static or ‘natural’ category or group, but rather to seek its relational and contextual meaning and apply it as an anti-essentialistic formula to reveal the specific cultural and societal conditions that created it. This was adopted after several considerations. First, an understanding of vulnerability as a fixed, static category is highly problematic as it suggests ‘being vulnerable’ is an essential attribute of specific social groups. Therefore, it should be rather analysed as a state or a set of conditions that

is simultaneously present in one or more phases of the life cycle of an individual or a group and that makes them vulnerable. Second, vulnerability is also constituted by social interactions and contexts as a form of different 'layers' rather than one solid form of vulnerability that transcends all circumstances. In other words, a person is not vulnerable, but is rendered or made vulnerable by certain situations and thus may be vulnerable, highly vulnerable or not vulnerable at the same time depending on the situation and context (Luna, 2009, p. 128; Delor & Hubert, 2000; Burghardt et al., 2017). Lastly, considering the current social developments, such as increasing job insecurity, decreasing caring capacity of families, and reduced effect of traditional welfare institutions (Bonoli, 2005; Ranci et al., 2014), young people are continuously exposed to new forms of social risks and new states of social insecurity, which is described by the notion of 'social vulnerability'. This term describes a situation characterised by a state of weakness, which exposes a person (or a family, or a social group) to suffering damaging consequences if a problematic situation arises, i.e., if one or more risk factors occur. Especially because of the complex and diversified effect of new social risks, the peculiar trait in the critical situations we have identified in YOUNG_ADULLLT is the presence of few social guarantees, the instability in the fundamental mechanisms for acquiring resources and the fragility of social and family relations. What they have in common is that their position within the main systems of social integration (work, family, the welfare system) is characterized by uncertainty. Thus, the notion of vulnerability also draws its relevance from the instability of the social position occupied by young adults.

Deriving from these observations, we apply the term 'vulnerable' in reflective ways to consider its dynamic, relative and multidimensional nature. Moreover, we suggest to analyse this category as constructed in relation to context-specific ascriptions of normality of the standard life course (cf. Weiler et al., 2017), and as varying according to the orientation of the specific policy – for instance, prevention, intervention, compensation, human capital development, etc. (cf. Kotthoff et al., 2017). Above all, in YOUNG_ADULLLT we try to avoid an essentialistic approach towards young adults in vulnerable position. Instead, we refer to the term 'vulnerability' in its contextual and constructed nature, thus stressing the relevance of diverging living conditions in building different structures of opportunities for young people, in terms of complex mixes of enablement and constraints, according to the place where they live. This has been already applied in our empirical Work Packages (WP4, WP5, and WP6). Departing from the contextual and place-based approaches towards vulnerability, we have turned our focus on the dimensions that correlate with the production of different risk profiles, covering the economic

and demographic dimensions, education and training, labour market, social inclusion and participation, and health and well-being (cf. Scandurra et al., 2018). Further on, when covering the life conditions of young adults, it often appeared that many of them had to cope with obstacles in their lives in one way or another, experiencing health problems (physical and often mental), family problems (e.g. divorced parents) or violence, which showed their clear vulnerable position (cf. Rambla & Jacovkis et al., 2018). Finally, regional economical characteristics exert an overwhelming influence on young adults' opportunities, especially considering their exposition to exogenous changes (cf. Capsada-Munsech & Valiente et al., 2018).

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