

Joint EPR and EASPD Webinar on Transitions from School or Training to Employment for Young People with Disabilities – Good practices and success factors

7 December 2022, 14:00-16:00 CET, Online (Zoom)

Report

1) Contextualisation & Concept Note

Adolescents and young adults, especially those with a disadvantaged background and fewer opportunities, e.g., due to disabilities, migration, risks to fall into poverty and social exclusions, are facing **barriers in accessing the labour market and becoming economically independent**. The COVID-19 pandemic and the related economic downturn have had a negative impact on these groups, leading to new challenges and an urgent need to provide adequate individual support. The design of **pathways for young people with disabilities (YPWD) to successfully transition from school, vocational education and training (VET) or inactivity into employment** is thus highly relevant across Europe, given the persistent high unemployment and unacceptably high inactivity rates in particular for more vulnerable groups or socially or economically disadvantaged adolescents and young adults.

One key aim and focus of the [European Year 2022 of Youth](#) is to improve the opportunities to shape i.a. a more inclusive future for young people in the EU. The [Disability Employment Package](#) issued on 20 September 2022 has as one thematic focus the promotion of pathways to the mainstream labour market. For **social service providers in the field of disability and vocational rehabilitation**, their staff and users, organising the successful transition from school or vocational training to employment is a permanent challenge, influenced by labour market developments as well as policies and legislative frameworks at the various levels of government and regulation in place in order to support this transition for young people with disabilities, but also by the knowledge about successful programmes, approaches and services.

In 2014, EPR published a [report on selected transition services for youth with disabilities in member organisations of EPR](#). It dealt with services to support the transition from school (secondary education) into vocational, employment and/or the community for young people for disabilities. It looked into programmes and approaches that EPR members were using with transition age youth (14 to 24 and beyond) to increase their independence and inclusion in the community and included recommendations. In the second half of 2022, the **EPR members involved in the Working Group Youth** have been collecting **good practices on transition programmes and services for YPWD from school or vocational education and training (VET) into employment**. The good practice used by EPR members CEDAR Foundation, Northern Ireland/UK, was presented at the webinar. The other good practice examples have been published in a **report in February 2023**. Both the full version and a 2-page summary can be accessed from this [page](#).

As part of the **Lighthouse Network EASPD's Member Forum on Education** develops a manual on how services can support persons with disabilities at key transition phases during their lives namely: Secondary School into employment. EASPD has thus also been organising a [collection of promising practices on the transition from education to employment](#). The manual which will

include a number of promising practices on how to support the transition at each phase currently is in the process of finalisation.

Towards the end of the European Year 2022 of Youth and ahead of the [European Year 2023 of Skills](#), EPR and EASPD thus decided to join forces for a webinar with its members and the interested public to present key findings from the **collection of good practices** and to discuss **success factors**, but also to have an exchange on **supportive legislative and policy frameworks** at the different levels of government and regulation.

2) Introduction

The **European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR)** and the **European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD)** decided to join forces for a [webinar](#) with their members – open to the interested public – to present and discuss key findings from the collection of good practices for services and pathways for young people with disabilities (YPWD) to successfully transition from school, vocational education and training (VET) or inactivity into employment done in recent months by both organisations. The webinar also and importantly looked into success factors of the transition programmes and what is needed in terms of supportive legislative and policy frameworks at different levels of government and regulation. The event on 7 December 2022 brought together about 40 participants. It was moderated by Mathias Maucher, EPR. Laura Jones, EPR, summarised the lessons learnt and made the concluding remarks.

3) Highlights from the presentations and the discussion

In the good practice session, **Benedetta Pesce, EPR**, [presented](#) highlights from the EPR Report “Young People with Disabilities and Transitions from School or Training to Employment”. It was elaborated in the 2nd half of 2022, based on a template to better structure the good practice examples and on input from 7 EPR members from 7 EU MS active in the EPR WG Youth.

Benedetta focused on the success factors and the recommendations for social service providers and policy makers jointly elaborated by the EPR members and the EPR Secretariat.

The following success factors for the transition programmes and services could be identified:

- Person-centered approach to support the identification of personal goals of YPWD, the elaboration of competence profiles, work integration and retention in the job.
- Improved skills and qualification levels of YPWD, combined with more confidence in their own capacities, also to ultimately obtain employment in the mainstream labour market.
- Quality of the team of professionals involved – and these professionals also being well-resourced and trained – and use of a multidisciplinary approach when cooperating with the relevant external stakeholders such as schools, employers, the Public Employment Service (PES), etc.
- Integrated service offer to young people, ranging from the identification of personal and professional goals and capacities, social support to increase the employability of YPWD as well as coaching and training of YPWD (covering both specific knowledge & job application training) to support services for YPWD to enter and stay in employment and support of YPWD at their workplace by job coaches.
- Coordination of different services as part of a comprehensive service package to support both YPWD in relation to their work and their social inclusion and employers, including in view of job placements in social enterprises.

- Work in partnership, including a close dialogue and interaction with employers to raise awareness about young people with special needs, providing information, advice and continuous support for employers to manage successful transitions from school or inactivity or vocational education and training (VET) to employment for YPWD.

A number of recommendations for social service providers was elaborated:

- Roll out comprehensive (work-related; addressing psycho-social needs) and/or integrated service offers.
- Pursue a holistic approach that promotes the positive health and social and emotional well-being of the young people.
- Support young people with special needs throughout the whole job finding phase and once they have started a job, based on a range of tools and services provided by job coaches (or similar professional profiles).
- Provide quality and continued training to the job coaches and enrich their functions/roles.
- Inform employers about the potential of employing YPWD and about the available accompanying measures (including financial support), encourage them to support the recruitment of YPWD and accompany them during the first phase of employment.
- Cooperate closely with Public Employment Services (PES) and employers, including social enterprises.

Finally, these are the recommendations for policy makers which could be identified:

- Set up regulatory frameworks to support the transition of YPWD from school or inactivity or vocational education and training (VET) to employment.
- Design, organise and adequately fund comprehensive and/or integrated service offers which link social services, labour market inclusion services and which effectively support employers in line with their needs.
- Invest in practical measures supportive of inclusive enterprises and oriented towards the changing the mindsets of employers vis-à-vis YPWD and of the organisational culture.
- Increase fines for employers who do not meet their legislative obligations, e.g. based on quota systems, to hire PWD.
- Promote and fund programmes based on supported employment.
- Overcome a deficit-based logic and shift to strengths-/capacity-/competence-based and “whole-person” approaches in policy frameworks.
- Adequately fund the scaling up of successful and positively evaluated EU-funded transition projects in line with the success factors set out above.

Tara Reddin, from EPR member **CEDAR Foundation**, Northern Ireland/UK, pointed to key features of the Transition Services offered by her employer.

CEDAR's Transitions Service aim to deliver a specialist holistic service that improves a young person's transitions readiness, when leaving school to secure socially inclusive and sustainable outcomes in their local communities. Cedar provides a regional service that fully involves young people and their families to co-produce a pathway for their life after school with regard to: education & work, community inclusion, health & wellbeing. It is delivered through a variety of intervention levels, including “1 to 1 Transition Readiness Support”, “Transition Advice Workshops” and “Personal Development Support”. Tara highlighted the multi-disciplinary nature of the work done by the CEDAR Transitions Officer which is very important to maximise success of the young persons' transition. They work with the family, the Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO) in the school, the local Education Authority Transitions Officer, social workers and any other professionals

involved in the young person's life to ensure a successful transition. As other success factors she highlighted the need to raise awareness of the needs of young disabled people, the quality of the team, the collaboration with relevant parties and the building up and sustaining of trusted relationship/trusted services.

The CEDAR Transition Services have an evaluated/evidence-based good track record. There is a 6-months tracking period after the completion of the service. The CEDAR foundation also receives and has used feedback from the YPWD after workshops and personal development programmes in which they have participated in to ensure the services offered are useful and worthwhile for the YPWD and their families.

Rachel Vaughan, EASPD, gave an overview on the "[EASPD Manual on the transition from education to employment](#)" after having shared summary information on the EASPD Member Forum on Education (set upon 2004) and the EASPD's Lighthouse Network was created to encourage our members to share solutions and learn from each other. EASPD's work on transition starts from the assumption that transition phases, including the one from education or training to employment, are crucial points at which PWD are at higher risk of exclusion.

The two main aims of the "[EASPD Manual on the transition from education to employment](#)" are to promote 1) peer to peer learning between members via in person study visits on the topic of the transition from education to employment and 2) the sustainability of this learning via the creation of a published manual. As for EPR, the work process towards the publication (still being work in progress) consisted in (i.a.) defining criteria for promising practices, identifying key phases of the transition process, reviewing and approving practices and writing up the manual. In addition, it also comprised study visits for EASPD members to learn more about the main features and success factors of the practice, its transferability to other context, etc.. As of today, they could collect good practices from 6 EU MS, namely Austria, Belgium, France, Italy, Romania and Spain.

Leading over to the illustration provided from Italy, Alternance School-Work (Alternanza Scuola Lavoro), Rachel pointed out highlights from 10 of the 11 practices already collected

1. Austria: LEA-Leben mit Epilepsie in der Arbeitswelt (Professional life with epilepsy)
2. Austria: FOKUS
3. Austria: SMaRT
4. Austria: TOL Dual - Transition towards open labour market
5. Belgium: Alternance vocational training special education
6. Belgium: Inclusive Adult Education (CVO Inclusief)
7. Belgium: Specialized Team Mediation
8. France: Accompanied Apprenticeship
9. Romania: JobDirect
10. Spain: Training Programmes for the Employment of "Auxiliaries of Florist" and of "Auxiliaries of Hospitality"

Dr. **Fabrizio Fea**, from the Italian EASPD member **Associazione Scuola Viva onlus**, Rome, presented a good practice from Italy, "Alternance School-Work", the 11th in the good practice collection of EASPD already realised.

This is an innovative teaching method that, through practical experience, helps consolidating the knowledge acquired at school and testing the aptitudes of students in the field, to enrich their training and to orient their study and, in the future, work paths, thanks to projects in line with their curriculum.

The “Alternance School-Work” is compulsory for all students in the last three years of any high school and. It is one of the most significant innovations of the “Buona Scuola” (Good School) Law in line with the principle of the open school. It provides 400 hours dedicated to work during the last three years of technical institutes and 200 hours for high schools, including for YPWD. The “Alternance School-Work” model differs from internships and apprenticeships in that it is structurally embedded in an educational pathway, within the programme of the last three years of upper secondary school. The approach involves three interlocutors: the company, the school and the users.

Fabrizio highlighted as strengths of the practice that it 1) promotes a strong interaction between school and world of work, not least for YPWD, 2) implements collaboration within a territory/local area, 3) represents an alternative place of learning as supplementing school learning and 4) can be easily scaled up. Possible weaknesses are the rather short duration of the internship and options to still improve the contents of the training programmes and the interaction between training and professional practice for the YPWD.

Ben Rowsome, an Irish member of the **Member of the Youth Committee** of the **European Disability Forum (EDF)**, brought in the user perspective and shared the experiences, proposals and requests from EDF.

Ben presented some data on the employment gap for young people with disabilities to show the need and urgency for having a comprehensive, inclusive, user-oriented and rights-based system of support services and measures in place for young people with disabilities:

- In 2019, 47.4% of persons with disabilities aged 20-29 were employed, compared to 57.8% of people without disabilities in the same age group.
- At EU level about 21.8% of young persons with disabilities (aged 18-24) were early school leavers compared to 9.7% for those without.
- 34.6% of young migrants with disabilities leave school early in comparison to 19.8% for young migrants without disabilities.
- In the EU 32.5% of persons with disabilities completed tertiary education or equivalent in 2019 against 43.6% for persons without.
- Investing in education for persons with disabilities decreases their relative disadvantage as the disability employment gap is lower for persons with higher education (14 pps) than for those with primary education only (28 pps).

He referred to still existing barriers for PWD when crossing borders and using their right to transnational mobility within the EU as “disability” is not assessed in the same way in the EU MS and EU MS often do not recognise the assessments done in the other EU – which implies that in crossing borders, e.g., as a student or apprentice, there is a risk that one loses her/his disability benefits services.

Ben also highlighted that barriers to completing education and obtaining qualifications also mean that young people with disabilities gain their first professional experience at an older age than their peers without disabilities. This results in workers with disabilities often filling more junior roles than other workers of the same age. The data and this “delay” are even more problematic against the backdrop of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) which clearly states the right to employment for PWD in equal conditions with the others and the right to quality and inclusive education. They also clearly show that young people with disabilities still face huge difficulties in the period of transition from education to Employment. The UN CRPD clearly states that all countries must provide inclusive education to everyone and that this “model” should become the norm whereas

in reality special schools – often hosted in segregated settings, too – are the only option for students with disabilities.

Ben mentioned that EDF supports the objectives and actions set out under the Youth Guarantee and other employment schemes to support vulnerable users, including YPWD. EDF welcomes that Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps have funds dedicated to support participants with disabilities and that the ALMA programme supports employment mobility for young people. EDF has provided input into the EU Quality Framework of Traineeships and wishes to see a strong focus on YPWD during the European Year 2023 of Skills. When it comes to youth employment and the transition from school and vocational education and training to employment, Ben pointed out some of the priorities and/or key asks of EDF:

- EU money should not be used to finance segregated and/or inaccessible settings. Sheltered employment places should not be supported but instead a supported employment approach where PWD are working together with the others.
- Provisions for reasonable accommodation are key for both inclusive education and employment of YPWD. More generally, segregated institutions should be left behind and inclusive settings should get more support in order to make the UN CRPD a reality for all young people. Ben in this context also referred to his own experience with him being fortunate to have been in inclusive education in secondary school, obtaining support from a special needs assistant to stay in mainstream education. He also explained that since he started studying, he receives support from the universities' Disability Service. Ben highlighted that he uses his own experience to closely work with the University Disability Service helping the staff there to set up appropriate support services for other students with special needs.
- It should be possible to cumulate disability benefits with money received from EU funds (and with other social benefits, not to penalise the taking up of a job/employment).
- There is a need to have easily accessible information about the programmes and the measures to support PWD.
- The involvement of PWD and their representative organisations in all stages of policy shaping has to be secured.

Concluding his intervention, Ben set out the conditions EDF considers essential for successful transitions from school or VET into employment:

- Access to quality continuous education or training
- Access to reasonable accommodation at work education training traineeship
- Access to mentoring coaching and career counselling
- Access to decent wages and disability benefits at the same time
- Access to correct, accessible information available in multiple formats about its rights when it comes to education employment and services available for the educational setting or work
- Access to mental health and general health services
- Access to peer support
- Access to funds for assistive technologies & supporting tools and services with Braille display, sign interpretation, speech to text easy read, etc.

4) Question and answers sessions, discussion, lessons learnt and conclusions

One question asked to the service providers following the good practice example presented by Tara was how YPWD are being referred to the support services. Tara replied that the CEDAG Transition Officers have regular meetings with (school) social workers, schools, Special Education Needs

Coordinator (SENCO) and Education Authorities. She added that clients can also self-refer themselves to their services and support staff. No direct reply was provided by any of the participants to the question “Which role play the users/the YPWD in the service delivery?”

Laura Jones announced that EPR would take up some of the topics and areas for action raised in the webinar in 2023, such as reasonable accommodation (in the context of the Inclusive Labour Market Alliance, created by EASPD and also involving (i.a.) EDF), (social services for) mental ill health and accured and supported career counselling for YPWD (in a project starting in early 2023).

Following all four inputs, the participants had the possibility to exchange on what they had heard and learned in **4 breakout groups. 3 questions** were put to the small discussion groups:

- What do you see as 3 main challenges supporting young people in transitions in their lives?
- Are there other success factors you consider important in ensuring good support for young people in transition?
- What would be 2 recommendations to funders or policy makers do to enable service providers to be able address those challenges or provide successful support?

Below we list the key (common) **points brought back from the breakout groups to the plenary by the 4 rapporteurs**:

- Challenges: 1) The transition process should be driven by the needs and expectations of the YPWD and seen in the broader framework of working towards inclusive societies; 2) Need to avoid benefit traps when transitioning into employment; 3) Lack of easily accessible and readable information; 4) Get personalised individual support for YPWD in their transition; 5) Need for better training of the professionals working with the social service providers to be able to provide support for young persons on the autism spectrum
- Success factors: 1) Intensive cooperation between education, health and social departments and services; 2) Good partnerships of schools and service providers with employers; 3) Strengthening self confidence and building up trust in transition services and programmes; 4) Well trained staff and YPWD regarding digital skills; 5) Importance to apply a supported employment approach
- Recommendations: 1) Need to provide sufficient funding for high-quality transition services and programmes; 2) Apply methods of co-design and co-production, involving YPWD and brining in their knowledge and experiences, for the transition services and programmes; 3) Use EU funds to address the challenges listed and to be directed towards the success factors

5) Evaluation

The evaluation (based on 8 replies and summed up for answers to 6 questions) was very positive (4.7/5). Participants, among other points, appreciated an “excellent facilitation, good clear information on the agenda and break-out group opportunities” and the fact that the facilitation “respected everybody involved.”

Annex

Programme

1) Welcome and Introduction

14:00

Welcome and Introduction

Mathias Maucher, Senior Project and Programme Officer, EPR

Rachel Vaughan, Head of Operations, EASPD

2) Good practices

14:10

Presentation of key findings of the EPR good practice collection on transition programmes and services for young people with disabilities from school or training to employment

Benedetta Pesce, Junior Project and Events Officer, EPR – followed by Q&A session

14:25

Presentation of main insights from promising practices on the transition from education to employment identified by Lighthouse Network EASPD Member Forum on Education

Rachel Vaughan, Head of Operations, EASPD – followed by Q&A session

14:40

Good practice examples by EPR and EASPD members: Key features, challenges, success factors

Tara Reddin, Service Manager – Transitions, Employment and Community Inclusion Services, Derry, CEDAR Foundation, Northern Ireland

&

Dr. Fabrizio Fea, Associazione Scuola Viva onlus, Rome, Italy & Board Member, EASPD

Moderation of good practice presentation session: **Mathias Maucher**, Senior Project and Programme Officer, EPR

3) Bringing in the views, expectations and requests of users

15:15

Which experiences, proposals and requests has the European Disability Forum (EDF)

Ben Rowsome, Member of EDF Youth Committee, Ireland (nominated by Autism Europe)

4) Mutual learning and exchange

15:25

Exchange with EPR and EASPD members and other participants on supportive legislative and policy frameworks and on success factors for transition programmes/measures/services

Organised in breakout groups

Moderation of reporting back session from breakout groups: **Laura Jones**, Secretary General, EPR

15:55

Lessons learnt & Closing remarks

Laura Jones, Secretary General, EPR

16:00

End