Finding a place in modern Europe

Jelena Markovic

Miguel Angel Garcia Lopez

Sever Dzigurski

Mapping of Barriers to Social Inclusion of Young People in Vulnerable Situations

Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth

EUROPEAN UNION

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Authors:
Jelena Markovic
Miguel Angel Garcia Lopez
Sever Dzigurski

Photo:
Mörgan Bourdeau

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1. Introduction

1.1. Strategic framework

Young people are a priority for the European Union's social vision and social inclusion of young people in vulnerable situations has been one of the key areas of concern for both the Council of Europe and the European Commission for several years.

In November 2009, the Council of Youth Ministers adopted the EU Youth Strategy for 2010-2018 which has two overall objectives: to provide more and equal opportunities for young people in education and in the labour market and to promote the active citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity of all young people.

The strategy defines eight main fields of action and national governments are encouraged to design and implement country-specific measures, such as:

- realise the full potential of youth work and youth centres as means of inclusion;
- adopt a cross-sector approach when working to improve community cohesion and solidarity and reduce the social exclusion of young people, addressing the inter-linkages between, for example, young people's education and employment and their social inclusion;
- support the development of intercultural awareness and competences for all young people and combat prejudice;
- support information and education activities for young people about their rights;
- address the issues of homelessness, housing and financial exclusion;
- promote access to quality services, such as transport, e-inclusion, health and social services.

The focus on young people was confirmed with the adoption of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (EC, 2010). The common objectives and indicators to monitor the progress of the achievement of EU 2020 strategic goals have been defined. The strategy includes a number of concrete initiatives to support young people in getting jobs and dealing with different challenges during the economic crisis.

Education and training policies are among the key focuses of the Europe 2020 strategy for reviving the European economy in the next decade. The central topics include improvement of the education system's relevance for the labour market by adapting learning outcomes, creating national qualification frameworks and empowering the present and future labour force to adapt to the new conditions and potential career shifts.

The Europe 2020 strategy defines the strategic goals that specifically address the area of employment: increasing labour market participation and decreasing structural unemployment; developing a trained workforce that matches labour market needs, promoting high-quality jobs and lifelong learning; enhancing the performance of the education and training system at all levels; and increasing the percentage of people having completed university education.

The flagship initiatives Youth on the Move (2010) and, more recently, the Youth Employment Package (2012) have significant social inclusion objectives: to make education more accessible and better suited to young people's needs; to stimulate mobility (through the EU programme for education, training, youth and sports, Erasmus+); and to encourage member states to take measures to ease the transition from school to work. In December 2012, in the face of high and still rising youth unemployment, the European Commission proposed a [Youth Employment Package](#). This package is a follow-up to the actions on youth laid out in the wider employment package and consists of proposals that includes the following:

- all young people up to the age of 25 should receive a quality job offer, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed (a youth guarantee);
- a consultation of European social partners on a quality framework for traineeships to enable young people to acquire high-quality work experience under safe conditions;
- a European alliance for apprenticeships to improve the quality and supply of apprenticeships available and to outline ways to reduce obstacles to mobility for young people.

The Youth Employment Package includes prominent actions such as the Youth Guarantee (2013), European Alliance for Apprenticeships (2013) and Quality Framework for Traineeships (2014). The Youth Employment Package re-emphasised the need to ensure opportunities for young people, stressing the importance of decreasing dramatic rates of youth unemployment and the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) by enabling transitions to work.

Efforts to reduce youth unemployment continued in 2013 as the European Commission presented the [Youth Employment Initiative](#), designed to reinforce and accelerate measures outlined in the Youth Employment Package. It aimed to support, in particular, young people not in education, employment or training and to decrease the unemployment rate. There followed another communication titled [Working together for Europe's young people – A call to action on youth unemployment](#) (2013), which is designed to accelerate the

implementation of the Youth Guarantee (2013) and provide help to EU member states and businesses so they may recruit more young people.

Formerly the Youth and Youth in Action programme, and currently Erasmus+ Youth complement the efforts made in the European political cooperation. These programs are conceived as an important instrument for the inclusion of young people, especially those facing vulnerable situations. The Inclusion Strategy for the Youth in Action Programme (2007) and the work of SALTO Inclusion and SALTO Cultural Diversity Resource Centres[1] have provided significant processes and tools to support the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities. Building on the outcomes of the period 2007-2013, the Inclusion Strategy has been revised in order to increase its relevance for the Erasmus+ Programme. The revamped strategy notably incorporates the element of diversity, thus not only putting the emphasis on including young people with fewer opportunities but also aiming to strengthen the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to fully accept, support and promote differences in society.

The youth policy of the Council of Europe aims to "provide young people with equal opportunities and experience which enable them to develop knowledge, skills and competencies to play a full part in all aspects of society", as stated in the Agenda 2020, which has guided Council of Europe youth policy since 2008. The social inclusion strand therein puts special emphasis on:

- supporting the integration of excluded young people;
- promoting the recognition of non-formal education/learning, strengthening young people's opportunities to reconcile private and working life;
- ensuring young people's equal access to decent living conditions as well as to cultural, sporting and creative activities;
- encouraging intergenerational dialogue and solidarity.

The co-operation between the European Union and the Council of Europe in the context of the Youth Partnership institutionalised in 1998 allows for effective management of evidence-based youth policy relying upon the mutually enriching capacities of youth researchers, policy makers, practitioners, and young people themselves.

The implementation of Agenda 2020 is supported by conducting international reviews of national youth policies, co-management of youth policy between governments and youth organisations, work with multipliers for the development of quality youth work and its recognition and other targeted activities implemented within the European Youth Centres and funded by the European Youth Foundation.

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[1]. SALTO-YOUTH stands for Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities within the European YOUTH programme.

In 2009, the Council of Europe's youth sector initiated the Enter! project, which aims to develop youth policy responses to exclusion, discrimination and violence affecting young people, particularly in multicultural disadvantaged neighbourhoods, with multi-dimensional social and economic imbalances experienced by young people living therein. The results of the project are being consolidated in the second phase (2013-2015), which focuses particularly on the areas of youth policy at local and regional level. The Enter! project was set in response to the growing concern and attention of the European Steering Committee on Youth and the Advisory Council on Youth, the governmental and non-governmental partners of the youth sector of the Council of Europe, to increase social cohesion and inclusion of young people.

1.2. Position of young people

In spite of the strong efforts, the unfavourable position of young people in many parts of Europe has further deteriorated during the economic crisis. The situation of young people who are studying and entering professional and adult societal life varies within each country, and even more so between countries at European level.

Poverty and social exclusion in the EU has increased during the crisis. According to Eurostat data, poverty and social exclusion continued to grow. In 2011, there were 119.6 million people in the EU-27, equivalent to 24.2% of the entire population, who lived in households facing poverty or social exclusion. In 2011, the proportion of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion varied between 15.3% in the Czech Republic and 49.1% in Bulgaria. The analysis of the dimensions of the at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion indicator shows that in 2011, 16.9% of the EU-27 population was assessed to be at risk of poverty, with this share ranging from 9.8% in the Czech Republic to 22.3% in Bulgaria (EUROSTAT, 2013).

Children and young people in general are treated as one of the most vulnerable groups exposed to the risk of poverty and social exclusion. In 2012, 28.3% of the youth population faced the risk of poverty and social exclusion. The proportion of young people at risk of poverty or social exclusion varied between 16.9% in Belgium and 48.4% in Bulgaria (EUROSTAT, 2014).

The labour market situation remains very difficult for young people (aged 15-24). Youth unemployment remained close to historically high levels of 22.5% in April 2014, affecting around 2.5 million young women and 2.9 million young men in the EU. Considerable disparities can be observed across the EU, despite improvements in about two thirds of the member states during 2014 (such as Germany, Sweden and Austria). The youth unemployment rate is still high in Spain, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Greece and

Italy. Young people also constitute the largest group in the EU population that is underemployed or that feels discouraged to look for work (EC, 2014).

Nearly 80% of young people aged between 20 and 24 in Europe have completed upper secondary education (EC, 2009). Nonetheless, a quarter of 15-year-olds are low achievers in reading literacy and 6 million young people leave school without any qualifications.

At EU level, young people in the NEET category[2] are considered to be one of the most problematic groups in the context of youth unemployment. In 2011, 7.5 million young people aged 15-24 and an additional 6.5 million young people aged 25-29 were excluded from the labour market and education in Europe. This corresponds to a significant increase in the NEET rate: in 2008, the figure stood at 11% of those aged 15-24 and 17% of those aged 25-29; by 2011 these rates had increased to 13% and 20% respectively. There is a huge variation between member states, with rates varying from below 7% (Luxembourg and the Netherlands) to above 17% (Bulgaria, Ireland, Italy and Spain) (EUROFOUND, 2012).

The health of many young people is at risk because of stress, poor diet, lack of physical exercise, unprotected sex, tobacco, and alcohol and drug abuse. Broader environmental and socio-economic factors also influence poor health, which in turn can obstruct active participation. Smoking remains a major risk to health in European countries. Of daily smokers among the population aged 15-24, the highest proportion was noted in Austria (29.4% of all persons aged 15-24), the lowest in Romania (12.4%) (Eurostat, 2013).

Full participation of young people in civic and political life is an increasing challenge, in view of the gap between them and the institutions. Of the young people included in the Flash Eurobarometer survey, 44% did not take part in the activities of any organisation (such as sports, culture, youth and political organisations) in 2012. Over half of those surveyed have voted in a political election at the local, regional or national level. These findings represent a decrease in participation since 2011, when 62% of respondents said that they had voted and 37% had not (EC, 2013).

1.3. Mapping objectives

Significant resources have been invested in the improvement of the position of young people at the EU level. Still, there is a need for efficient mechanisms to ensure that all young people have equal chances to be included and participate fully in the development of their societies.

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[2]. The term NEET is used to describe young people who are not engaged in any form of employment, education or training. The term has come into the policy debate in recent years due to disproportionate impact of the recession on young people (under 30 years old). http://eurofound.europa.eu/emcc/labourmarket/youth

One of the basic questions is whether modern Europe today is a space of equal opportunities. Is it a space where priorities and policies are made operational in a way that clearly focuses on the creation of a society of equal opportunities? What are the barriers young people in Europe face and is progress still possible while a significant number of them live in vulnerable situations, facing barriers that lead to poverty and material deprivation, exclusion from education, from the labour market, from social and cultural life, and from the health protection system, and without a decent roof over their heads?

The crisis crystallised and even reinforced many of the previously existing barriers and their related consequences, hence the strong relevance of mapping those. The current crisis impacts on the social integration process of young people. This phenomenon can increase if underlying risks are not tackled properly and if adequate actions are not taken to address the causes of social exclusion. Therefore all attention must be focused on identification of barriers which lead to social exclusion and improvement of policies and measures that will enable full social inclusion of young people in all segments of society.

The overall purpose of this mapping is to develop knowledge-based resources that can better support initiatives aiming at ensuring young people's access to rights and at providing them with opportunities to equally engage in society.

The concrete objectives of the mapping study are:

- to identify and understand the barriers to social inclusion, their impact and consequences on individuals/groups at risk of exclusion and/or in vulnerable situations;
- to explore good examples of practice allowing youth policy and youth work to learn from different experiences
- to develop recommendations for supporting young people in vulnerable situations in overcoming the identified barriers and for targeted interventions through youth work and youth policy.

The objectives of the mapping could be visualised as follows:
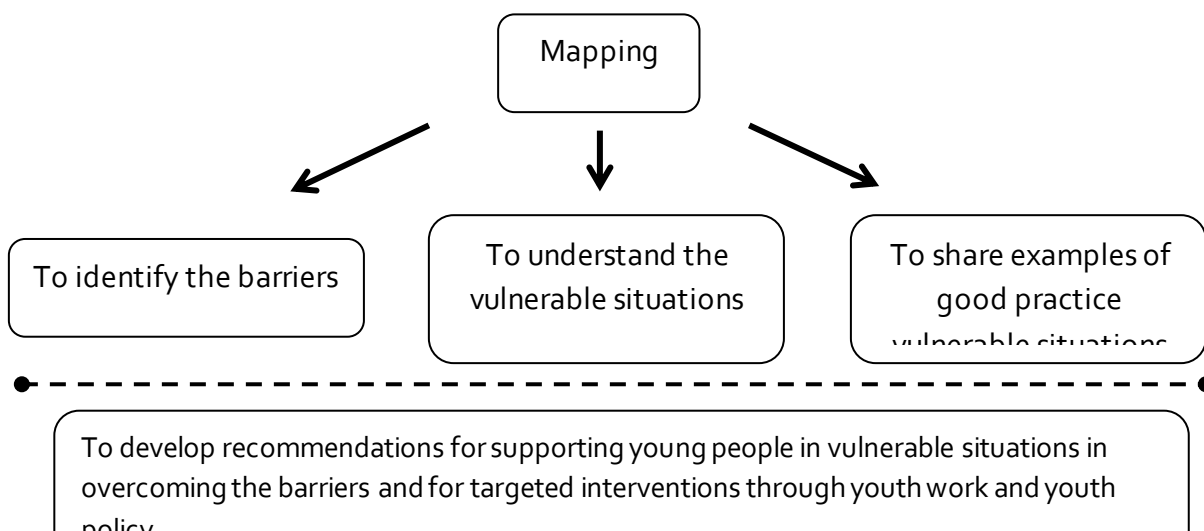
This analytical paper has been developed to present a concise framework systematising knowledge on the barriers to social inclusion for young people in vulnerable situations. The examples of good practices in youth work and youth policy in overcoming the identified barriers are integral part of the analytical paper. Based on the identified barriers and examples of good practice, recommendations are developed for supporting young people in overcoming these barriers and for targeted interventions.

1.4. Approach

The value of this analytical paper lies in introducing a situational human rights oriented approach to social inclusion instead of a target group oriented approach that might be relevant and inspiring for re-orienting current policies and practices. Identification of vulnerable situations instead of the problems of different marginalised or vulnerable groups of young people shifts the focus from the individuals to the social environment they live in. It also changes a paradigm that often insinuates that young persons are responsible for their own exclusion and shifts the responsibility for setting the conditions for equal chances, development and social inclusion to the society. It is important to enhance that independently of belonging temporarily or irreversibly to a "problematic group" which might lead to social exclusion, young people can, in different stages of their life or in one particular moment, experience a process of social exclusion. That might be influenced by different social, historical or merely circumstantial reasons. This means that policies should target unfavourable situations rather than young people themselves.

In order to elaborate on structural and contextual as well as personal elements related to barriers hindering inclusion, the following aspects have been explored within each of the domains:

- legal and policy measures
- social context and attitudes
- individual factors of young people.

The approach to the mapping was driven by the following considerations:

- **Adoption of a rights-based approach**: attention to how the realisation of human rights for all people, all the time, is essential to combating issues of poverty, injustice and social exclusion. This approach ensures that the concept of participation is examined as transversal to all contexts of social inclusion and considered throughout all analysed domains.

- **Practical applicability**: putting effort into gathering information from available data, studies and research and articulating applicable recommendations that are in accordance with the realities of different countries.

The term "young people in vulnerable situations" also refers to specific constellations of structural factors. Special attention was given to the interactions between institutions, individuals, domains and barriers. Furthermore, the dynamic of the spiral of exclusion and specific situations and events that trigger exclusion and build barriers were explored. Additionally, special attention was put on different life transitions (for example, from education to work). Exclusion from each of these domains can be of a different nature and degree and touches upon a variety of dimensions (for example, the economic dimension which can be linked to different domains such as housing, work and education).

1.5. Conceptual framework – definitions and understandings

The definition of social exclusion[3] varies considerably in the literature; different authors and organisations developed their own interpretations of this concept. Furthermore, and also as a consequence of this conceptual pluralism, the responses, actions, programmes and policies have also oscillated dramatically over time.

The concept of social exclusion was initially linked to poverty, vulnerability and deprivation. The concept derived by Rene Lenoir in 1974 focused on various categories of individuals who lacked social protection, the mentally and physically handicapped, elderly, delinquents, single-parent households, substance users and others (Gore et al. 1995; Silver 1994; Sen 2000). This view was perceived by many as restricted and stigmatising and has been significantly broadened since the 1980s. Silver (1994) claims that social exclusion emerges from the complex interaction between status, class and political power, and Sen (2000) understands social exclusion as capability deprivation, exclusion which will limit living opportunities.

Understanding of social exclusion has been changing over the years. Social exclusion is defined in a variety of ways but there is a consensus around some key components (MacDonald and Marsh 2005): social exclusion is more than just income poverty – beyond economic marginality, there are political and cultural dimensions; social exclusion is manifested through a combination of linked problems, it is the accumulation of interrelated difficulties that typifies the condition and experience; social exclusion is not characterised by random distribution across individuals or households but concentrated spatially – a product of increased social polarisation between neighbourhoods; social exclusion is a consequence of a political economy by which some groups secure privilege and power at

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[3]. Before using the concept of social inclusion, scholars used the term social exclusion.

the expense of others; social exclusion is a dynamic process that takes place over time; social exclusion carries the risk of producing inter-generational effects, as cumulative disadvantage is passed on from one generation to the next (Williamson 2007).

For the better understanding of factors which might bring individuals into social exclusion, it is important to take into consideration the fact that social exclusion is a complex, multidimensional concept that affects multiple areas of life. Marginalising certain individuals from acquiring economic resources results in restricted access to labour markets, assets, factors of production and income opportunities (Spoor 2013; Beall et al. 2005). However, it is important to understand that social exclusion is more than just income poverty; that those who live in risk of poverty do not necessarily have to be excluded from different segments of society but also that those individuals who live in good material conditions can be excluded in one or more dimensions.

The social and psychological aspects of exclusion should be highlighted at least as much as the economic and employment-related aspects. Exclusion from civil, social and political life implies unequal access to justice, social services, public institutions, political freedom, citizenship responsibilities and other opportunities (Spoor 2013; Beall et al. 2005).

Since social exclusion is a dynamic process, some situations and events may trigger exclusion and build barriers, more specifically in the period of different life transitions (such as from education to work). Young people are particularly exposed to the risk of social exclusion because they face significant challenges during the processes of transition to autonomy and social integration.

As a multidimensional issue, social exclusion is manifested through the combination of linked problems and accumulation of interrelated difficulties. Exclusion from the economic dimension may lead to exclusion from other domains as well (such as housing, work and education). Also, exclusion from education may lead to exclusion from other domains such as culture, participation and employment.

Social exclusion may result from a group's social identity, such as gender, race, religion, ethnicity or caste, as well as resulting from social location, such as remote areas or war-stricken regions (Beall et al. 2005). The UN includes a third dimension, social status, which may include one's health, migrant situation, occupation and level of education (Zikhali et al. 2011). Individual factors (such as lack of resilience, cope mechanisms) and family background might be crucial as well. Even though understanding of personal barriers to social inclusion is as important as understanding of structural barriers, it is necessary to take upon individual factors not as "individual failures" but "lack of support/policies for specific situations". Some authors also emphasise the significance of lack of engagement

with institutions and policies, which may limit and impoverish individuals (Hickey and Du Toit 2007).

"The significance of **social inclusion** lies in the fact that it leads to the process of an individual's self-realisation within a society; acceptance and recognition of one's potential by social institutions and integration in the network of social relations in a community. This is relevant to all young people as they go through a transition process towards more autonomy within the larger society and under rapidly evolving circumstances. However, it has a particular meaning to those young people who come from underprivileged backgrounds and live in precarious conditions. For them, social inclusion has another connotation and starts with the need to break various barriers before acquiring their social rights as full members of society" (Kovacheva, 2013, *Social Inclusion*).

Young people as well as the "socially excluded" shouldn't be treated as a homogeneous group. It is essential to be responsive to the differences between diverse groups. Young people in general should not be perceived as a group with the same needs, problems and living circumstances. Perceiving them as a homogenous group often clouds the special vulnerability of young people. In particular, it also risks further marginalising of those who suffer multiple disadvantages. Attention must be paid to structural and systemic barriers to social inclusion, especially in relation to education at all levels (CEU 2005; EC 2005).

The multidimensional and dynamic nature of social exclusion/inclusion can be illustrated by the following graph.

Exclusion/Inclusion as a process, lifting the barrier as a tailored exercise (an example)
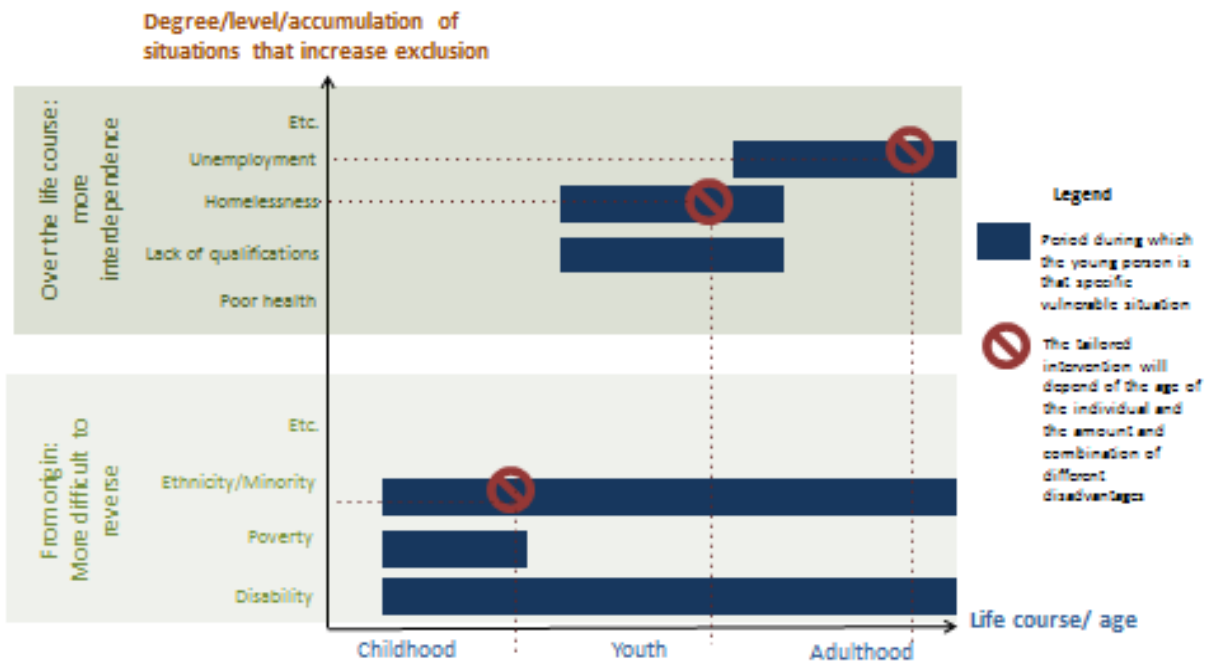
Based on discussions within the Advisory Group, Strasbourg, 2014

Social exclusion is a consequence of a political economy in which some groups secure privilege and power at the expense of others. A modern concept of social justice refers to the aim of realising equal opportunities and life chances and suggests that establishing social justice depends less on compensating for exclusion than it does on investing in inclusion. Instead of an "equalising" distributive justice or simply formal equality of life chances in which the rules of the game and codes of procedure are applied equally, this concept of justice is concerned with guaranteeing each individual genuinely equal opportunity for self-realisation through targeted investment (EC 2014).

1.5. Conceptual framework at European level

Youth social exclusion has both present and long-term consequences which make it a priority topic for youth policy in Europe.

The EU defines social inclusion as "a process which ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in the economic, social and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living and well-being that is considered normal in the society in which they live. Social inclusion also ensures that

vulnerable groups and persons have greater participation in decision making which affects their lives and that they can access their fundamental rights" (EC 2010).

The strategy Europe 2020: Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth 4 is the fundamental document of the current EU strategic framework. This document was adopted in an attempt to more effectively coordinate economic and social policies at the EU level, taking into account the achievements of the Lisbon Strategy and its social dimension – the Agenda for Social Policy 2000-2010. The integrated guidelines for the economic and employment policies of Member States were to support the Europe 2020 strategy. Guideline 10 tackles the promotion of social inclusion and combating poverty. Besides ensuring equal opportunities, Member States "...should put in place effective anti-discrimination measures. Equally, to fight social exclusion, empower people and promote labour market participation, social protection systems, lifelong learning and active inclusion policies should be enhanced to create opportunities at different stages of people's lives and shield them from the risk of exclusion." (EC 2010)

In the Council of Europe, debates on social inclusion are framed by a concern to promote social cohesion. A strategy was developed by the European Committee for Social Cohesion in 2000, and was revised and adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 2004. Social cohesion was defined as: "The capacity of a society to ensure the welfare of all its members, minimising disparities and avoiding polarisation. A cohesive society is a mutually supportive community of free individuals pursuing these common goals by democratic means" (European Committee for Social Cohesion 2004). This strategy draws on the European Convention on Human Rights and the revised European Social Charter, and focuses on the need for social policy to ensure access to rights. Combating social exclusion and poverty are seen as the key tasks. The strategy acknowledges that this requires building a sense of solidarity and co-operation within a society; and that certain groups – such as young people – are particularly vulnerable and therefore need greater support. The responsibility for social cohesion is placed jointly on the co-operation between the state, business, civil society, family and individuals.

1.6. Methodology

The barriers as well as the recommendations presented come mostly from previous studies and policy papers. They are rooted in the previous work of the different institutions and stakeholders behind this mapping and they have been critically selected and filtered.

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[4] Adopted at the EU summit on June 17, 2010, http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm

This mapping report on the barriers to social inclusion is based on desk research and the analysis of relevant available data, researches, reports and policy papers. Data, conclusions and recommendations come from sources such as EUROFOUND, OECD, EUROSTAT, WB, EC and the Council of Europe, and research papers and expert studies dealing with different aspects of youth social exclusion. More than 160 documents were analysed: strategic documents, policy papers, recommendations, research findings and scientific papers. The review of relevant documents provided an insight into the current situation and circumstances of young people in vulnerable contexts and an operational framework, and identified potentials and issues.

Specific attention was given to the following elements:

- the existence of multiple or accumulated barriers faced by young people in vulnerable situations;
- the sensitivity and implications of using certain terminologies, the risks and possible negative implications of labelling individuals from so-called 'vulnerable groups' (hence the more appropriate use of 'in vulnerable situations');
- the existence of unknown "factors" hindering social inclusion and related experiences;
- the existing perceptions and prejudices within societies and their potential impact on excluded members of the society;
- the risk of ending up focusing more on young people in vulnerable situations than on the barriers to inclusion;
- the balance between focusing on society ("structure") on the one hand, and young people as specific subjects (of exclusion) on the other ("resilience", "agency", "coping").

Additional data were obtained from relevant stakeholders involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of different practices at various levels:

- civil society organisations
- local and regional governments
- national policy makers
- European institutions.

Identified barriers and proposed recommendations were presented at the expert meeting organised in Strasbourg in September 2014 and at the Youth Conference on the role of youth work in supporting the social inclusion of young people in vulnerable situations held in Malta in November 2014. Valuable inputs from those events are incorporated in the final analytical paper.

Examples stemming from experience and examples of good practice were collected via public call, and organisations and individuals were invited to share their experiences and describe policy measures, civil society organisation projects, activist initiatives, community/social services measures or remarkable personal experiences linked especially to the domains of education, work/employment, health and housing, culture and citizenship.

The criteria for the selection of experiences included in this paper were the following:

- the variety of vulnerable situations (not to focus only on one or two but to try to illustrate different domains with different situations);
- the variety of countries;
- the process and the level of youth participation;
- the impact (short-term or long-term effect/impact (including on policy);
- the variety of projects/processes/activities;
- the potential for transferability.

The process does not intend to be exhaustive as it is not possible to fully tackle all vulnerable situations that exist and all groups that are confronted with them.

It is also important to highlight that the intention of the authors was not to present barriers in hierarchical order, but rather to list the barriers identified. Indication of the most important or frequent barriers would request a different methodological approach and deeper analysis of the impact of identified barriers on the young people in vulnerable situations.

1.7. Limitations

Although the approach to the mapping was rights-based and intended to focus on young people in vulnerable *situations*, the analysis of the barriers identified in different existing documents predominantly shows that social exclusion is mostly viewed in relation to young people as a vulnerable *group*. On the other hand, in the recommendations section, specific attention is given to the rights-based perspective essential to combating issues of poverty, injustice and social exclusion.

One of the goals of the mapping paper was to understand the barriers to social inclusion and their impact, and consequences on individuals/groups at risk of exclusion and/or in vulnerable situations. The mapping paper relies mostly on secondary data. For further

analysis and recommendations, it is necessary to conduct additional research and consultations, especially with young people in vulnerable situations.

Lack of research data on certain domains influenced the level of elaboration on barriers and recommendations in these domains. Additional research on specific issues is needed, particularly to enhance the broader insight into some cultural and individual factors influencing social exclusion (resilience, coping mechanisms and personal aspirations).

Data on multiple or accumulated barriers faced by young people in vulnerable situations are available, but the systematic approach and intervention measures to cope with these barriers are still missing.

One of the limiting factors was the lack of data related to individual factors that influence social exclusion. These data could be obtained through participatory research.

2. Barriers to social inclusion of young people in vulnerable situations

2.1. Finding a place in education

Education is one of the key factors in a wide range of positive personal, societal and economic changes. The long-term effects of education, both at the personal and societal levels, are multiple – a higher education attainment level has provided an individual with an opportunity for higher earnings, higher productivity and easier integration in the world of work. However, the current crisis seems to have wiped out the shielding effect of education on unemployment, at least in some countries. Youth unemployment has increased dramatically even among those holding upper secondary and, especially, tertiary education (OECD 2012). Regardless, young people who are in the education system have more opportunities to participate in cultural, sports and volunteering activities. Societies with more educated people generate higher tax revenues and lower expenditures on social benefits and health care. The long-term effects that cannot always be measured in financial terms are also significant – education creates opportunities for an individual to attain a higher standard of living, better health, a better job, higher satisfaction with life and higher level of inclusion in social developments. States that support maximisation of their citizens' educational attainment levels can count on reducing poverty, increasing human capital, enhancing social inclusion and political stability, and earning higher trust of their citizens.

Still, school has not always been an experience that leads to success and quality of life. Opportunities and outcomes remain unequal, and subtle barriers are often entrenched in the school systems, which themselves are a potential cause of social exclusion. Children from impoverished backgrounds have lower enrolment, attendance and completion rates. They often have more difficulties in their progression through the system and lower educational achievements.

For a deeper understanding of education barriers young people might be exposed to, it is necessary to be aware of the whole education cycle. Education barriers in most cases start to affect individuals very early, at the point of their entry into the education system.

Educational prospects after compulsory education have their roots in pre-school education. The prospective impact on educational attainment in pre-school education is significant: it prepares children for compulsory schooling; gives opportunities for children from dysfunctional homes to find relief from potentially harmful consequences of their families; and offers a good start for a child with a migrant or ethnic minority background to enter the mainstream community. Limited access to pre-school education limits the developmental

horizons of young people with biographical disadvantages from an early age. Despite the fact that they need and would profit most from nursery schools and early childhood socialisation, children from disadvantaged backgrounds – such as Roma children and children from migrant and poor families – are usually significantly affected by poor access to pre-school facilities (European Parliament 2011).

Compulsory and post-compulsory education in Europe also mostly segregates children with biographical disadvantages: those from poor families and those with minority ethnic or public care backgrounds. The earlier the tracks of separation occur, the higher the probability of those children from disadvantaged backgrounds being allocated to more disadvantageous segments of the education system (that is, lower-quality schools). Some students are particularly vulnerable at transition points between different stages of education. Besides the personal problems of those young people, there are multidimensional institutional barriers they have to face. Schools can be the bridges and the barriers. It depends on how they are developed and aimed at different vulnerable situations.

Some research findings indicate that the barriers varied considerably depending on the national context (Eumargins 2010). These included migrant legal status, financial status or language skills, limiting the choices for young adults with migrant backgrounds to continue a pathway through higher education.

2.1.1. Risk factors and barriers

2.1.1.1. Structural and contextual

Children and young people living in vulnerable situations may face numerous obstacles during their schooling.

<u>Enrolment and attendance barriers</u>

Enrolment and attendance barriers exist at all educational levels, in particular as a result of distance from education institutions, lack of access to the mainstream education system and lack of clear information on the existing support measures, particularly for vulnerable groups. Barriers appear from access to pre-school education and persist until the end of secondary and tertiary education.

At the macro level, educational policies vary in different welfare state regimes. Some children are deprived of the basic prerequisites for school attendance as a result of **insufficient and poorly targeted and/or unco-ordinated support within the social**

welfare system and other support services. Many children do not exercise their legal rights due to the fact that their parents are not informed or they are not in a position to adhere to administrative procedures. Frequently, access to certain provisions is not transparent and the proposed measures do not reach all those in need.

Education cannot be just a responsibility of the educational institutions. **Fragmentation of measures and lack of strategy and co-operation on all levels and between different sectors** prevent efficient, comprehensive and holistic support to the young people and their families. The co-ordinated action and adequate linking of educational, labour, welfare and housing policies of young people are missing.

Children and young people from specific vulnerable groups such as migrant or Roma families often do not have personal **documents,** as a prerequisite for fulfilling the basic rights, and they are not capable of getting them because of illiteracy, social exclusion, or living in closed communities with no information flow. Sometimes they do not see the need to have the documents and are not aware of the consequences that this has on their and their children's lives. Many support measures that they could use are out of their reach because they cannot handle administration and bureaucratic procedures.

School access and attainment in many countries are influenced by direct costs of education such as costs for tuition, school meals, textbooks, compulsory uniforms and school-based activities. Barriers in the form of unfavourable material conditions include absence of some supportive mechanisms such as organised transport to school facilities and lack of material support to the families.

Attendance in secondary or tertiary education by poor students can depend on getting financial aid, scholarships, loans and placement in student dormitories, including meals in case the educational institution is not in the vicinity of the place of residence. The scholarship award system is predominantly based on the excellence criterion and is largely insensitive to socio-economic characteristics.

Most drop-outs happen in the transition from lower secondary education to upper secondary level. According to the research findings (Bridgeland et al. 2006), clear signs that a young person is losing interest in school usually shows one to three years before they drop out. Therefore, the first important step in preventing early school-leaving is to identify which young people are at risk of dropping out and for what reasons.

An early warning system for identification of young people at risk of dropping out is most often missing. Close co-operation between educational authorities and social and labour services, health services and the justice system is a precondition for effective prevention and intervention measures.

Proximity of schools to communities is an obvious condition for participation in education, especially for children from poor families and for children with disabilities. Some of the children are disadvantaged by location or physical inaccessibility of classrooms.

Enrolment policy

Enrolment policy and early streaming may have a negative impact on the individual level. Negative effects are found particularly on the achievement levels of disadvantaged children. It is observed that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to be placed in the least academically oriented tracks or groups. Early tracking policies increase the spread of educational outcomes and clearly harm children with lower abilities, since they cannot benefit from the positive effect of being around more able peers (OECD 2010).

Many countries have introduced school choice mechanisms where parents can decide which school they want their children to attend. This policy is often criticised for its negative consequences. Experiences show that well-off parents, who exploit a variety of advantages and resources, send their children to the "best" schools while, on the other hand, poor or less educated parents may not have sufficient knowledge or money to make the choice even if they wanted to. Freedom of choice has produced negative and unintended impacts. In some countries (such as Hungary), parents of non-Romani children have taken advantage of the lack of enrolment limitations and enrolled their children in schools in which the proportion of Romani children is low and even transferred their children from the schools where the proportion of Roma children is high or growing. In schools with mostly children from a low socio-economic background, the motivation of school staff may be quite low. Potential consequences are a big staff and students' turnover, , a limited provision of extra-curricular activities, and a weak support for parental involvement. In many cases this leads to a vicious circle whereby these schools continue to enrol mostly disadvantaged children and do not have the capacity or motivation to provide sufficient support for the children who need it most.

Some countries have a comprehensive system of schooling, where all children in a particular geographic area attend the same school, but pupils might still be streamed into different academic tracks *within* schools. In some countries, all classrooms in all schools are grouped heterogeneously, with pupils of mixed ability levels. In those schools ability grouping, which is not permanent, can be used as a pedagogical approach (for instance, in in-class reading or for project work). There are also important differences between countries in timing and form of this selection. For instance, in most Central European countries, pupils are streamed before the age of 15.

Teachers' competencies and motivation

In many countries, education programmes for teachers are not of good quality or adapted to modern teaching and learning approaches. Some voices questioned teachers' competencies and motivation to engage actively in further education and to refresh old and gain new competencies. Many educational institutions lack staff that understand and can handle the challenges of young people with special needs (including the psychological/emotional situation of young people leaving orphanages and public care systems, young people with disabilities, and young people from migrant backgrounds experiencing discrimination or exclusion).

Teacher motivation to recognise and support individual needs of students is not developed enough. They still lack the skills and motivation to support individualisation of the learning processes and different learning styles of students, to introduce active learning, to provide a quality learning environment and to support students and their families to overcome unfavourable living conditions.

A lack of competencies in vocational teachers might be one of the reasons for the high drop-out rate from vocational schools. Moreover, the secondary education system is poorly linked to the business sector. Careers guidance in some countries is not developed enough and teachers are insufficiently trained. Teachers of vocational subjects are those who are the least prepared for the teaching profession; their initial education does not cover enough professional areas needed for working with students; their teaching style and behaviour predominantly reflect their implicit educational theories (Hollenweger et al. 2014).

Achievement and progression

Poor quality of the education process is the principal reason for all children's low educational achievements and intellectual and social outcomes. However, children living in non-poor families have considerably better chances of alleviating the impact of system weaknesses, compared to those children living in poor families, who can rely only on what is provided by the education institution. Schools still do not do enough toward finding ways and designing school mechanisms to provide children from non-stimulating and deprived backgrounds with at least roughly the same opportunities as other children. Growth and development in a family in unfavourable circumstances might permanently deprive some children of many future opportunities. Educational opportunities for students mainly depend on their families' social and economic status.

PISA results show that students from a lower socio-economic background are at risk of low performance and that disadvantaged schools may reinforce this negative effect. The reasons for this phenomenon are multiple. One of the primary causes is that students'

socio-economic background has a strong impact on their performance. Many disadvantaged schools are unable to counteract its negative impacts, and may indeed accentuate it (OECD 2010).

In fact schools often do not represent a stimulating environment for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Teachers' expectations of such students are often lower; a minimum of knowledge and simple presence in school are required. Low expectations for achievement of children lead to lower motivation and cause an increase in drop-out levels.

Students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds repeat a grade more often than their advantaged peers; as a result, grade repetition widens inequities. Although the objective of grade repetition is to provide these students with more opportunities to learn, there is little evidence that underperforming students benefit from repeating a grade. One hypothesis to explain this negative relationship is that having the option to have low-performing students repeat a grade places fewer demands on teachers and schools to help struggling and disadvantaged students improve their performance (OECD 2012).

The equity issue of urban and rural schools is also evident in some countries. The performance gap between students in urban schools and those in rural schools can be more than 45 score points, even up to 80 score points in Hungary after accounting for differences in socio-economic background (OECD 2012). The lack of education quality for children attending rural schools might be a barrier for attaining a higher level of education.

Learning environment

In many countries, a great deal of formal education is still not learner-centred, has little practical relevance and does not focus sufficiently on development of personal competences for an autonomous life. On one hand, it lowers motivation for learning and on the other it influences acquisition of basic life competencies. Education systems do not place enough emphasis on acquiring competencies such as learning to learn, problem solving, team work, and leadership, which would help children and young people to transfer school-based knowledge to everyday life. Acquisition of these competencies is of great importance for children in vulnerable situations because it empowers them to become included in different spheres of live. Questions of socialisation and personal resilience are often neglected, although education should contribute to the achievement of social integration objectives. On the other hand, young people do not have enough access to non-formal educational opportunities and are generally little engaged in those offers that exist. The informal knowledge that young people learn outside the school context is not properly recognised by the education systems (Stigendal 2006).

One of the barriers might be the lack of flexible schooling opportunities in some countries, such as a short cycle and modular programmes within secondary education.

Educational institutions do not recognise the importance of active parental involvement enough and parents often do not recognise the importance and opportunities for their participation and partnership with educational institutions. Lack of opportunities for parents to be actively involved in the education process might create a barrier for children's enrolment in the education system as well as progression.

Stigmatisation and discrimination

Young people with disadvantaged backgrounds often face stigmatisation and discrimination. In some cases, even professionals such as teachers and social workers cause children and young people to be labelled. This leads to greater stigmatisation and even greater alienation of young people, especially those under the risk of social exclusion (Council of Europe 2014)

Educational segregation proves a key driver of inequality regarding educational and vocational opportunities and the reproduction of social deprivation on ethnic grounds. Students from highly educated families have an almost five times greater chance of attaining an "excellent" qualification than fellow students from a very poorly educated parental background. If students' ethnic background is considered, the data reveal deep divisions. It was found that the impact of ethnic affiliation is close to that of the family's cultural capital, and in its intensity it certainly surpasses the influence of differential living conditions or gender. For the most part, teachers considered it a "problem" to teach and educate students from other than a majority background, or more accurately, than backgrounds that fit the prevailing social and cultural norms. A common opinion among teachers was that teaching in a school with many students from poor families makes their work extremely hard and calls for special measures, including the allocation of additional financial resources (EC 2013).

Research findings indicate that first-generation immigrants lag on average 1.5 school years behind their native counterparts. Common factors include age of arrival and difficulty integrating into a new school, language difficulties, pressures on schools to respond to rapidly changing student profiles, particular practices in national education systems, family background and parental expectations, financial pressures, low aspirations and expectations, and a lack of awareness of education routes and options (OECD 2011).

The contributing factors are complex. Research has shown that educational performance gaps between native and non-native students are largely explained by socio-economic differences and language barriers. Nevertheless, even after accounting for socio-economic

background, a gap is still apparent. The educational situation for young people living in socially deprived areas cannot be understood by looking only at their possible foreign background, socio-economic background factors, gender, or where they live as such. In many cases the young are faced with the combined effects of ethnicity, class, gender and segregation linked to the existing power structures in society (European Fundamental Rights Agency 2009).

2.1.1.3. Personal barriers

Low self-resilience and lack of coping mechanisms set the ceiling to one's personal aspirations and lead to self-exclusion from potential opportunities. The consequences of that might create psychological distress, such as feelings of loneliness, powerlessness, restlessness, anxiety and depression.

There are a lot of personal reasons for dropping out of school – needing to work to support oneself and one's family, social and educational background, poor results, social and behavioural issues, etc. Many young people having trouble with learning are excluded from mainstream schools and alternative provisions. If families do not give importance to education and incentivise educational achievement, the problem is strengthened. Boys and young men are particularly affected by this problem. The school system does not consider their special needs, and they drop out in higher numbers (EC 2013).

Young people make comparisons between their successes and the social advancement of their reference group (their peers). Their subjective perceptions are mediated by personal as well as normative social standards. Negative self-comparisons to normative expectations and peer achievements lead to lower aspirations to continue education or find a job. This is particularly evident with young people with low personal capital (such as weak family or kinship support, lack of financial resources, or low or missing language proficiency in the cases of migrant youths).

Growing up in unfavourable conditions as well as lack of support within schools influences motivation for learning and attitudes of young people. Lack of motivation leads to extensive truancy rates and behaviour that may lead to school exclusion.

2.1.2. Critical reflection

Although the importance of education of young people is recognised in different strategic documents, the barriers that young people face are still numerous.
For further efficient and effective knowledge-based policy making, it is important to study in greater depth the different structural, contextual and personal elements which can create the unfavourable circumstances that put young people at risk of exclusion from

educational opportunities. Specific barriers can be identified at the different stages of the education cycle: enrolment, attendance, achievement and progression, and some specific barriers might be identified relating to different levels of education.

Young people at a greater risk of becoming socially excluded belong to the following groups: young people with disabilities, those with a migration background, those with a low educational level, those living in remote areas and those with a low household income whose parents have a history of unemployment, low education levels or are divorced. That is to say that social exclusion from or within educational systems is more a consequence of other social exclusion processes than a cause of social exclusion processes (although ultimately it also becomes one, and a very strong one). The (policy) message to take home in this sense would be that education should not solely be seen as a mechanism or a means to prevent further social exclusion, but also as an indicator to pinpoint other statuses and situations of exclusion. Action should then be, just as overall youth policy should be, cross-sectorial and holistic.

An education system plays a key role in the process of social inclusion of children and young people who live in conditions of disadvantage. The education system can compensate and make up for the lack of incentives in family environment or community. In order to fulfil this role, the education system must show in practice what it means to ensure equal chances for everyone and to establish a system of individualised and holistic support to emotional, social and cognitive development through its curricular and extra-curricular activities. The education system and the creators of educational policies have a great responsibility to provide equitable, efficient and quality education systems for everyone.

Mainstream policy and educational institutions have yet to change focus from what is wrong with young people and the policy rhetoric around those at risk, to what may be wrong with the schooling and the consequent need for taking more wide-ranging actions.

Without adequate investment in skills, people languish on the margins of society, technological progress does not translate into economic growth, and countries can no longer compete in an increasingly knowledge-based global society. People with poor skills face a much greater risk of experiencing economic disadvantage, and a higher likelihood of unemployment and dependency on social benefits.

Education and training systems should be instrumental in supporting upward social mobility and help break, rather than reinforce, the cycle of disadvantage and inequality. Pre-primary education is probably the most crucial factor for breaking the vicious circle of intergenerational transmission of poverty, and it is the investment with the highest returns. Investing in high-quality early childhood education and care can support a sure start in life for all. Learning is a dynamic process which builds on foundations laid down at an early age

(Anderson 2009). Evidence shows that the earlier investment is made in the lifecycle, the better the outcomes. Improving early years interventions can be done best through putting in place adequate support measures for the necessary local stakeholders, such as childcare providers and schools. Involving parents and relatives in the schooling of their children will also pay dividends in improving their children's outcomes.

2.1.3. Recommendations

Enrolment and attendance

- **Problems faced by young people in a disadvantaged situation require comprehensive and long-term measures** covering a wide range, from material support in the form of clothes, books and meals to development of social skills and support for the entire family. There are numerous programmes and projects focused on solving different problems but they can often be short-term, focused only on one measure without covering other necessary aspects (for example, providing free books or clothes but not covering meals or transport) or having poor coverage in terms of beneficiaries. This raises both the question of sustainability and predictability of the support and the question of effectiveness, since the effects are most often short-term and partial. Solving these shortcomings demands co-ordinated action focused on working with poor students, the Roma population, the community and parents, but also working with the mainstream population in terms of their awareness.
- **Fulfilment of basic needs as "conditio sine qua non" for education and staying at school**. Basic needs like food, clothes, hygiene and transportation are often out of reach of children and young people from families with low socio-economic status. Also, children cannot integrate properly if they cannot fulfil basic hygiene needs and have inappropriate clothes. They can easily be excluded by their peers because of their appearance and quickly discouraged from attending classes regularly.
- **Providing financial incentives** for enrolment by offsetting household costs is a good strategy to increase access for the marginalised. Examples of such targeted incentives include direct monetary transfers as well as cash stipends and scholarships or bursaries alongside fixed funding from government per student.
- **Setting up a monitoring and early warning system** is one of the effective ways of ensuring a timely intervention. Such systems not only provide information to schools and education authorities on how many students have dropped out of school and why; more importantly, they help to identify those students at risk of doing so. Diagnostic measures enable authorities to gather information on early warning signs of school leaving, such as data on absences or academic achievements. One of the good models might be a platform for schools, teachers, parents and students to share information about school life and to inform parents about the progress of their children in schools

(including grades and absenteeism). The analysis by Lynche (2012) of the dropout prevention measures concluded that in order to overcome early school leaving, policies must involve action both outside and inside school simultaneously.

- **Establishing measures to reintegrate early school-leavers** by encouraging and enabling them to continue their previous studies or to find other, more suitable training alternatives. It is never too late to re-engage those young people who have slipped out of the system and it is important to find ways to help them build skills and competences outside the formal education system.

Enrolment policy

- **Strengthen policies against school segregation**, possibly by restricting free school choice.

- **Abolition of early streaming** can directly influence a reduction in the drop-out rate. Data that prove this statement come from Sweden and Poland. Data from Sweden prove that abolition of early streaming has a holistic influence on educational outcomes. In Poland, in 2002, early streaming was postponed from 14 to 15 years of age. Results of PISA research show that this reform is connected to better outcomes for students with low achievement and that it does not lower the results of the best students (OECD 2007).

Teachers' competencies and motivation

- **Teaching competences are complex combinations of knowledge, skills, understanding, values and attitudes**, leading to effective action, and thus are likely to resonate differently in different national contexts. The starting point for teacher education and professional development should always be a shared understanding of the competences and qualities that teaching staff require, starting and progressing within the profession.

- Since **teaching staff are the most important in-school factor affecting student outcomes**, targeting them is likely to bring the biggest returns in terms of efficiency of education systems. In order to attract, educate and retrain high-quality teaching staff, it is essential to focus on coherent and coordinated provision, including high-quality initial teacher education, systemic support for new teaching staff, and individualised career-long professional development.

Achievement and progression

- **Every teacher needs to keep his/her practice under constant, critical review and adjust it in the light of students' outcomes.** The key focus is upon improving the levels of attainment of each and every learner. Within educational institutions, teachers have the greatest impact on the performance of learners; other staff, such as educational leaders, trainers and educators, are also essential to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

- **Additional support for children and young people** living in disadvantaged situations is needed, such as more quality remedial teaching, extra-curricular activities and flexible learning programmes and career guidance. Remedial teaching[5] is a measure that efficiently helps to eliminate major barriers to attainment and progression, and prevents class repetition and drop-out. Remedial teaching should become a preventive and flexible mechanism which creates opportunities for all children to deepen their understanding of the curriculum at its particularly demanding points, or in areas where their prior knowledge is not sufficient, and thus ensure success in their education.

<u>Learning environment</u>

- **Using a holistic approach** and keeping children "as close to learning as possible" (Education Committee 1998) through a wide range of activities within the schools, including alternative provisions, are the most productive measures. That also demands working with mainstream as well as vulnerable people on social integration.

- **The reflexivity of institutions** is a requirement for the success of policy interventions in dealing with de-standardised and flexible youth transitions: their ability to shape and re-shape measures in a flexible way. For all policies, and particularly for a co-ordinated policy for disadvantaged youth, the organisational ability to reflect upon activities and redesign them when necessary is of key significance.

- **It is necessary to facilitate further recognition of young people's non-formal learning and skills** as well as to provide an additional source of learning. The key elements are peer learning, learning environments and inclusion of all young people. Formal learning emphasises cognitive learning; non-formal settings often complement cognitive aspects by emotional, social and practical levels of learning (CoU 2014).

- **Parental participation and training is necessary,** as parents are the most important pillars of support for their children's education. It is necessary to provide regular training

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[5]. Remedial teaching is a multifaceted approach, tailoring remedial intervention plans to a child's specific needs. It makes use of one-on-one instruction, small group instruction, written work, verbal work and computer-based work.

in ways of supporting the education of one's own children, for all parents who have not completed secondary education.

- **Individual motivation to participate in or drop out of counselling, education, training** or employment determines the sustainability of policy initiatives. Such a focus on the individual does not mean placing the blame for failures upon the young person, but employing the resources of the individual in the changeable and de-standardised process of growing up and achieving autonomy.

- **The relationship forged between young people and the professional practitioner, and the motivation of young people to change the direction of their lives** are the critical features of most preventative interventions. Prevention needs to operate on a broad front if the risks of social exclusion are to be diminished: from educational awareness programmes (around, for example, the importance of qualifications, the consequences of crime, the risks of unprotected sex, or the dangers of substance misuse), through mentoring and personal support strategies and practical measures such as alternative curriculums.

- **An individualised approach is face-to-face counselling**; acknowledging the perspective of the individual in coping with transition problems, not only in the transition from school to work, but also in wider life, may be a highly effective tool. Successful social inclusion implies not only fulfilling institutional targets for placing individuals into training or jobs, but also giving access to a subjectively meaningful life. Empowerment can be defined as a change from being an object to a subject (Stigendal 2006).

2.1.4. Relevant practices

In the area of education the member states of the European Union established co-operation through the Open Method of Co-ordination. Representatives of different decision-making bodies as well as civil society organisations exchange the experiences and lessons learned within the six thematic working groups in areas governed by the national level jurisdiction: Adult Learning; Modernisation of Higher Education; Schools (focused on Early School Leaving and the Teaching Profession); Vocational Education and Training; Development of Transversal Skills (focused on Information and Communication Technologies, Entrepreneurial Skills and Languages); and Digital and Online Learning. Social inclusion of children and young people is treated as the cross-cutting issue within each of the thematic groups but it is important to enhance that there is room for

improvement of the discussion and exchange of the experiences in this area. Depending on the national context and strategic priorities, EU countries offer different measures for tackling the most important issues related to educational attainment, enrolment and progression.

The Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving created the document "Reducing early school leaving: Key messages and policy support", published by the European Commission in 2013. The importance of introducing comprehensive policies instead of implementing individual early school-leaving measures is recognised.

Examples presented in this study illustrate the importance of systematic co-operation between different sectors and institutions in treating the complex problem caused by a cumulative process of disengagement.

Since 2001, social pedagogues have worked in each school In **Lithuania**. Today there are about 1 000 social pedagogues working in schools, day care centres and children's homes. They offer counselling to children, families and teachers. They organise social skills development groups for pupils with behaviour problems and implement prevention programmes. They are members of the "Child Welfare Group" at school, which deals with the problems students face. The group consists of a wide range of specialists: social pedagogues, school administration representatives, teachers, special educational needs (SEN) teachers, school psychologists and parents. In addressing attendance problems in schools, the group works in close co-operation with territorial unit inspectors for juvenile affairs and the staff of the municipal children's rights protection departments.

Another illustrative example of systematic co-operation and importance of joint work between students, families, schools and local institutions comes from Belgium.

In 2012, the Flemish government in **Belgium** adopted an action plan on "Truancy and other forms of anti-social behaviour". The action plan is aimed at all students in compulsory education, but also focuses on pupils at risk of early school leaving (ESL). The actions address anti-social behaviour and truancy in a continuum of mapping the phenomenon, informing and sensitising, preventive work, guidance, and sanctioning. It aims to reduce truancy and other forms of behaviour leading to ESL. In **Belgium (French Community),** a dedicated service checks the implementation of compulsory education. Its purpose is twofold: identifying those children between 6 and 18 years old who do not comply with compulsory education and checking the school attendance of children who are registered in schools. The latter task is important to detect pupils at risk of dropping out of school; truancy is regarded as one indication of other difficulties faced by the pupil at school or at home. Based on information provided by the school, the administration sends an official letter to the parents to remind them of the need to respect compulsory education. If the

situation does not improve and the problem cannot be solved within the school, field workers working for the Ministry of Education can provide additional support to the school stakeholders. One of the main aims of their intervention is to re-establish the communication between the pupil and his/her family and the school.

One of the areas of great importance consist of supporting young people and their families by providing opportunities for the development of cognitive, social emotional and cultural skills. For the better attainment and progression of young people it is important to provide individual, specific and continuous support.

In **Denmark**, 52 municipal youth guidance centres help young people to continue or to complete their chosen education programme. The main target groups are pupils in primary and lower secondary school and young people under the age of 25 who are not involved in education, training or employment. The youth guidance centres support young people during their studies and in their transition to the labour market. In compulsory education, each pupil is required to prepare an education plan in partnership with a youth guidance counsellor. The pupil is expected to participate in a series of consultations in order to develop these plans and is encouraged to start thinking ahead to employment and further education opportunities after compulsory education. If the pupil is unable to decide, the pupil may be offered a 10-day "bridging course" that introduces the pupil to various educational pathways and job fields. Furthermore, after compulsory education, Danish municipalities are legally obliged to monitor all young people between 15 and 17 years of age and help those who are not in employment or education.

To improve the position of young people excluded from the education system and/or at the risk of dropping out from the education system it is important to provide early intervention measures and to involve parents of children as much as possible in the education process and school life.

In 2005, **Ireland** implemented an Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, "Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools" (DEIS), involving a process for identification of schools with the highest levels of disadvantage. DEIS is an integrated multi-faceted strategy to address educational disadvantage from pre-school through the completion of upper second-level education and seeks to tackle educational underachievement and ESL. Under the terms of DEIS, a high priority is given to early intervention; specific measures and support to improve literacy and numeracy; increased emphasis on the involvement of parents and families in children's education; and planning, target setting and measurement of progress and outcomes are in place.

Participation of the entire community as well as parallel work with mainstream and vulnerable people on integration is another important aspect.

Located in a disadvantaged area of **Berlin**, Campus Rütli is based on a new educational concept which includes the creation of a collective and integrated social space where the entire spectrum of care, guidance and educational institutions for young people collaborate and jointly shoulder responsibility. Integration between schools (from 1st to 13th grade) and between schools and youth clubs, sports and other extra-curricular activities, individualised learning, age mixing, and co-operation with local institutions (libraries, theatre, etc.) are some of the distinctive features. Parents are invited to the school twice a month, and a parents' centre is located in the same building.

In order to address the problems with mainstream education that lead young people to leave school early, many member states have implemented measures that offer alternative learning environments and teaching methods within the existing public education systems. Such programmes usually use different and innovative teaching pedagogies and often involve teaching in non-classroom environments to boost the motivation of young people to learn. In the Eurofound study NEETs – Young people not in employment, education or training: Characteristics, costs and policy responses in Europe (2012), some illustrative examples are described.

In **Luxembourg**, "mosaic classes" (*classes mosaïques*) give schools the opportunity to temporarily remove students at risk of leaving school early from their regular classes for a period of 6 to 12 weeks. During mosaic classes, students can get personalised help. The programme is thought to be very effective; between 2005 and 2009, three-quarters of participating students were reintegrated into their original class, and just over half showed an improvement in handling the problems that led to them being moved into the mosaic class.

To improve the position of young people excluded from the education system and/or at the risk of dropping out of the education system it is important to provide support that satisfies basic needs such as clothes, food and transport. Some countries have also introduced financial incentives for staying at school and aim for greater parental engagement (Eurofound 2012).

Financial support mechanisms are introduced in the form of subsidies (such as subsidised study books in Poland), free school meals, allowances and scholarships (all of which are provided in Italy, Poland, Portugal and Slovakia). In some countries, school meals and books have been free of charge for a long time, either for all school-aged students or students in primary schools. In others, this approach is new (for example, Bulgaria and Romania). Certain countries have recently made free school meals available for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Slovakia, for instance). In some countries, financial support for children and their families is used as an incentive for continued school

attendance. For example, a scheme of free school meals and books in Slovakia is tied to the children's attendance.

2.2. Finding a place in the labour market

Unemployment "prevents young people from accumulating work experience, which reduces their entire human and social capital, and can be reflected in lower future wages" (European Commission 2010).

As the OECD in the report Local strategies for youth employment (2011) states in relation to young people, going through an unemployment situation early in life may leave long-term scars. Unemployment may ultimately lead to social exclusion and result in a psychological hindrance for young people if they feel unable to contribute fully to society.

But having a job does not necessarily guarantee social inclusion. If the working conditions are not adequate, young people might fall into "in-work exclusion".

Apart from the classical financial incentives for hiring young people, the current European policy debate on employment policies for young people has been dominated by issues around education and training, their adequacy for the labour market and the transition from education to employment.

But the initiatives on education and training seem to be insufficient or not well oriented or implemented; the current generation of young people confronts a higher level of powerlessness in the work market regardless of the reality of being viewed as the best-instructed ever, more versatile and more open to new open doors and competent in the use of the new information technologies. Every sixth young European (aged 15-24) has no job, 40% of the young people who are working do so under a temporary contract and 10% suffer in-work poverty (European Commission 2009).

Moreover, some groups of young people in vulnerable situations face exclusion in the longer term for reasons beyond the current crisis. Remaining outside the labour market has for them far-reaching consequences – not solely economic. These include a loss of confidence, an undermining of trust and expectations, and an increasing risk of social exclusion and disengagement from society (Eurofound 2014).

In the following sections, we will try to identify – from a European perspective – some of the most relevant risk factors and remaining barriers for young people to find a place in the labour market.

2.2.1. Risk factors and barriers

2.2.1.1. Structural and contextual

The structural and contextual barriers to employment have been grouped in the following sub-topics: getting a job, working conditions, losing a job and discrimination. Discrimination is transversal in time and explored at the end. Bearing in mind that those processes are very much fluid and in many cases non-linear, the other three sub-topics try to follow the chronology of the "traditional" employment and unemployment cycles.

<u>Getting a job</u>

Being young is still a structural barrier to getting and keeping employment. In terms of some social attitudes, being young is a barrier to employment because of the preconceptions of some employees that see young people as lazy, problematic, non-professional or not responsible enough. These preconceptions are even more negative if another layer of stereotypes is added and support mechanisms are lacking, for example in the case of young Roma, young migrants or young people with disabilities.

Low qualifications are a barrier to employment. Young people who are modestly qualified are especially vulnerable. In 2009, according to the EU Youth Report, the average time taken by graduates to find a "significant" job was half that required by those who had just completed lower secondary education: 5 months compared to 9.8 months (European Commission 2012).

But the economic crisis has also affected higher-educated young people. Since 2007 the risk of unemployment has also increased for young people with higher education. The growth of the phenomenon of "**overqualification**" is one of the consequences of the current crisis (Eurofound 2014).

Skill mismatch is another barrier to employment; it contributes to unemployment and reduces productivity and competitiveness. In times of economic prosperity, mismatches take place where there are not enough people with a specific type of skill to satisfy the labour market demands. This happened, for example, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when some companies had difficulty in recruiting IT specialists.

But in times of crisis like the current one, the main problem of mismatch (except for some very specialised jobs) for young people is under-employment (such as young people occupying part-time jobs despite desiring full-time work, or being overqualified for the requirements of the job). As the title of the CEDEFOP (2010b) Study of skill mismatch in Europe suggests, the challenge for Europe is not just to improve skill levels, but to match

people with the right skills to the right jobs. Without ignoring the need to address the underinvestment in training and the slow responsiveness of the training and educational systems (those would imply challenging and long-term reforms), the study suggests that the current mismatch could be more efficiently tackled through better labour-market information and more efficient job placement services.

Those two barriers regarding qualifications and the skills mismatch become even bigger in the long term due to the very limited co-operation between the public and the private sector for providing ongoing and recognised training that facilitates adaptation to changing job requirements.

<u>Working conditions</u>

As previously indicated, not every job reasonably guarantees the social inclusion of young people.

The young form the segment of the European population that works most in **low-quality jobs which require low qualifications and are poorly paid**. Numerous young people cannot benefit from the rights that characterised the European social model and which, up to now, were guaranteed to its workers. There seems to be an intergenerational gap with regard to the existing rights as a consequence of reforms in practically all countries. These factors contribute to postponement of the transition to adult life based on financial independence from their original families and on taking decisions about the creation of their own family and parenthood (European Commission 2008c).

Additionally the labour market tends to be more and more divided between a segment that provides stable, indeterminate contracts and a more precarious segment, characterised by **temporary contracts**, few prospects of advancement and poor social benefits. Whilst in some European countries like Germany, Sweden, Austria and Denmark short-term contracts end five years after graduation, in some others, young people continue to be trapped in temporary jobs longer (in Poland, for example, 66% of young people aged 15-24 and 90% of those aged 15-19 work on temporary contracts, cf. Krzaklewska 2013).

For a certain period interim contracts can help young people in the transition from education to employment, allowing them to gain work experience, easing access to work or opening the doors to training opportunities. However, **high rates of temporary employment may be an indicator for insecure jobs**. Temporary employees face a worse social security coverage and more precarious working conditions. This is the case for many young people who lack the stability enabling them to live independently. They cannot leave the cycle of alternating temporary contracts and unemployment. This has negative consequences for their professional prospects later. The transition from temporary to

permanent contracts becomes more difficult if they do not have a recognised level of relevant working experience. There are evidences showing that the longer young people spend searching for a job, the less likely they are to secure a permanent contract (European Commission (2012), *EU Youth Report*).

Altogether the precarious working conditions described above lead to the emerging phenomenon (linked to the insecure and temporary jobs) of working poverty: young people who are employed, but who face problems in sustaining themselves with their salaries or those who are working in pro bono jobs with the supposed benefit of gaining experience. The in-work poverty risk is higher for young people than for older age groups (Maria-Carmen Pantea 2014).

Losing a job

The youngest workers are thos first affected by unemployment because they are the least experienced, more often employed under temporary contracts and therefore less protected by labour law.

Young people experience periods of unemployment more frequently than adults because in general they are less settled in their occupational choices and more mobile than adults. For these reasons, it could be argued that youth unemployment does not necessarily have to be negative as it is generally of shorter duration (O'Higgins 2010).

But when unemployment becomes persistent, it leads to **long-term unemployment and permanent labour market disengagement**. And this is exactly what is happening at this time of crisis; there are more young applicants for fewer job offers (Eurofound 2011) and the labour market becomes more competitive. As a result of this youth unemployment remains higher than that of the overall adult population and young people remain unemployed for a longer time, become discouraged and postpone their job search or return to the education system.

At European level, long-term youth unemployment as a share of youth unemployment has grown since the onset of the crisis. In 2002 around one third of young people without a job were long-term unemployed. This percentage went down until 2008, when it reached its lowest level of 22.8%. It then began to grow, reaching an average of 30% in 2011.

Long-term unemployment is particularly high in Slovakia, Bulgaria, Italy, Ireland, Greece and Romania; in all these countries, in 2011, 40% or more of jobless young people are long-term unemployed. By contrast, in Finland, Denmark and Sweden, the share of long-term unemployed is 10% of the total population of young unemployed people. In Ireland, the number of long-term unemployed people is double the pre-crisis level. It has also increased

in Italy and Bulgaria, while it has notably decreased in Romania. In Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands and Austria, no great change occurred during the crisis. Finally, in Germany, the number of long-term unemployed young people has decreased by 10 percentage points since the onset of the crisis (Eurofound, 2012)

Discrimination

As a result of social discrimination and the lack of proactive specific employment policies and programmes, young people with an immigration background, Roma or belonging to other ethnic minorities, have more difficulties to access the labour market; they are 70% more likely to become NEET compared to other young people (European Commission 2012).

Gender plays a role in youth unemployment. At EU level in 2007 female youth unemployment was slightly higher than male youth unemployment. But during recent years male and female unemployment rates in the EU have converged. In 2011 youth unemployment grew across both genders but more among young men than young women. This unemployment-rate convergence between genders is probably due to the particularities of the current economic crisis which is more accentuated in traditionally male-dominated sectors like construction or manufacturing. In that sense it would not necessarily imply a consolidated tendency towards gender equality in access to the labour market.

Some gender differences have been identified by countries. In the "Anglo-Saxon" and Scandinavian countries and in the Baltic republics in general, male youth unemployment is higher than female. In southern European countries, with the exception of Spain, female unemployment is higher. In Belgium, the Netherlands, Malta and Romania the situation is quite balanced (Eurofound 2012).

2.2.1.2. Personal

In addition to the structural barriers (probably the most determinant ones), specific individual circumstances cause some young people to be more at risk of unemployment than others because of the lack of adequate support.

Lone parenthood and teenage pregnancy have been identified as risk factors for unemployment, for becoming inactive and ultimately socially excluded (Cusworth et al. 2009). If they could choose their working hours freely, inactive young people in general and very particularly inactive young mothers and fathers looking after their children would

work. For this group the lack of flexibility and the absence of family-work-life reconciliation measures is a clear barrier towards employment (Eurofound 2014).

Health problems and mental illness have been identified as a risk factor for unemployment as well (Meadows et al. 2009). Compared to those with a good health status those with precarious health are over 40% more likely to be NEET (Eurofound 2012).

There is no updated evidence-based study at European level but young people with **special educational needs and learning disabilities** have more difficulties in accessing the labour market (Cassen and Kingdon 2007; Social Exclusion Task Force 2008).

The family situation plays a very important role particularly in the transition between education and work. Young people with parents with a low level of education are up to 1.5 times more likely to be NEET than those young people whose parents have a secondary level of education. Young people whose parents are divorced are 30% more likely to be NEET than other young people. Also, having parents who have experienced unemployment increases the probability of being NEET by 17% (Eurofound 2012).

2.2.2. Critical reflection

After going through this non-exhaustive exploration of barriers for young people to have a decent employment, the overall picture is more than worrying, particularly for young people in vulnerable situations. They face structural, permanent and generalised barriers such as comparatively higher youth unemployment, worsening quality of available employments in terms of length and working conditions, and shortcomings and inadequacies in employment-oriented education and training schemes. And additionally they face (and this is often determinant for young people in vulnerable situations) discrimination and lack of social and political sensibility. Due to that, too often their personal difficulties become enormous.

For these reasons the initiatives and policies should address both the long-term and structural problems and the very specific problems of people in vulnerable situations. The following relevant practices and recommendations are based on this mapping of barriers and on the sources used by the authors. They try to offer some inspiration and perspective for overcoming them. The recommendations offer a wide spectrum of actions and the practices show successful ways of doing.

2.2.3. Recommendations

For getting a job

- To encourage **youth entrepreneurship** with an emphasis on sustainable entrepreneurship by providing the necessary financial, administrative and other necessary support.

- To promote the **visits of businesses and organisations to schools** (not just to universities) acting as career advisers to talk to the students and present them with a range of vocational options so that students are not just encouraged to attend university (Policy statement of the [99% Youth Employment Campaign: Failing Today's Youth](#)).

- To reinforce the **links between secondary schools and businesses and organisations** active in the field of employment at local level in order to create work placement opportunities, future employment and stronger community ties. This would attract local vocational employers to create jobs, but also provide the opportunity to deliver classes and workshops during school hours, offering students the chance to try a new skill and, potentially, find something that they enjoy.

- To ensure **the transition from education to employment**, young people should be provided with high-quality career guidance counselling and job coaching, paid internships and paid apprenticeships of good quality that meet their skills and interests. Those internships and apprenticeships should be complemented afterwards with provision and support schemes to ensure smooth transition to employment opportunities.

- To provide **up-to-date information** for young people on career progression and pathways, training and apprenticeships, both formal and informal, to assist the transition from school or unemployment to employment. For that:

  o Public access to information technology should be ensured (for example, through public libraries and media centres, schools or youth centres) to allow young people to apply for jobs and to receive up-to-date information on employment. Open days and workshops on what it means to attend a job agency or ask for social assistance should be organised. Links and updates on work opportunities via mobile phones should be promoted.
  o Youth competency centres, clubs or groups could assist young people with CV creation, job interview preparation and assistance in attending interviews. Community centres, schools and youth centres are all venues which can be used to facilitate groups.

For improving working conditions

- To **eliminate any kind of discrimination** towards young people based on age, gender, disability etc. during the recruitment processes and in employment. Young people should have the right to equal and fair treatment, especially the right to decent work and salary, non-precarious jobs, training and promotion opportunities. Young people should receive specific information on their rights and have easy access to a reporting body in cases of mistreatment.

- To reverse **the dangerous trend of precariousness** by adapting and modernising the social security system to ensure that young people have a stable and autonomous life, even when they are on short-term contracts. For that the trade unions should promote job-guarantee schemes, working conditions and approaches compatible with young people's life courses.

- To provide **affordable child care and day care facilities** in order to allow young parents to return to or enter the workplace. These centres should be designed to be compatible with parents' working hours.

After losing a job

- To introduce **special measures**, early intervention and back-to-work policies for addressing the current **unprecedented high levels of youth unemployment** and to prevent further regression in this area. Such measures should be coupled with relevant incentives for both private and public employers, and career guidance and training opportunities.

- To promote **youth guarantee schemes** at local, regional and national level for ensuring that no young person is out of education, training or employment for longer than four months (as proposed in the final report of Enter! Access to social rights for young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods, Council of Europe Youth Department (2013)). Particular attention should be paid to young people in vulnerable situations so that they can also effectively access these youth guarantee schemes.

- To provide **income support for young people** when they cannot benefit from the standard support. An easier access for young people to the existing income support schemes is necessary. The associated procedures can be daunting and act as barriers themselves and the bad experiences that they provoke can be very discouraging.

To eliminate discrimination

- The **public employment services** should become more **youth friendly and accessible** particularly to people in vulnerable situations. They should be more proactive in the advice that they offer. Instead of offering generic opportunities to each individual through its doors, they should aim to provide a genuine service which offers real employment opportunities, related to a person's interests and competences, and seek to benefit their long-term career options rather than simply farming people out to any employer available.

- **Training** should be provided to **employees of the public employment services** in relation to young people in vulnerable situations: their specific needs, their challenges for accessing recruitment agencies, how to communicate with them…

- For reaching young people in vulnerable situations and/or victims of discrimination **youth workers should have access to information and be trained** in order to be able to support them. In co-operation with the public employment services youth workers could develop activities to motivate discouraged workers; for example, motivational interviewing and the application of theories around the cycle of change.

2.2.4. Relevant practices

The three following practices show three fields of action or strategies to overcome the barriers of young people in vulnerable situations to employment: looking towards future employment, building young people's networks for employability and a re-insertion programme for ex-drug users.

This first practice is an empowering working and educational experience for the young people involved. The young people participating in the Rückenwind projects face the challenge of finding a job with more self-confidence and more competences and therefore with more possibilities. It is a relatively small project but a very inspiring one in terms of educational approach.

The second practice is an initiative with the purpose of improving young people's networks and associating them with the labour market through summer jobs. This project could be considered "medium sized"; it was launched and funded at national level and implemented at local level by five municipalities. The networking strategy as a key factor for breaking the social and personal disconnection of young job seekers is certainly something which could be applied in other contexts.

The last one is a considerably bigger national programme targeted at former drug users. It is a long-term programme involving different agencies, actors, stakeholders and policy areas. It is a good example of a long-term, holistic and multidimensional approach. Going

beyond punctual actions is one of the lessons to be learnt when eliminating barriers for youngsters in very vulnerable situations.

The three practices are not just different in their "size". The target groups, actors and strategies are different and therefore inspiring in different directions. They are also different in their documentation and in the level of detail of their evaluation. That is the reason why their description is not uniform.

But they have at least two things in common. The first is that independent of their European or national scope they are anchored with the local reality and the local community. And second, they all include as part of the process a working experience with an educational dimension, but of real work. Paradoxically still today many initiatives aiming to overcome the barriers to employment do not include a real work experience. Those are probably two of the lessons which could be applied in many other contexts and initiatives.

Looking towards future employment

Rebuilding a century-old fishing boat in a Cornish fishing village provided a new sense of achievement and confidence for three young men from Austria who had difficult employment histories and disadvantaged backgrounds. In 2011 they spent up to a year living in the community in Cawsand, Cornwall, with support from a youth worker and local people, including a traditional fisherman and boat builder. As well as learning technical skills in woodwork and improving their command of English, they also acquired a sense of teamwork by working together in an environment that at first they did not know. The project was run by the Rückenwind strategy, which specialises in strengthening the competences of young people with difficulties in the job market. It works with young people who have been unemployed for lengthy periods, or who have educational or health difficulties.

Rückenwind projects always take place with a strong anchorage to the local community, and with a local project coordinator as an intermediary to social workers, unemployment offices and other advisory organisations.

An initial interview process explores each young person's interests and skills in relation to possible fields of employment, and young people are then assigned to a local project (mostly non-profit making) to develop their strengths through concrete work experience. Participation in a Youth Exchange or a European Voluntary Service extends the experience to another country. That process helps develop the long-term motivation of participants, who frequently find work after their involvement, go back to school or participate in other projects. The project was hosted by Point Europe, a UK training and education charity, in

collaboration with Cubic (Cultur and Bildung im Context) from Austria, which aims to help young people integrate into society and the world of work through international projects.

Building young people's networks for employability

In Sweden, improving young people's networks has become a key dimension of policies and programmes aimed at increasing young people's employability, particularly those living in city districts that are largely disassociated from the rest of Swedish society.

In 2010 the Swedish government provided 100 million Krona (~10.7 mio Euro) to municipalities to create summer jobs for young people, though many municipalities already organise such summer jobs for 16-19 year olds. Some municipalities even guarantee jobs.

The project Work Factory (in the municipalities of Säffle, Åmål, Årjäng, Dals-ed and Bengtsfors) was recently evaluated and used study visits and training to build young people's networks:

- 38% of the 322 participants answer that they have new knowledge about the labour market ;
- 26% have an improved network;
- 63% went from unemployment to work or studies after participating in the project, which is considered a good result.

Re-integration of former drug users

In Portugal, the Employment-Life Programme was created as a strategic tool in the context of a new national strategy to complete the treatment of participants by re-integrating them into employment and society. Its main innovation was co-operation between treatment between the IEFP (Portuguese Public Employment Services) and the IDT (Institute for Drugs and Drug Addiction).

The structure of the programme included:

- five agencies, located in the five regional agencies of IEFP, composed of five servants each (a co-ordinator and other four members);
- a network of mediators (about 300 in the whole country), located near the agencies and, mainly, in the health services specialised in drug-addiction treatment;
- public treatment centres of IDT and private therapeutic communities.

The Employment-Life Programme was intended for people in the final phase of drug-addiction treatment. The programme had a philosophy of differentiating the measures directed at individuals undergoing rehabilitation. It was implemented within the general context of active employment and training measures, on the basis of the central notion of "intermediation", arising from a triple focus on the fight against the social exclusion of drug addicts, employment training and treatment. Five distinct measures were developed for this programme:

- intermediation for training and employment: support for employing mediators, within the intermediation framework of the programme for institutional intermediation (treatment units and intermediation for employment);
- social and occupational integration traineeship: training in the workplace (9 months);
- social and occupational integration payment (2 years maximum): support for employers who hire a beneficiary with a short-term contract;
- employment support – support for employers who hire a beneficiary with a permanent contract (must last at least 4 years);
- self-employment support – support for business initiatives.

The mediators' role was strategic. Working in close co-operation with treatment services (both public and private), they received from therapists the beneficiaries considered prepared for integration into the labour market, which is supposed to consolidate the treatment. According to each candidate's profile, a plan was prepared. One of the actions could be guiding the participants to the mainstream measures of training and employment. The most common actions, however, were the guidance of beneficiaries to one of the distinct measures of the Employment-Life programme. Usually the process begins with a so-called social and occupational integration traineeship, followed by a social and occupational integration payment or employment or self-employment support. Measures could be sequential but not accumulated. The mediator accompanied the beneficiary: each mediator could take care of a maximum of 15 beneficiaries during the whole process, ensuring the connections between therapists and employers.

The Employment-Life Programme represented a notable innovation in social and employment policies, as it represented a new kind of intervention aimed at strengthening

inter-institutional co-ordination and upgrading intermediation within the strategies for the rehabilitation of drug addicts.

The evaluation identified multiplier effects in the different areas of the beneficiaries' lives:

- an improvement in family and personal relationships;
- entry into the labour market (62% of users working after participation in the programme);
- job stability (on the survey date, 32% of the beneficiaries were still working in the workplaces where they were originally placed).

In spite of the high level of drop-out, the results were more favourable than previous integration programmes. In fact, the advantages of the Employment-Life Programme were remarkable both in terms of treatment of drug addiction and of integration into the labour market. Indeed, the innovative nature of the programme opens a new door for the social and occupational re-integration of participants. Furthermore, the favourable opinions of employers and drug addiction treatment units testify in favour of the quality of the new alternatives generated by the measure. The Employment-Life Programme also had a multiplier effect in public bodies and entities, in particular the local administration, generating new initiatives for the fight against drug addiction.

The evaluation also recommended to improve some elements:

- the involvement of therapists in the integration process itself, by a closer follow-up of the beneficiaries, supporting the work of mediators;
- the mobilisation of other support instruments – such as housing – needed for a systemic approach to social and occupational re-integration.

European Commission 2005: Thematic study on policy measures concerning
disadvantaged youth. Final Report, Volume 2, Annex 4

2.3. Finding a place to live

Having a place to live is a human right but it is becoming a very difficult goal for a growing number of young people. In addition to the challenges of the overall housing situation young people have to face the challenges associated with the transition from family home to independent housing. This transition and how important or urgent it is perceived depend of course on many factors (culture, overall social structure, personal and family preferences, lifestyles, the formation of their own family by the young people or not) but it is, in any case, an important and legitimate aspiration towards autonomy and self-realisation.

The process of leaving home has changed successively during the last decades and, at present, includes for example returning to the parental home, not only once but many times. The general conception that you leave your family home only once in a lifetime can no longer be considered correct. Young people's routes to independent living are extremely diverse and part of a bigger picture in which they are remaining longer in education and moving later into employment, independent housing and a stable relationship with a partner. The transition from education to employment and the financial autonomy associated with it is in most cases a prerequisite for leaving home.

Therefore, due to the barriers already explored related to education and employment, young people are facing growing difficulties for accessing affordable independent housing (whether to own, rent or share), and the external (family) support (both financial and material) in assisting transitions to independent living is increasingly critical. Consequently these difficulties are delaying the process of leaving the parental home (Eurofound 2014).

Despite the housing policies targeted at young people (mainly consisting of weak social housing programmes, tax deductions and some quite limited financial support measures for specific groups such as students and young couples) young people in vulnerable situations face growing barriers for independent living or are propelled into it with no preparation or support for independence and no place to return if things get tough.

The 2010 EU Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion acknowledges that being without a roof, or having to live in emergency shelters and temporary accommodation, is the most extreme form of homelessness, and indeed of poverty and social exclusion. A growing proportion of migrants, women, children and young people are affected by homelessness in the EU.

The risk factors and barriers to independent housing are in many cases coincident with those already previously analysed in the fields of employment and education. In the following sections some of the most significant and specific (clustered as structural-

contextual and personal) of these associated with housing are explored. After analysing these barriers the phenomenon of homelessness is tackled in a specific section.

2.3.1. Risk factors and barriers

2.3.1.1. Structural and contextual

<u>Accessibility</u>

As already mentioned, young people are generally in a disadvantaged financial situation for accessing housing but additionally **young people are being subject to discrimination** due to the social attitudes towards them. Landlords generally prefer not to let to younger tenants, perhaps because it is believed that this kind of tenant will prove to be problematic in terms of behaviour or lack of responsibility or financial stability. Discrimination against younger households reduces their housing options, and means that they are likely to accept more marginal and riskier housing arrangements.

A young person leaving the parental home for the first time normally needs basic advice and information on their housing options, financial transactions, legal implications, rights and responsibilities. The private advice and support systems in this respect are expensive and the public ones are in most cases weak. Ultimately the family is expected to advise and protect younger members in this transition. Without this kind of support a young person may be liable to make mistakes that could be costly financially or that could place them in a position of housing vulnerability.

<u>Affordability</u>

Young people in general are more likely to be **economically disadvantaged** due to the fact that they move from studying into work or into higher or further education. This makes it more difficult for them to afford to live independently. When moving out of the parental home the financial support of one's family is essential. The support that the young family members receive consists of helping them with the payment of mortgages or of rental deposit or advancing the rent payments. If this kind of family support is not received, young consumers can find it harder to get suitable accommodation.

Since the 1980s among young people there has been a marked **move from owning to renting** a house in the private sector. This is by far the most common choice, especially among young people under 25. In both situations (owning or renting) **housing costs** absorb a substantial proportion of the disposable income, especially of those with low levels of income. There are many factors influencing housing costs that include basic elements such as rent or mortgage payments but as well expenses related to heating, maintenance,

repairs or charges. Despite there being big differences between individual countries there is a very clear general trend all over Europe: in recent years housing costs have continually increased and this increase has been accelerated by the economic crisis, in particular in relation to incomes and with respect to mortgage arrears and repossessions (Erhan Őzdemir and Terry Ward 2009) .

Inadequacy and discrimination

Some groups of young people in vulnerable situations face additional challenges and barriers when accessing housing because of some permanent social attitudes towards them.

In comparison with young students, **young workers face additional barriers**. Students are connected in networks through their studies or live for some time in a residence. This opens the door for them to peer-based communities. Their move into the private renting sector is supported by these communities and at times they continue sharing a house after finishing their studies.

In contrast, young workers have fewer choices and their routes to independent living are more haphazard. The option of owning is beyond the possibilities of the working class and the availability of social housing declines or is limited to even more disadvantaged groups.

Young people with disabilities are more likely than their non-disabled peers to live longer in the parental home. It is often socially assumed that the first housing destination of disabled young people should be more permanent than that of their non-disabled peers. Another quite common social attitude is the unreal assessment of their difficulties for developing an autonomous life in an independent house. This tends to add a delay in leaving home.

Many gay and lesbian young people leave home at a relatively early age due to family disputes or uncomfortable situations linked to their sexuality. The specific situation of non-heterosexuals is often overlooked by supported housing projects. As a consequence housing exclusion and homelessness – compared with straight people – is a more common outcome.

2.3.1.2. Personal

The personal barriers for accessing housing and the risk factors for becoming homeless are by definition very diverse and difficult to cluster but social research has identified the following.

Family systems and social situation

Intergenerational relationships and family systems are culturally oriented and play an important role in the process of leaving the parental home. Spending much of one's youth outside the parental home may shape intergenerational relationships as much as be a consequence of it. As Reher (1998) pointed out, leaving home may be embedded in a system of intergenerational relationships which includes care giving for the elderly.

"Strong" family systems would reinforce the idea that a long permanence in the parental home implies more involvement of children in care of their elderly parents. Supporting young people in their educational and labour market transitions would allow parents to claim care (and to transmit care-oriented values and norms) when they age. This could certainly hold true for Southern and Eastern Europe.

On the other hand, "weak" family systems rely on state subsidies and individuals seem to detach themselves from their parents which would imply less reliance on children when parents become old. "Young adults may be more exposed to poverty and diminishing social status in North-Western Europe than in South-Western Europe, and to a certain extent in Eastern Europe. In Eastern Europe young adults count on the residential support of their parents more often, although this does not imply that household independence results in an absolute lack of support from the parental home" (Billari, Philipov and Baizán 2001, *Leaving Home in Europe* p. 23).

Together with the above-mentioned differences in the intergenerational relationships and family systems, the family social situation as such marks the access to housing of young people. **A precarious family is a barrier** to access to housing and causes a risk for young people to become homeless.

- No family network support: death of parents – HIV, addictions, alcoholism, extended family without socio-economic resources to receive the children resulting in institutionalisation.
- Dysfunctional families: with difficulties, for example, to recognise the importance of stable employment, to exercise legal rights, to identify what is happening on their context, to set priorities….
- Family ruptures: conflicts associated with young people negatively influence their attitudes and behaviours and ultimately their housing decisions. Being expelled from the family home can also be a consequence of family ruptures.

Particular needs

Young people with reduced mobility face particular challenges in finding suitable, accessible housing. The lack of consideration, by the housing policy and systems, of their

specific needs constitutes a barrier. These specific needs relate to personal safety, accessibility to spaces, adapted furniture, and need of assistance and they could be solved easily and not expensively through a more flexible and tunable planning and design.

Young parents also experience barriers for accessing and securing suitable housing. Their options are limited. They are trapped in an inadequate benefits system in many countries – wanting to gain employment or continue their studies but unable to pay childcare costs and rent if they lose their housing benefit. Consequently it is quite common for young parents to live in their parental home or in unsuitable social houses.

The **cognitive difficulties** of some people combined with complicated procedures for accessing any housing system constitute an important barrier. The lack of support for this particular group results in the fact that very often a first negative housing experience compromises the young person's future options. In some cases it can lead to lack of control and aggressive behaviours.

2.3.1.3. Homelessness

Homelessness is a strong manifestation of extreme social exclusion. There are many different causes and combinations of causes behind it. The profiles of people affected by or at risk of homelessness are increasingly diverse.

Together with the permanent structural barriers already explored and in relation to the housing situation, homelessness was accentuated after the transition in post-communist countries due to limited public budget support for housing developments for the low-income population and the shortage of affordable flats following privatisation of the public housing stock.

Another structural and generalised cause is the severity of the crisis and its impact on housing costs and the housing situation. The recent economic crisis has provoked a significant increase in the number of non-performing housing loans which have been recorded in Belgium, Estonia (up 215% in 2008 and a further 40% increase in the first quarter of 2009), Greece, Ireland, Lithuania and Latvia. The number of repossessions has also increased in Denmark (up 100% in 2008 and up 46.3% in 2009), Spain (up 126% in 2008), Greece (up 17% in 2008), Ireland (up 30% between June 2008 and June 2009), and the United Kingdom (from 10 000 in Q2 2008 to 11 400 in Q2 2009). The number of beneficiaries of specific support schemes for tenants has increased in Ireland (up 41% between Q2 2008 and Q2 2009) and Hungary (up 5% between Q4-2008 and Q4-2009), while the number of beneficiaries of schemes to support mortgage holders also raised in Ireland: up 144% between Q2 2008 and Q2 2009. Finally, the applications and waiting times

for social housing have increased in Ireland, Luxembourg and the UK (European Commission 2010 – EU Report on social protection and social inclusion).

The personal causes or risk factors for homelessness are very diverse, and include alcohol or drug abuse, broken marriages, economic problems (employer's, or personal bankruptcy) but the low level of education, apart from being an important personal cause, is one of the main barriers to overcoming homelessness.

The national data available on rough sleepers and homeless people show a mixed picture, with the situation improving in certain member states (United Kingdom, Ireland, Netherlands and Germany), but deteriorating in others (Romania, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia) (European Commission 2010 – EU Report on social protection and social inclusion).

2.3.2. Critical reflection

The barriers to housing and consequently the policies and measures to overcome them are very complex. For a young person, finding a place to live is normally linked to his education path, his trajectory in the labour market and the creation of a family.

But youth housing policies should be linked to other ones (e.g. education, employment, health, mobility and financial policies). Linking those different policies allows dealing with the big diversity of situations and needs for different groups and it allows contra balancing the financial interests which widely play a too relevant role in the housing policies.

After exploring some of the main barriers and some of the reasons behind them, many factors, such as those influencing living costs, or the price of and/or the accessibility to housing, it can be concluded that too often people and their needs are not at the centre of housing schemes, initiatives and policies.

In other words, this limited exercise shows very clearly that houses are not just planned and built for people to live in, but at the service of other actors and interests like those of the banking system or of speculative investments and subject to short-term territorial policies. Therefore housing policies should include, correct and compensate those distortions.

There is an urgent need to refocus housing by putting human beings and their needs at the centre of it. This would be important for all citizens but it is crucial for young people and particularly for those in vulnerable situations.

Particularly in youth housing policies there is an urgent need to go beyond good intentions and to come up with concrete measures. This is not always easy at the European level because housing policies are normally outside the European scope.

The following recommendations and relevant practices try to articulate and compile those guidelines and initiatives which re-focus housing policies and initiatives on the real needs of young people. Together with structural long-term policies and strategies, very targeted and specific measures are necessary. The following recommendations and practices combine these two directions and should contribute to overcoming the quite widespread thought that in the field of housing, considering how strong and important the existing interests are, very little can be done.

2.3.3. Recommendations

Prevention – education and awareness

- To promote in schools and through civil society organisations **basic financial education** and practical training for making informed housing choices. This would include, for example, how to make and keep a budget, financial implications of sharing, renting and buying a house, how to choose mortgages, etc.

- **To provide information and support for customising housing options**. The information should be provided in easy language to be understood by all young people including, for example, care leavers and young people with special needs. Where information and housing support teams operate, they need to include officers with specific training and knowledge of housing and young people. Particular attention should be given to young people who leave care institutions. Apart from information, their future housing choices should be supported by consultations and practical training.

Availability, accessibility and affordability

- To reinforce the state regulation of the housing market, controlling the prices of rents, developing responsible urban planning, stopping speculation, ensuring responsible and transparent bank practices, confiscating unused buildings for social housing projects, etc.

- A more nuanced approach to **social housing** is needed. Policy makers, especially at local and regional level, should make social-oriented choices in this direction; for example, supporting social housing instead of private and elitist sport stadiums. Social housing is an important source of stability for young people. It provides the stability to get their lives back on track. Both these issues are crucial for young people. The

assessment of individual needs should be more precise so that other options beyond social housing are considered. For example, by introducing financial support measures for young people for a limited time period in proportion to their wages and rents. This financial support could be in the form of vouchers so that young people could decide what type of housing would be more convenient for them.

- Housing policies for young people need to **refocus attention on those young people who are in vulnerable situations and socially isolated**. For most young people it is not realistic even in the long term to own a house because of their limited ability to pay a deposit. But policy agendas have too often been oriented towards owning a house. Policy attention has to be directed to a more pressing concern: the existence of very extreme housing need amongst young people disadvantaged by the benefit system.

- To protect **young renters and buyers** by reforming the deposit guarantee schemes (hardly affordable for young people) and the banking regulations on mortgages (costly and inflexible). **Renting a single room is in most cases inequitable for young people in vulnerable situations**. Its provisions place vulnerable young people in even more vulnerable housing situations. By making those regulations more flexible and youth friendly, young people could move up from the very bottom of the housing market where they find themselves.

<u>Adequacy</u>

- **Develop the right products for young people**. The growth of large-scale private sector halls of residence for students is a reminder that it is possible to develop products aimed at the youth housing market. As in the case of students, housing products adapted to their needs should be developed for low-income young people in their first jobs, young families, ex-homeless young people and young people with special needs. For example, the development of youth "hotels" with up to 20 or 30 spaces could be explored, offering rooms including kitchen facilities and shared bathrooms These could be let at the equivalent rate of the single room rent. Another option to explore could be the promotion of self-build housing initiatives that could combine the use of hard-to-let and empty properties and the competences of young people in vocational training.

- To review strategies in the context of the current market, **adapting the renting and buying systems to the changing housing needs of young people** at a variety of stages in their housing pathway and particularly for those in vulnerable situations:

  o It is necessary to introduce support and flexibility mechanisms so that the consequences of the interaction between the housing market, the banking

system and the employment market do not lead to social exclusion; without any flexibility or support even a temporary loss of employment can lead to financial ruin and ultimately to a situation of homelessness.

  o Another example for the need of this adaptation to different needs would be the regulations for the security of tenure that may not be an issue for single people in their early twenties, but may become a bigger concern for younger families, who may also struggle to pay a market rent.

Eradication of homelessness

- To reinforce the mechanisms of **social housing for young people in emergency situations**, in particular for homeless young people and for young people without housing possibilities after leaving care institutions. This emergency social housing should be accompanied by holistic programmes and initiatives for achieving independent living.

- The existing shelters for homeless people and the social canteens should have a **holistic approach**; not only providing a place to sleep and eat but including health care, training/education and counselling. For this holistic approach an extension of the duration of stay in shelters and the attention to specific individual needs is necessary so that inflexible and standardised support do not become an extra barrier for homeless people.

2.3.4. Relevant practices

The following practices exemplify four strategies for overcoming the existing barriers for young people to have a place to live.

The first is a general policy giving priority to young people in access to social housing. The promotion of social housing is very much needed all around Europe and the decision to give priority to young people is one of the results of the consultation and participation mechanisms of residents. This is a very clear example of how policies can improve if they are designed not just "for" but "with" young people.

The second group of practices is aimed at easing the transition to independent life. Apart from getting a place to live in the always-challenging moment of transition to independent living, the personalised support and attention to individual development is particularly inspiring in the example of the foyers in Germany.

Eradicating homelessness, the most extreme form of not having a place to live, is the final aim of the last two practices, which show an unconventional approach and special attention to young people. These two focuses can also be inspiring in other contexts.

Finally the "help to rent project" shows how co-operation between different generations, facilitated by civil society organisations, can generate a "win-win" situation that supports access to housing of a group of young people. Similar forms of co-operation could be promoted in other contexts and be extended to other groups (not just students).

Priority to young people in social housing

A 2007 decision of the Flemish Government calls on social housing providers to give priority to young applicants. This decision was launched in consultation with an association of residents of social homes (*Vivas*, or *Netwerk sociale huurders*). This is an important think-tank, which looks after the interests of the residents of socially rented homes. One of the focus points of *Vivas* is the inclusion of certain groups of renters, such as young people, immigrants and people living in poverty.

Summary report on the 2013/14 social inclusion country templates
EC – Council of Europe Partnership on Youth – page 9
http://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/7110690/Summary+Report_Social+Inclusion_2014.pdf/11362dce-b78b-4ddb-9528-e90c487dd3fc

Foyers for transition to independent life

Similar to hostels, the foyers available in Germany offer affordable accommodation and assist young people who are homeless or in housing need in their transition to independent life. They help young people in the process of gaining personal confidence and self-reliance, when completing their training and apprenticeships, or arranging personal matters etc. Depending on the individual needs and competencies, young people may stay from several weeks up to three years. Foyers involve extremely personalised development work. Germany has an extended networks of foyers, specialising in assisting young people in different life situations.

"Summary report on the 2013/14 social inclusion country templates
EC. – Council of Europe Partnership on Youth – page 10
http://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/7110690/Summary+Report_Social+Inclusion_2014.pdf/11362dce-b78b-4ddb-9528-e90c487dd3fc

Preventing and tackling homelessness

In 2002 the Danish Government introduced a programme called "Our Common Responsibility", targeted at the most socially marginalised people in Denmark, including homeless people, people with alcohol or drug problems, prostitutes, and people with mental disabilities. The programme focused on homeless people who were difficult to

reintegrate into normal living situations, and older homeless people who required some measure of residential care but who, because of their homeless experience and behavioural issues, could not be accommodated in mainstream residential care homes.

The Danish Government established special nursing homes and also, under the unfortunate slogan "freak houses for freak existences", provided unconventional small dwellings, and help in maintaining them, for those who wished to live independently. In these "freak houses", residents could behave differently from the norm without having to confront hostile reactions from other people. The programme also offered emergency provision, such as night shelter cafés. The project was implemented by municipalities, which received earmarked funding from central government to pay for it.

Homelessness and housing exclusion – Initiatives within the European Strategy for Social Protection and Social Inclusion, EC 2010, page 4
http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=6396&langId=en

In February 2008, the Finnish Government adopted the National Programme to Reduce Long-term Homelessness aimed at halving long-term homelessness by 2011. This was based on the "Housing First" principle, which asserts that appropriate accommodation is a prerequisite for solving other social and health problems. The programme includes a goal to convert all traditional short-term shelters into supported housing units that facilitate independent living. Around 1 250 additional homes, supported housing units or places in care were made available. The programme also includes projects aimed at providing supported housing for recently released prisoners, reducing youth homelessness and preventing evictions, for example by providing and expanding housing advisory services. The programme is based on a partnership between central government and the country's ten largest cities affected by homelessness.

Homelessness and housing exclusion – Initiatives within the European Strategy for Social Protection and Social Inclusion, EC 2010, page 5
http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=6396&langId=en

"Housing for Help"

"Housing for Help" is a homesharing project targeted at students who would like to have a very affordable or even free place to stay. In exchange they should help and support senior citizens in their everyday live: household chores, doing the shopping or gardening...
Students should just have some experience in volunteer work or social affairs to be able to do so. As a general rule, for each square metre room area, one hour of help is provided each month.

Studentenwerk Hannover
http://www.studentenwerk-hannover.de/en-homeshare.html

2.4. Finding a way to healthy life

"Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO 1948:100). Moreover, the question of health spans at least four elements: physical (exercise and diet), sexual (STIs, HIV and pregnancy), mental (psycho-social from eating disorders, depression, self-harm to psychosis) and substance misuse.

Health inequalities are one of the key problems that continue to drive social exclusion, whereas access to health care ensures young people can be active in society. For example, in the case of sexual health, clear interactions between poor sexual health and the processes of social exclusion are observed. Increases in sexually transmitted infections, sexual abuse and exploitation, violence against young women, gender inequalities and risks of homophobic attacks hold clear implications for poor sexual health and for exclusion from the mainstream in relation to employment, successful family life and active citizenship (Widmaier 2014).

Concerns are especially related to bad diet, high youth suicide risk, anorexia (especially among women), alcoholism, addictive behaviours, sedentary lifestyles and excessive weight. Moreover, recent research indicates increasing rates of depression, anxiety disorders and substance abuse among young people (including alcohol, tobacco and drugs) (Pantea 2014).

Public policies covering the right to health are set out by governments. There are some strategic plans for the health system, too. The implementing bodies include a wide range of state and regional health care institutions: clinics, health centres, hospitals, consulting and diagnostic centres, while NGOs are involved in the dissemination of information, the provision of some primary health services and monitoring (Enter! project, Overview of policies, 2010).

In relation to health concerns, special attention should be given to young people exposed to multiple discrimination. Human rights violations compromise the health of marginalised communities, impeding their access to health care and undermining the underlying factors affecting their health (Open Society Foundations 2013).

Some of the measures by which health risks of young people were addressed so far include special youth counselling services, youth and student clinics, information dissemination activities, and peer health education. However, even though there is widespread recognition of the importance of health issues and specific needs young people have in relation to this issue, measures in place are failing to ensure access for and equal treatment of all young people.

2.4.1. Health risk factors and barriers

2.4.1.1. Structural and contextual

<u>Access to health services and related goods</u>

Access to health services and opportunities for practising healthy lifestyle is limited in numerous ways. Public health systems across Europe are experiencing extensive cuts in public funding, which leads to less access to quality health services for young people (Eurofound 2014). Young people living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods have particular difficulties in accessing health services as these tend to be located elsewhere or have limited capacities. Besides, local communities lack sports facilities and, when they are available, they can be expensive to use (Enter! 2013-2014). Besides costs and location, access is reported to be highly limited by long waiting lists (Eurostat 2010). In addition, despite high-profile campaigns and visible efforts, many of the health care institutions are still not physically accessible to all young people.

Age- and/or status-dependent access to health services represents a big challenge for young people, especially for those over 26 and migrants. Where access to public health services is dependent on being in education, a social insurance scheme or employment, some categories of young people are excluded (Enter! 2013-2014). Besides, free medical services are usually only provided to young people up to the age of 18/19 (those in education tend to be included up to completing their studies, but age limits are usually set) (Pantea 2014).

Economic barriers are visible in several situations. Besides more people saying that it has become more difficult to afford health care as a result of the financial crisis (EC 2012), young people also face economic barriers to participating in sporting activities. The cost of food is also an important aspect, as fruit, vegetables and other healthy nutrition options are more expensive than junk food and sweet snacks (Enter! 2013-2014). Additionally, budget limitations can prevent health institutions from implementing policies.

Barriers grounded in legal status are especially faced by immigrants, refugees, homeless people and internally displaced young people. Health care coverage and registration with social services are generally inaccessible to individuals who lack a legal and official status in the country where they live. Homeless young citizens who do not have a permanent address or a legal residence permit can encounter significant difficulties in qualifying for health services (EACEA, 2013).

<u>Institutional policies and practices</u>

The quality and coverage of health services is another barrier. Existing safety nets seem to leave aside a significant proportion of the neediest youth due to limited capacities. There is a lack of "youth-friendly" services and young people have little trust in health professionals because they fear prejudice and moral judgement. Even when there are health services for young people and they have health staff, these are usually not specialists in the relevant counselling skills. Competencies of service delivery staff (Etienne, Parkinson and Verkest 2005) and professional development opportunities for youth health advisors remain a challenge in a number of countries (Pantea 2014). A limited role of civil society organisations in health services provision is recognised as another barrier, as their stronger involvement could improve coverage. However, compared to other areas, knowledge and awareness of youth workers and youth leaders of health issues are limited (EU Youth Report 2012).

Type and focus of policy measures and institutional initiatives sometimes also imply additional barriers or lead to misinterpretation of health-related needs. In some countries, policies to determine child eligibility for additional resources and services are preoccupied with categories, ratios and statistics (Etienne, Parkinson and Verkest 2005). Measures are usually centred on ensuring economic security, including allowances/tax facilities (for personal assistance, purchase of equipment, transportation, housing modifications) or rest mostly on young people's labour market integration (Pantea 2014), while failing to incorporate social and personal support aspects. Sexual health services are often described as "family planning", which is not always what young people would identify with when wanting to address a sexual health issue (Kovacheva and Pohl 2007). Too many separate actions are not co-ordinated in any structured way (Walther and Zentner 2008). Additionally, the literature on inequality and health has been criticised for focusing on the consequences of social inequalities on people's health.

Lack of openness of institutions and unequal treatment is experienced by different groups, including immigrants and people with disabilities. Due to a mainly medical approach, some young people are encountering judgemental staff and their inability to take a holistic view of patients' needs (Philip, Shucksmith, Tucker, van Teijlingen, Immamura and Penfold 2007). Another example shows that members of Macedonia's Roma population frequently face outright denial of health care services, in addition to misinformation and abuse (Open Society Foundation 2013). Also, too often there is a focus on disability in a narrowed way and usually limited to medical terms, which treats a child or youngster as a disability case, rather than a person (Etienne, Parkinson and Verkest 2005). LGBT people's experiences with health care professionals show that many have misconceptions, such as that all gay men are automatically at risk of HIV infection and all lesbians have no sexual health needs because they do not require family planning. LGBT

people also face restrictions on giving blood, discriminatory insurance policies and everyday practices (Takacs 2009).

<u>Exposure to particular information and attitudes</u>

Lack of health education and relevant information is the result of education policies, inconsistent presence of health education in school curriculums, availability of facilities, etc. Little importance is given to sport and outdoor activities in the school programme, and many schools lack adequate sport facilities. Little importance is also given to healthy diet in both schools and families. In the communities, teen pregnancy is a serious challenge as the result of general lack of comprehensive sex and sexuality education at school and the general lack of knowledge about reproductive health among young people (Enter! 2013-2014). According to statistics, young people tend to have less information then adults, especially in relation to sexually transmitted diseases (Perolini and Ozolina 2010). A lack of capacity and health-related competencies among teachers leads to reluctance among young people to view teachers as credible or reliable sources of advice and information on sexual health issues (Kovacheva and Pohl 2007).

Prejudices and discrimination towards particular groups and health problems is a widespread barrier. For instance, young people with disabilities experience far more difficulties compared to other groups. Higher incidence of stress-related symptoms and higher exposure are recorded among young people with disabilities (Pantea 2014). Young people with mental health problems are also often exposed to discrimination.

> It's like, if somebody's broken a leg, you immediately go to their house and help them as much as you could and make them meals, make them comfortable, make them cups of tea, and this sort of thing. You would do that as a good neighbour, just automatically. But with mental health problems … it's difficult, it's strange (EACEA 2013, p. 9).

Discrimination among peers has a strong influence, especially on mental health. "Bullying at school, a form of discrimination according to European standards, often leads to anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation" (Perolini and Ozolina 2010:33). Further, exclusion from community groups or not receiving a hospital visit from peers can make a young person feel rejected and neglected.

Exposure to particular values and practices often leads to an unhealthy life and, consequently, ill-health. A positive correlation between drug use and the drug use of family members and friends, outgoing behaviour, committing petty crime and truancy are observed in many European countries (Mitev 1998). Those in lower social classes are more likely to smoke, to have a poor diet and to be physically inactive. Consequently, they are

affected to a greater degree by certain preventable diseases such as coronary heart disease, diabetes and some cancers (SEU 2004).

Family values and relations are sometimes also a limiting factor. For instance, family involvement in marriage choices, which still happens in some Eastern European countries, with forced and arranged marriages taking place, can have severe consequences, such as suicide attempts (Perolini and Ozolina 2010). Some young women coming from traditional families and communities have more difficulty in accessing various activities and services (Enter! 2013-2014).

Social constructs of roles and power relations

Power structures are often a limiting factor. 'Power' embedded in social relationships is exercised through formal and informal institutions. Constitutively restricted participation in economic, social, political and cultural relationships as a result of the abuse of power in social relationships impacts negatively on health and well-being (EACEA 2013). Dominant institutions start by applying negative labels and attributes to define and classify those who do not conform to dominant social "rules". The victorious "social mindset" then uses its categorisation to legitimise differences in the treatment of others. The third stage is characterised by strong repression and stigmatisation (Carcillo et al. 2015).

Heteronormative practices and gender-based discrimination are a very strong barrier, as gender-based discrimination appears to affect the health and emotional well-being of young people significantly (EACEA 2013). Sexual behaviour takes place within a set of cultural and gendered practices in which the power to negotiate is highly uneven. Heteronormative values embodied in social interactions also lead to mental health problems among the LGBTIQ population, as many of them become withdrawn and socially isolated in the period while most other young people are learning to express themselves socially. This is due to the fact that they spend an enormous amount of energy and time monitoring their own behaviour and using hiding strategies to minimalise the risk of being found out, often at a cost to their mental health (Rivers and Carragher as cited in Takacs 2009).

2.4.1.2. Personal

Awareness and information

Lack of awareness about social and economic rights plays a significant role (EACEA 2013). Moreover, awareness of contraception, safe sex, relationships and sexual rights among young people remains low in countries where health and sex education is not part of the

curriculum (Enter! 2013-2014). On the other hand, young people who are aware are often not prepared for the situation when the moment arises.

The level of knowledge about different health-related aspects is another relevant challenge. The transfer of legal knowledge and skills is therefore crucial to the well-being of marginalised populations (Open Society Foundations, 2013). Sometimes they also do not know where to go, what to learn or how to cope with existing health problems (Cullen 2004).

Lifestyle and practical limitations

Factors arising from **personal lifestyle and behaviours** are also important. Young people facing risk are in danger of being affected in their physical or psychological state because of some behaviour related to their own will: having sex without protection, drinking alcohol, smoking and using drugs (Council of Europe 1999). Additionally, behaviours arising from socially constructed roles can be a risk factor (e.g. gender roles).

A practical aspect especially relevant to employed or care-giving young people is having difficulty in **finding time to go to the doctor** (Walter and Zentner 2008).

2.4.2. Critical reflection

Based on the consulted sources and the selection of most obvious obstacles, it is clear that existing barriers are mainly related to awareness and information that young people have on the one hand and institutional structures on the other. An especially relevant aspect is the way services are provided, as young people expect from them to ensure confidentiality, a friendly and a non-judgemental approach. Besides, the social milieu young people live in plays a significant role, as it has a strong influence on attitudes, beliefs and behaviours.

Barriers related to health are interconnected with other obstacles, primarily financial resources, legal status and belonging to minority groups. In addition, fragmented and discontinuous policy initiatives (for example, narrowed capacity building of health care staff, project-based information sharing which stops with the end of funding) pose limitations on reaching better results.

An example that captures several aspects, including lack of alignment with needs and inter-sector co-ordination as well as limited resources, is the trend towards deinstitutionalisation, which brings challenges for young people with ill health who are supposed to establish an independent living. This is especially due to the limited support provided by institutions and the lack of co-ordination between the health sector, the labour market and the education

sector through which it could provide more opportunities for sustainable, autonomous living.

2.4.3. Recommendations

Alignment of service provision with needs

- In light of the current budgetary cuts to social services (including health care), governments and service providers should take into account the **growing need for social services** among young people while ensuring access for all.

- Service design and delivery have to take account of the **diversity of experiences and expertise among the youth population**. Implementation should entail awareness raising among staff, trust building with clients and the development of services that are accessible, embedded in local cultures and sustainable.

Knowledge and information

- **School-based health, sex and relationships education** should be widespread, as it was identified as a crucial mechanism for the promotion of positive approaches to sexual health and for equipping young people to make informed decisions. Further, it is important to ensure that health education is available in accessible formats for young people with disabilities.

- **Legal empowerment** is an important intervention for ensuring health care and realisation of human rights. This should include the processes of learning about rights and procedures related to access to health care and involvement in advocacy initiatives.

- **Advertising should be regulated** in order to prevent the promotion of unhealthy lifestyles.

Higher involvement and partnerships

- **Active involvement of young people in strategies designed** to improve sexual and reproductive health or to tackle social exclusion is the prerequisite for the development, implementation and monitoring of adequate measures. Moreover, young people should have an equal role in decision-making processes, especially those facing barriers.

- **One door and tailored** services should be promoted and developed in partnership with different groups. Such an approach would deal with widespread practices of referring a client from one agency to another – a grievance often expressed by young people that are looking for help and support.

2.4.4. Relevant practices

The following examples explore different approaches to dealing with health-related issues: one presents an innovative approach in working with people in need (particularly people with deafness), while the other tackles health protection through providing information and empowering citizens to stand up for their rights.

In **Italy**, Centro Rieducazione Ortofonico (CRO, Centre for Speech-Language Reeducation) is approaching the issue of deafness by creating the opportunity and fostering the ability to construct meaningful phrases and to express new thoughts. Speech therapy makes the hearing-impaired person free and independent, capable of developing words and phrases that are always new and not stereotyped, addressing and challenging any type of subject.

Deafness is a deficit that implies loss of hearing which, if not adequately treated, can lead to a handicap in the form of lack of oral language. This is what has given rise to the widespread and unjustified correlation deaf equals deaf-mute. The deaf-mute is indeed an erroneous concept for something that does not exist, has never existed, and the persistence of this attitude is the symptom of a cultural problem. Further, sign language can create a social exclusion and exclusion from family.

This is why a child with a hearing impairment has to be viewed and assessed in terms of linguistic competence, as well naturally as concerns his or her personal history, developing the most appropriate teaching methods on the basis of this.

www.italytrames.eu, www.icare-cro.com

In **Macedonia**, a consortium of four CSOs have developed a Right to Health project, which aims to improve the realisation of the Roma population's right to health care services, including enhanced health insurance coverage, the elimination of discrimination in the health care system, and increased accountability for human rights violations.

Right to Health was centred on a paralegal programme based in the Roma communities. It trained community paralegals on human rights in patient care and the structure of Macedonia's health care and judicial systems, and is providing ongoing supervision of individual cases. Paralegals offer advice to patients, accompany them to institutions to help them access vital services, prepare documentation necessary to claim certain rights, and make referrals to lawyers, government bodies, and community service organisations. The paralegals also carry out a programme of door-to-door visits to Roma households. Every two months they conduct round-table debates and public discussions designed to raise awareness about specific health care issues facing Macedonia's Roma community.

2.5. Finding a place in communities

Europe is a rich and heterogeneous landscape of identities and is becoming more and more culturally diverse. "The enlargement of the European Union, the opening of labour markets, migration and globalisation have increased the multicultural character of many countries, adding to the number of languages, religions, ethnic and cultural backgrounds found across the continent which come regularly into contact" (DG Education and Culture 2011, p. 8). In that context, enabling engagement and ensuring a feeling of belonging among young people is becoming a complex and challenging task.

Youth participation is often considered as a key mechanism for the construction of citizenship. This is due to its educational character, leading to social involvement and associative practices as well as to its democracy-building quality, resulting in representativeness and democratic culture.

Participation is an essential element of citizenship in a democratic society and a democratic Europe. Meanwhile, participation is not an aim in itself, but an approach to becoming active citizens. As a citizen in any state of the United Nations, participation is a basic human right (UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, Article 20(1), Article 21(1), Article 23(4). Also as a young citizen residing in any European local community, region or country, "participation and active citizenship is about having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and where necessary the support to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society" (Council of Europe European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life 1992 and 2003). For the European Union (2007), "youth participation in democratic institutions and in a continuous dialogue with policy makers is essential to the sound functioning of our democracies and the sustainability of policies which impact on young people's lives".

Broader understanding of citizenship is conceptualised not just as a status that can be given and taken by the state but also as a set of social practices of engagement with civil society over governance issues at personal and local level (Jamieson as cited in Dolejsiova 2009). Citizenship goes beyond the political science definitions and strives for a "more total relationship, inflected by identity, social positioning, cultural assumptions, institutional practices and a sense of belonging" (Werbner and Yuval-Davis as cited in Dolejsiova 2009:11). Thus active citizenship can be understood as the word "participation" suggests – ranging from cultural and political to environmental activities at local, regional, national, European and international levels. The lack of involvement of citizens is considered to pose a long-term risk to democracy and to the continuing legitimacy of governing institutions at

a European, national and local level. However, for a few years, new forms of participation have been on the rise, such as one-off issue politics or ethical consumption (Hoskins 2007). Moreover, youth unconventional participation is much enhanced by information and communication technologies (Huang 2014) and different types of engagement in cultural activities. In the area of youth participation across Europe, further research was compiled that highlighted new forms of political participation, such as fluid networks of people gathering around short-term projects.

Thus, participation shall be also understood in a broad way that reaches out to different spheres of life, such as culture: "involvement in cultural activities can also enable young people to express their creative energy and contribute to fostering active citizenship" (EC Promoting Young People's Full Participation in Education, Employment and Society 2007:9).

If we pay further attention to culture, we can realise a striking importance of this domain for the engagement of young people. Hence, the policy based on the European Agenda for Culture seeks to ensure that culture and creativity can make their full contribution to driving economic growth, job creation, competitiveness, as well as fostering personal development and social cohesion. Besides, one of the six main priorities in the European Commission's culture work plan for 2010-2014 is focused on promoting cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and inclusivity. Moreover, the emphasis of cultural policies of the EU countries is placed on proactive and inclusive cultural policy through, beside other actions, the active participation of marginalised people in national, regional and local cultural practices in the EU. Above and beyond, culture and creativity have been identified in the EU Youth Strategy as a field of action for young people, since involvement in cultural activities contributes to their personal development and feeling of belonging to a community. Furthermore, accessing culture reinforces awareness of sharing a common cultural heritage and promotes active citizenship open to the world. Culture can even allow young people to express their creative energy in a way that will help them to exploit future employment and entrepreneurial opportunities.

However, in the European context, the concept of citizenship is the subject of continuous "debate on living in, belonging to, participating in, being excluded from and still building the community of people in Europe" (Dolejsiova 2009:8). Thus, the political, social and emotional dimensions of European citizenship, the sense of community and belonging, diversity and otherness, dignity and integration need further discussion, emphasis and knowledge.

2.5.1. Risk factors and barriers

"Getting young people more involved in the life of the local, national and European communities … represents one of the major challenges, not only for the present but also for the future of our societies" (EC 2001:11).

Although engagement policies declare that they provide equal opportunities to all, they do not ensure equality of conditions. Thus, lack of involvement is usually perceived to affect the most vulnerable groups. However, "there are also young people coming from an average economic background who try to participate, but they find that their voices are never heard, their concerns never acted upon and their interventions ignored. This is also a form of exclusion" (EACEA, 2010:4).

Typically, measures aiming to ensure higher engagement of young people were so far including different leisure time activities, targeted or continuous youth work initiatives, introduction of citizens' education into formal education curriculums, representation mechanisms for political participation, etc. Still, numerous challenges remain unsolved. From these, we have selected those relevant for different forms of engagement in communities.

2.5.1.1. Structural and contextual

The gap between young people and structures for engagement

There is a growing feeling among young people that **institutions and organisations are far removed from their realities,** and often they are right. Especially young people coming from marginalised or disadvantaged backgrounds often lack appropriate communication channels and access to information. They articulate their concerns and interests in many other ways, which are often neither heard nor understood by policy makers, institutional representatives or even teachers and youth workers (Schild, Pererva and Stockwell 2009).

Youth engagement is limited to a certain extent due to **young people's restricted access to the power structures** and their vulnerable positions in the social and economic arenas (Huang 2014). Sometimes those at the "top" of society can provide space for those at the top of youth organisations. However, civic participation is not supported or secured for those young people further down the hierarchy of policy making and youth involvement (Titarenko 2009).

Lack of adequate methodologies

Recognition of the role that social engagement can play in dealing with social exclusion is being undermined by a **lack of quantifiable evidence and the lack of indicators to measure the impact of lasting engagement on social exclusion**.

Mechanisms set to enable youth participation are often inadequate whereas lower involvement and the lack of mechanisms lead to lower participation (Pantea 2014). For example, some critics say the Open Method for Coordination is lacking methodology and instruments (Masson as cited in Czerwinska 2009) and it might exclude organisations without the appropriate budgets or young people with fewer opportunities (Czerwinska 2009). Structured dialogue only stimulates answers from the most active young people and usually young people beyond the active membership were not activated (Kiilakoski and Gretschel 2014). A uniformed approach is often used while the diversity of young people requires many different approaches in order to involve young people and foster youth participation (CAP 2013). Besides, the same mechanisms and activities are applied in countries with different histories and grounds for European identity and citizenship construction (e.g. east v. west) (Balescu 2009).

Barriers related to access

Access to social and political processes is jeopardised in different ways. Organisations and institutions are mainly based in cities, which hampers reach-out and involvement of rural/remote youth (Van de Walle, Coussee and Bouverne-De Bie 2011). Besides, even in some developed countries, coverage is low and covers only 15% of young people at risk (Mitev 1998). For those young people who cannot be present where they are registered on the day of the election, the right to vote is also threatened (EACEA 2010). An active social engagement is often understood to be a sufficient criterion for subsequent active political participation, but there is a **lack of bridging structures** that lead to political participation (CAP 2013). Moreover, there is a lack of understanding of how different aspects of life are interconnected as, for example, access of young people to culture is predominantly understood by policy makers as the need to increase access to classical and traditional forms of art and culture whereas policies tend to perceive access of young people to culture as something related to "leisure".

Money, geographical constraints and time remain the main obstacles for the lasting engagement of young people. National reports show that major obstacles are money constraints, attitudes (not only of the public in general but of young people themselves), geographical limitations (dichotomy between urban and rural environments, lack of physical access such as transport), time (at least in the perception of young people), social environment, and also what is on offer, meaning that the offer does not always correspond to the needs and necessities of young people.

Geographical disparities in the provision of services means that only those living in certain areas (usually larger cities) have access to the range of local engagement

opportunities, whereas for those living in rural areas the cost of transport or the lack of information can be a problem.

Institutional structures and practices

Formal politics and different engagement structures as closed systems are less accessible for particular groups, especially for women, the lower educated or younger people (Vanhoutte 2009), those living in rural areas or those having less economic means. This leads to the legitimacy gap between the institutions and population (Dobbernack 2009).

A low level of effectiveness and efficiency of institutions and organisations is undermining efforts and discouraging young people. As structures in general are resisting change, many young people and practitioners have become disillusioned with the process (Barber 2009).

Lack of inter-sector co-operation between different government institutions as well as between governments and civil society leads to fragmented and inefficient policies and measures. The results in such situations are incoherent social inclusion policies, which represent another barrier to full engagement (Carcillo et al. 2015).

Youth participation as a part of **learning citizenship and democracy in the school context seems to be a great challenge** (CAP 2014). There is an evident lack of citizenship education in school curriculums. Besides, schoolteachers do not regard it as their task to prepare young people for active participation in political life (Widmaier 2014)

Civil society policies and practices

The organisational culture of civil society organisations and their capacity to involve young people democratically is often not supportive (Barber 2009). For instance, a high level of organisational activity among immigrants does not have a centralised and representative character (Gezici Yalcin 2009). Besides, time-limited projects implemented by CSOs are not sustainably contributing to youth engagement. Moreover, a substantive link between the project work with the local social and political agenda is often missing (CAP 2014).

Representation within youth organisations is also somehow contested. There exists a problematic divide between national and European youth participation organisations on the one hand and grassroots or community-based youth organisations on the other (EACEA 2010).

The quality of youth work enabling youth engagement is often questionable. Youth work profession is not recognised in many countries and even more of European states are lacking youth work quality assurance mechanisms. Additionally, some research findings raise questions about individualistic fallacies and cultural biases in youth work practices and policies (Van de Walle, Coussee and Bouverne-De Bie 2011).

Limiting engagement practices

Coverage and outreach are usually insufficient. The "pistachio effect" encapsulates Foucault's theory of performativity perfectly, and its perverse effects: the very policies and practitioners tasked with promoting social inclusion and engaging young people are actually picking easy choices and leaving those "hard to open" aside. By such an approach, they are managing to realise project targets in relation to numbers, but failing to involve those most in need.

Youth engagement is limited by predefined domains of interest. Quite often it is heard that participation shall be ensured in the field of relevant policy processes for young people (CAP 2014) whereas young people can be interested in any topic no matter whether it directly influences their lives.

Institutional approaches and methods used often limit access to citizenship rights. Projects and policy measures seem to be largely based on a "fitting young people in" approach. They tend to focus on strengthening young people's capacity to articulate their concerns in the political arena (and less at encouraging politicians to initiate a dialogue with young people) (Pantea 2014).

Social contexts and changes

The proportion of the EU25 population over 65 is forecast to rise from almost 16% in 2000 to 22% in 2025 and 30% in 2050, contrasting with 9% a century earlier in 1950. Due to this **rapid demographic change**, young people are facing growing challenges to finding their place in a society where older generations, who are stereotypically more conservative and reluctant to change, are becoming a majority (Schwarzmayr 2009).

Different histories and social change processes have to be considered when analysing citizenship across Europe. For instance, Poland and Lithuania, having gone through an intensive transitional process after Communism, emphasize the civic citizenship dimension of social participation, whereas in England and Germany participation is more seen and implemented in its political impact (CAP 2013).

The **spread of consumerism** among young people might be a serious challenge to their belonging and active participation, as it presents a shift away from collective solidarity and ideological engagement (Kovacheva 2005).

Social perceptions and presentations

Young people are probably one of the most visible groups in society. However, the **media image of youth culture and young people is often negative, unfavourable and problem-filled**. For young people to be engaged in society as members with full rights and responsibilities, and to feel themselves to be recognised and respected, there is a need for a change in this projection.

The social perception of young people represents an obstacle in different ways. Young people run the risk of being considered more "passive" than "active" actors by different parts of society (for example, politicians, advertising, the education system). Besides, there is no full recognition of the social inequity faced by a significant number of young people (Barber 2009). Moreover, young people in the main have not been encouraged to get involved in adult decision making because of their perceived lack of maturity and some would argue that this is the central issue within any genuine debate on youth citizenship (see Cardiff Declaration 2005). Above and beyond, fear of young people is present in European societies. "Fear" refers to the socially constructed perception of youth as synonymous with rebellion and deviancy. Fear of young people is a global phenomenon, quite often finding expression in moral panics in society and community (Barber 2009).

Attitudes, awareness and understanding

The way identity is constructed is based on a constant potential for "othering" implicated in citizenship. If people become self-conscious of their European citizenship in this "othering" way, they seek to define and guard a particular version of "European" through rules of citizenship that keep those designated as "non-European" out (Jamieson and Grundy 2005), which often leads to rise of undemocratic associations (Widmaier 2014).

Young people often **feel discriminated** against their own religion, colour and sexual identity, which poses serious obstacles to youth engagement (EACEA 2012). Feeling discriminated against because of colour and religion scores as the strongest reason for disenfranchisement.

There is a narrowed understanding of democracy and citizenship across Europe. The claim "To strengthen democracy" is based on the assumption that the culture of participation can be improved through an enhanced dialogue of young people and decision makers (CAP 2014). It can be observed that apparent apathy and the lack of participation

among young people, revealed by a growing tendency not to participate in elections or by the fall in membership of political parties, trade unions and NGOs, may be misleading. It may simply reflect a lack of trust in political institutions and organisations, as well as a shift towards new emerging forms of expression, which are not so easy to examine, such as the Internet (Forbrig 2005). However, young people's trust in institutions depends considerably on the country context. Major differences are observed between Nordic and high-income countries (higher) and Central and Eastern European countries (Eurofound 2014).

Ageism is widely spread through social and political institutions and there are real **tensions between youth activism and formal institutional politics** when young people and politicians try to work together (Fominaya as cited in Huang 2014). Traditional political thinking has excluded children and young people from the role of political subject (Kiilakoski and Gretschel 2014). "Adultising" refers to behaviour by adults who do not fully accept young people as they are. Instead there are great efforts (sometimes overt, sometimes manipulative, paternalistic and hidden) that seek to accept young people only if they mimic "responsible" adult values and behaviour (Barber 2009). Further, participation events are usually structured by adults where young people have to accept pre-given roles, structures and even discourse (Kiilakoski and Gretschel 2014).

Gender turns out to be a powerful predictor for citizenship and participation. Heteronormative, patriarchal values are predefining roles (Takacs 2009). One traditional explanation in terms of gender roles is that boys are expected and stimulated to be more involved in the public domain, where girls are more involved in the private domain. Women are "supposed" to be more compassionate (Vanhoutte 2009), which leads young men to be more self-confident about their political skills (Ekman 2009). Gender-based discrimination is also present within families, with the legal instrument enabling it. In some countries, for instance, Muslim parents are allowed to deny their daughters the right to participate in co-educational activities such as school trips or swimming, under the banner of respect for cultural difference and diversity (Mojab as cited in Kakabaveh 2007).

2.5.1.2. Personal

<u>Awareness and information</u>

"Status ambiguity" refers to the phenomenon of **not knowing the extent of your own rights and responsibilities** and this has significant effects on the sense of purpose felt by both adults and young people (Barber 2009).

A lack of information or being outside the social networks that would provide relevant information prevents young people from participating in different activities taking place in their communities.

<u>Willingness and capacity</u>

Participation depends on the **willingness and capacity of individuals to engage with each other** (Sullke 2009). Not taking part may be caused by a lack of will. Perhaps, people simply do not want to participate. It may not feel meaningful enough. We don't feel motivated, have too little to say. We may not understand or trust each other. So, we choose to not take part (Stigendal 2006).

The lack of competencies is another obstacle. Young people may not wish to participate because they are not familiar with a "problem-solving" approach, which may help them to better understand aims and priorities of their individual and collective walks of life without being blocked by problems they are not willing and/or able to face (Demicheli and Boaria 2009). Civic knowledge is the main predictor of future voting, and is also significant in participation in legal demonstrations (Ekman 2009). In relation to e-participation, the level of digital skills remains an issue for some, mostly with a low educational level (Killakoski and Gretschel 2014).

Young people today **may not be aware** of their potential and thus live without being conscious of the importance of playing an active role and having a say in society. They are also usually not fully aware of the complexity of our global society and they lack instruments to understand and face this issue in a positive manner (Demicheli and Boaria 2009).

A preoccupation with survival on a day-to-day basis can result in little time or energy being available to access and participate in community initiatives.

<u>Self-perception and motivation</u>

Uncertainty of the future for today's young people significantly undermines their **motivation for engagement** and diminishes trust in democratic institutions and leaders (Fominaya as cited in Huang 2014) as well as civil society organisations.

Young people perceive themselves as very autonomous rather than as rooted in local traditions and shared conditions. Thus, they are unlikely to become mobilised by common causes.

2.5.2. Critical reflection

Barriers for the engagement of young people in community life are complex and interconnected, including individual attitudes, institutional structures, organisational

practices, social dynamics and unsuitable policies. Additionally, causal relation is observed as, for example, providing an opportunity for participation is irrelevant if prior to that young person is not informed and empowered to use it. But even before, active engagement can only be reached if basic existential conditions of life are fulfilled or have the prospect of being fulfilled.

At both national and local levels, the concept of social exclusion tends to be linked primarily to unemployment and related socio-economic factors, thus limiting the attention given to cultural, leisure time activities and other forms of engagement. For instance, there is an evident lack of recognition of the importance of access to culture services and opportunities as a means to reduce exclusion at national policy levels which leads to the lack of programmes to support it. Moreover, the lack of systematic connection and coherent policies between different institutions is observed.

Three types of groups are perceived to be most at risk of exclusion from engagement opportunities: those who are economically disadvantaged and lacking the financial or social means to access activities (in particular the unemployed and poor); refugees and immigrants; and young people with disabilities. Disabled people in particular face a range of barriers from lack of physical access to lack of specific support for visual, aural or other impairments.

Family and social environment are fundamental elements in encouraging youth engagement. Moreover, social relations, peer interactions and school have an essential role in ensuring young people's engagement in social processes.

Most of the challenges relating to youth engagement have so far been addressed at policy or programme level. However, the insights gained from this mapping exercise call for interventions at the 'public philosophies' level (Hall and Taylor 1996), as changes in beliefs and attitudes are needed for a substantive change to happen.

2.5.3. Recommendations

Strategic directions

- Policies at different levels need to recognise the **role that community engagement plays in addressing the needs of people who are socially excluded**.

- **Engagement needs to be broadly defined**; it goes way beyond political participation to embrace opportunities that enhance the quality of life for everyone and provide access routes out of marginalisation and unemployment.

- Youth engagement needs sufficient time, supporting structures, professional accompaniment by youth workers and adults, and a clear political will (CAP 2013). The diversity of young people requires many different approaches in order to involve young people and foster youth participation (CAP 2014). Thus, different participatory mechanisms should be in place. Moreover, young people are not a homogeneous group and need **differentiated, co-ordinated and long-term policies for ensuring youth engagement**.

- Effective youth engagement requires the **development of individual competences as well as structural changes** to strengthen opportunities for immigrants, minorities and disadvantaged groups. Beyond a culture of participation, the **legal and political framework** must be provided (CAP 2014).

Access

- Encourage **engagement of young people in disadvantaged areas** (rural, economically challenged, islands, etc.) through new technologies, specific programmes and displacement of activities to remote or disadvantaged areas.

- **Access to decision-making** processes should be enabled **through co-management structures** at local, national and European level.

- **Access to information** seems to be a crucial theme in many countries; information tends to be disperse and hard to localise. Besides, it is important to ensure the provision of information that is easy to understand.

Institutional and organisational approaches

- It is necessary to **develop and promote specialised training for teachers, youth workers and culture professionals** in youth cultures, new technologies, intercultural competences, arts education, cultural rights and cultural awareness.

- As social inclusion and educating for civic engagement should be interconnected, stronger involvement and systematic development of **civic education** as an actor for the implementation of youth participation structures is needed as well as further democratisation of schools. Therefore learning participation should not only take place in projects of youth work but also be linked to curricular and decision-making activities at school (CAP 2014).

- Active citizenship and youth participation cannot develop without a **wider learning process** which has to include not only all young people, but also families, institutions, organisations, educators, teachers and political actors (CAP 2014). People should be educated to share knowledge of how to use conventional as well as unconventional methods of participation to pursue their own concerns (environmental, social, health, gender politics, etc.) (Ehs 2009).

- There is a strong necessity of a **cross-sectorial approach** in promoting youth engagement as youth participation in political and social affairs is inevitably connected to their participation in education, training, employment, and their well-being in social, economic, physical and psychological aspects in life (Huang 2014). This is especially relevant when working with social outcast groups (such as hooligans, neo-Nazis).

- Being **present and accessible over time** facilitates quality engagement, and not just at times of crisis (Huang 2014). Thus it is important to ensure continuity of programmes, especially at local level.

Social context and attitudes

- Supporting **participation in community-based activities** can celebrate the cultural diversity and improve understanding and tolerance towards different cultures and encourage participation from minority ethnic groups so as to enhance their integration in society.

- Enabling **exchanges, learning mobility programmes and intercultural communication programmes** in order to strengthen the feeling of belonging to highly diverse European communities.

- In relation to **media and campaigning**, more emphasis should be put on exhibiting the similarities between the group identities rather than differences, through to increased involvement of young people in the media (Vasilyan 2009). Cultural, ethnic, sexual and social class diversity should not be seen as a source of potential problems and conflicts. Intercultural contacts and learning should be promoted to foster mutual understanding and engagement.

Personal development

- It is important to **involve young people in decision-making processes** to the extent possible and to promote self-generated organised activities for young people instead of "top-down" structures. That will contribute to developing differentiated policies and programmes for different youth groups. There is a need to evaluate what young people themselves consider important in terms of engagement, as well as what their expectations are.

2.5.4. Relevant practices

In **Germany,** a creative approach to engage young people was developed. Across Berlin, young people (aged 14-18) from minority backgrounds have designed and delivered walking tours of their neighbourhoods aimed at visitors. This is a partnership project between local schools and neighbourhood management teams. The tours reflect the young people's own perspective of the neighbourhood, for example Route 65 is delivered by two Pakistani brothers who focus on their primary interests of "rap and religion". Route 66 covers the district of Wedding, where everyone is different. Route 68 in Neukölln provides an insight into the lives of young Turkish women.

The Route Guides model acknowledges the value of the local knowledge held by these young people. Through their involvement they acquire a wide variety of skills and aptitudes (planning, dealing with the public, communications, team-work etc.) that are helpful in the labour market – but also strong skills for life.

In the **Balkans region,** the Young Men Initiative (YMI) is a multi-country initiative led by CARE International Balkans working with a network of youth organisations in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo and Albania engaging lower-income young men (including from minority groups), primarily from vocational schools (including some that dropped out of school). The programme aims to address social inequalities within society, especially around social norms addressing masculinity and what it means to be a man in society. Lower-income young men are often more marginalised within society and engage in more risky behaviours that affect their health, well-being and level of engagement.

YMI addresses multiple barriers affecting the positive youth development of the participants within their programme. These barriers include: 1) harmful socialisation and gender norms that promote a hyper-masculine culture that contributes to poor health practice; 2) interpersonal violence that affects many of the participants in their everyday lives; and 3) lack of opportunity to engage with community structures and influence policies that affect their lives.

In close co-operation with schools, youth workers, researchers, CSOs and governments, YMI seeks to promote positive masculine role models, non-violence, healthy lifestyles and gender equality through a combination of educational workshops and community campaigns. YMI's curriculum is designed to elicit critical reflection on the social driver of violence and risky health behaviours. YMI also promotes more positive peer culture among adolescent boys, particularly around the issue of high-risk alcohol consumption, which is linked to an increased likelihood of violence in many settings and is prevalent in the region. YMI's guiding philosophy is that boys should be understood not as obstacles to peace and gender equality, but rather as critical allies in promoting non-violent, healthy relationships and communities.

3. Intricate barriers: the accumulation and embeddedness

The "youth" period is rich in life transitions. Young people are expected to be successful in completing education and/or vocational training, to enter the labour market and, eventually, to leave their parental homes. They are expected to do so in a specific order (which does not vary considerably from country to country) and, especially, they are expected – and sometimes want – to do so in a relatively short period of time. Very often the reality is

different and many young people lack the status, rights and power – and sometimes will – to perform in such a standardised and "success-oriented" way. They are constrained by poverty, by their extended dependence on the family and state in the transition to independent living, and by limited opportunities available to them for higher education, employment, housing and/or citizenship, making them vulnerable to social exclusion (European Commission 2012).

Natalia was 18 when she was still living in horrible conditions with an aunt, which caused her health problems. She moved to a shelter and lost most of her social contacts, which led to lower self-esteem. She ended up without any future plans...
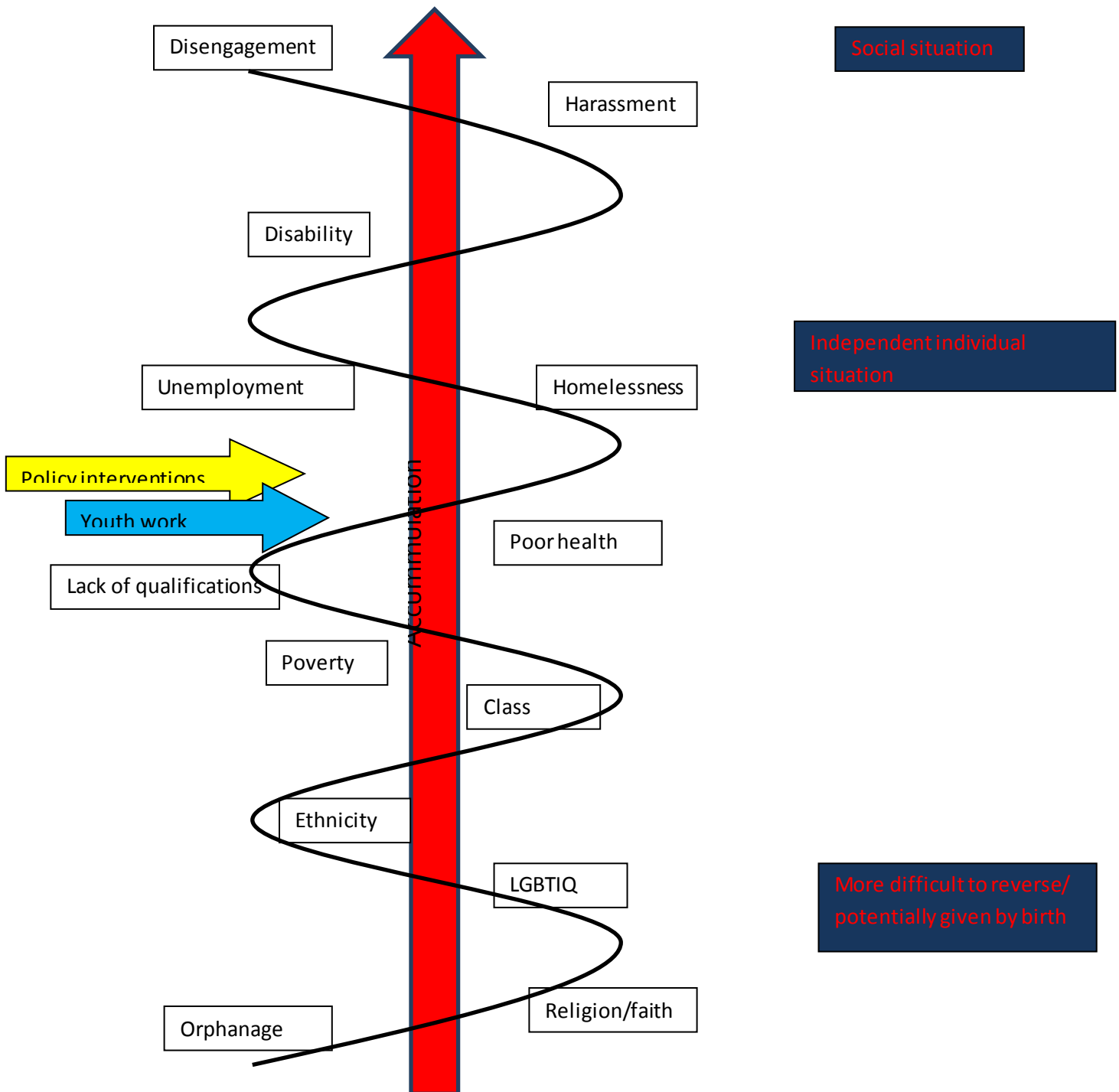
Sure Start: Care leavers integration programme (www.p4ec.org.ua)

Young Men Initiative member (16) is one of five children in a poor one-parent family. Due to financial conditions, they had to move to another city where they were religiously different from the majority of the population. He was bullied by peers because of his name and darker skin. Additionally, he was denied a right to documents by the local administration office.

Barriers to social inclusion can accumulate, act as a cause or be an effect of previous exclusion. Moreover, intersections of identities and situations can further accelerate exclusion (e.g. a black teenager would face far fewer challenges than a black, gay, disabled young person). Social exclusion is therefore a multidimensional issue manifested through a combination of linked problems. Those problems can accumulate to create even more complex and challenging situations. Furthermore, as a dynamic process that takes place over time, social exclusion carries the risk of producing inter-generational effects, as cumulative disadvantage is passed on from one generation to the next (Williamson 2007).

To illustrate how they can accumulate, we introduced an example graph in the section on conceptual framework at the beginning of this paper. After analysing the identified barriers, we recognised the possibility to further expand it by introducing a third category of situations that can increase exclusion – a social dimension. Additionally, after consultations during the Conference on the role of Youth Work in supporting young people in vulnerable situations, we developed the following graph:

Accumulation of barriers

Disengagement

Harassment

Disability

Unemployment

Homelessness

Policy interventions

Youth work

Poor health

Lack of qualifications

Poverty

Class

Ethnicity

LGBTIQ

Orphanage

Religion/faith

Accumulation

Social situation

Independent individual situation

More difficult to reverse/ potentially given by birth

This graphic presentation of the dynamic between different vulnerable situations and potential interventions can be interpreted in the following ways:

a) **Accumulation** most usually "climbs" from the bottom upwards, adding to a more complex interconnection and mutual enforcement between barriers. For example, poverty and disability contribute to the vulnerability of potential school drop-outs that would further lead to more likely unemployment, causing housing difficulties and disengagement from the community.

b) The **role of youth work** is multiple: youth work programmes can empower young people to forestall and even reverse (thereby turning down) the accumulation arrow by, for example, providing learning support to keep an individual in schooling, informing young person about, for example, health care, political rights. Besides, youth work can provide interventions that target specific vulnerable situations through, for instance, the development of competencies to raise employability.

c) **Policy interventions** can similarly influence the life of a young socially excluded person by targeted interventions (for example, social housing opportunities to address homelessness). Besides, policies can aim to create a more supportive environment for people in vulnerable situations, by changing public philosophies, introducing anti-discrimination legislation, etc., performing in this case a more preventive role. On the other hand, particular policy instruments can also have a negative impact on social inclusion (for example, health care being conditioned by the legal status).

The most beneficial is the situation when policy measures and youth work interventions are aligned, which calls for closer inter-sector co-operation. Policy intervention, itself, implies efficient collaboration, communication and/or co-ordination between different ministries or equivalent agencies.

Beyond interconnections between specific barriers and situations, we have also identified particularly critical transitional periods along the life of a young person – namely, those transitions from education to work and from family to independent living – that not surprisingly correspond to two of the most researched and compared topics in youth studies. However, no matter in which life phase and situation a person is, economic deprivation is seen to have a major influence and contributes to the propensity for young person to face all other social exclusion barriers. It is one of the major causes and major consequences of any process of social exclusion.

Considering the specific domains analysed in this paper, we have identified numerous interconnections between them and how they present both causes and effects of exclusionary patterns. Dynamics and influences that appeared strongest or most frequent are described in the paragraphs below.

Education is recognised to be at the core of a complex social exclusion web as a higher education attainment level is presumed to provide an individual with an opportunity for higher earnings, higher productivity and easier integration in the world of work. School is also seen to be relevant in the context of political participation, as young people with a high education level are three times less likely to be politically apathetic than those who are less educated (Vanhoutte 2009). On the other hand, people with poor skills face a much greater risk of experiencing economic disadvantage, and a higher likelihood of unemployment and dependency on social benefits.

The concept of social exclusion also tends to be primarily linked to unemployment and related socio-economic factors. Working and having fair and favourable conditions of work is a human right is linked to human dignity because it is not only a way of guaranteeing the necessary financial means but it also allows the development of a function in society, to realise personal development, fulfil our ambitions, learn new skills and qualifications, become part of the social network and remain up to date. For all those reasons, not just for the financial one, employment is often considered as the key to social inclusion or as the antidote to social exclusion. On the other hand, unemployment, precariousness and/or lack of dignifying working conditions usually leads to poorer health, fewer education opportunities and lower social engagement.

Housing and social exclusion are closely linked and further interconnected to other domains mapped in this paper, particularly with education, employment and health. Unemployment, or precarious employment, is probably the main barrier for ensuring a decent housing or achieving residential autonomy. The difficulties for access to decent housing are also caused by low levels of education and health problems. As a consequence, being homeless or in a situation of housing exclusion very much limits the possibilities of enjoying education, finding a job and having a healthy life.

A person's health results largely from inherent factors, lifestyle, and access to and quality of health care. Social exclusion can be triggered by poor health, and may also reinforce health problems, for example, where unemployment results in barriers to health care. Ill-health may be a barrier to inclusion in other areas, especially participation, education and employment. Poor health and disability can themselves generate exclusionary processes – by limiting people's ability to find and retain paid work for example, or through the stigma often associated with ill-health further restricting social participation. Disease and ill-health are thus both products of and contribute to exclusionary processes. Additionally, while it is widely accepted that inequalities persist in health status, cultural differences as regards the perception of health status also exist and this should be borne in mind (Eurostat 2010).

Community engagement depends very much on the availability of basic elements, such as legal and civil status, political knowledge, social security and cultural identification (Süllke

2009). Among the most important barriers that prevent young people from more active participation are: "ever longer economic dependence on their family; unemployment pressures; a diminishing role of politically active autonomous peer groups; and the consequent retreat into petty, banal private shells" (Kuhar 2005: 58). There is a clear lack of opportunities for and political inclusion of young people who are systemically excluded (through poverty, unemployment, linguistic, ethnic or social integration) (EACEA 2010). On the other hand, for example, lower community engagement will result in weaker social networks, potentially reducing employment opportunities.

4. Final conclusions and general recommendations

The first purpose of this paper was to identify and present different barriers to social inclusion of young people in five domains and to better understand their impact and consequences on young people in vulnerable situations.

Despite the efforts made by several institutions, barriers that young people face in the area of employment, housing, education, health and civic engagement are still numerous. For further efficient and effective evidence-based policy-making we have clustered them in two groups: structural and contextual barriers and personal barriers (understood as specific individual circumstances, not as individual failures). All those barriers and particularly the accumulation or combination of them create the unfavourable circumstances that puts young people at the risk of exclusion from life opportunities. Thus, identifying the stage of exclusion at which a person is situated is fundamental to any intervention.

To what extent do specific forms of exclusion derive from individual choice and circumstances, from family situations, schooling or neighbourhood contexts, or from wider social and economic infrastructures? The answer is invariably a combination of all of these as explored in the previous chapter devoted to the relations and influences between barriers and it is precisely this combination that leads to the social exclusion of young people.

The analysis shows that the terminology used to describe the position of young people is shifting from labelling individuals from so-called vulnerable groups to the more appropriate use of young people in vulnerable situations. This approach, apart from avoiding any kind of social labelling and stigmatisation, is probably more adequate for addressing the changing circumstances and the different life routes of young people. But still so far in most cases the existing analysis, public policies and civil society practices are "target group oriented" instead of "situation oriented". This paper has explored this "situation oriented" approach but it is based on documents and practices that are in most cases "target group oriented". The analysis has hopefully shown that this situational and human rights based approach should be further strengthened especially when it comes to policy making.

When it comes to the building of the most effective and efficient approach to deal with social exclusion, two main policy dilemmas are raised:

- individualised approaches (supporting individuals in adapting to the demands of education, labour market, housing …) versus structure oriented approaches (making structural opportunities more accessible and relevant to young people in vulnerable situations)

- preventive (addressing risk factors of vulnerability) versus compensatory measures (trying to alleviate accumulated barriers).

A success factor of policies is defining their objectives not from the institutional perspectives but from the perspectives and needs of the individuals. Even if wider contexts like families, peers and communities should be considered, when taking into consideration the barriers that young people face, the programmes and measures for supporting young people in vulnerable situations should be mainly based on their biography, values, skills and subjective orientations so they can take a role as key actors in their route to inclusion. (Colley, Boetzelen, Hoskins and Parveva 2007).

The second purpose of this paper was to contribute to the shaping and development of policies aimed at eliminating barriers, allowing and empowering young people in vulnerable situations to become actors of their own inclusion processes. For the above-mentioned reasons (situation-oriented approach mostly based on target-oriented data) not all the recommendations developed for each domain come from a complete new analysis. The recommendations are rooted in the work of the organisations behind this mapping (EU, Council of Europe and the numerous NGOs and institutes working as partners with these institutions), and some of them, as the references show, have been directly taken from previous documents. But they have the value of having been filtered, discussed, critically revised, specified and complemented in the light of this new situation-based approach in the consultation spaces associated to this mapping exercise; the "Mapping of barriers to social inclusion for young people in vulnerable situations" expert meeting organised in Strasbourg (30 September to 2 October 2014) and the conference on the role of youth work in supporting young people in vulnerable situations organised in Malta (25-28 November 2014).

The following general recommendations were identified in those consultations as common among the five domains of study and should be always considered in relation to the specificities of the different contexts.

- To strengthen the representation and direct participation of young people in vulnerable situations in the design, implementation and evaluation of all the policies relevant to them. Young people in vulnerable situations should be not objects but actors of those policies.

- To work with a holistic approach in the implementation of social inclusion policies and programmes, in partnership with all the relevant social actors (public authorities,

schools, employers, police, NGOs, families) at national level and to promote cross-sectorial policies against exclusion at European level.

- To strengthen the mechanisms of monitoring, evaluation and quality development of the social inclusion programmes.

- To facilitate access to young people in vulnerable situations to information, to social programmes and to social justice. Very often complicated and complex procedures and inflexible rules become an extra barrier to the effective enjoyment of rights and of programmes addressed to them.

- To promote policies and programmes which allow complete and long-term processes so that they can be effective in completing the uneasy route to social inclusion. An example of such a complete process cycle, as proposed by Howard Williamson, would be:
  - Awareness: on a certain vulnerable situation
  - Access: Through inclusive routes to the programmes addressing that situation
  - Action: Make effective use of those programmes through support mechanisms like mentoring
  - Accreditation: Formal recognition of experience, progress and achievements made
  - Advancement: Facilitate the progress by setting supportive stepping stones on the route towards inclusion

These general recommendations convey the final idea of this mapping exercise; as the accumulation of barriers prevents social inclusion, the policies and strategies to overcome those barriers should be holistically defined and go beyond a series of more or less co-ordinated actions. This holistic approach would imply guaranteeing the access of young people to all different programmes (justified by their situation at a certain time) that work independently (education, employment, housing …) and promoting holistic specific programmes addressing extreme situations of social exclusion.

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