



EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



Policy Transfer and Comparative Frameworks

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INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of the Great Recession, the urgency of the youth problem, in many parts of Europe, led to policy responses involving learning, transfer, and experimentation in order to address the complex needs of youth at risk. EU initiatives for a common focus among member states on comprehensive and integrated policies for youth at risk has accelerated mutual learning and experimentation and new practices for improving labour market outcomes for youth. We examined the institutional and governance of school-to-work (STW) transition policies that facilitate or hinder policy learning and innovation. Our main findings indicate that local/regional administrations and agencies are more likely to exchange knowledge on policy processes and tools between themselves and also to get involved in cross-country mutual policy learning. Policy experimentation is facilitated by a mode of policy governance based on regional/local partnerships and networks of public services, professional bodies and education/training providers, employers, youth associations, and other stakeholders. The role of policy entrepreneurs in promoting policy learning and transfer is crucial in this respect too. Yet, for policy learning and innovation to yield results of sustained labour market integration of youth, a national policy environment is required that is conducive to coordinated sharing and diffusion of information and experience between different levels of administration and joint stakeholders' bodies, from the bottom up and vice versa.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

Denmark, the Netherlands, the UK and, to some extent France, stand out as rather 'proactive', though to varying degrees and through different mechanisms. Belgium, Greece, Spain, Slovakia and Turkey show a higher inclination to path dependency or inertia. Nevertheless, in France and the UK, innovative policies do not seem to yield significant outcomes in dealing with the youth problem of drastically reducing youth unemployment (particularly in France). In particular effectively tackling the NEETs problem and the risk of poverty and social exclusion among the young (as well as gender disparities in this respect) remains a significant issue.

A public debate on the mismatch between the skills provided by the educational and VET systems, and those required at the workplace, constitutes a significant driver of policy change in Denmark, the Netherlands and, partly, in the UK. In the first two countries coordinated diffusion of evidence/knowledge

between different levels of government and stakeholders feeds into policy decision making, while in the UK competition and choice leave little room for this, except for policy fine-tuning. France, Greece, and Slovakia provide some examples of EU influence opening a “window of opportunity” for local policy entrepreneurs to act as pull factors for major reform in VET/education.

(1) Foci of innovation

The case studies conducted in the nine countries have shown three main foci of innovation for addressing STW transition barriers and difficulties: (a) A novel way of governance in policy design and delivery often referred to as a “triple” or “multiple” helix, which involves collaboration between the public administration, professional bodies and education/training providers, employers, youth associations, and other stakeholders interested in employment growth and youth labour market integration. This is illustrated by two regions in the Netherlands: Mid-Brabant and Amsterdam. Both cases involve extensive cross-regional learning and develop a partnership-based mode of policy governance. (b) A commitment to an integrated preventive and proactive approach that combines services and provides comprehensive support tailored to individual needs (in Denmark, the Netherlands, and partly in the UK and France). And (c) in countries where the active path of a youth guarantee is a novel policy (Greece, Slovakia, Spain) designing and delivering individually tailored services and coordinating the system at the national level pose a challenge. The strengthening of traineeships and apprenticeships, combining school- and work-based learning (dual VET) in parallel with the mobilization of employers to play an active role in the design and delivery of VET is a high priority.

(2) Major barriers to policy learning and innovation

Among the main barriers to policy learning and innovation are: (a) Fragmentation of competencies among different levels of administration, hindering cooperation across regions and with other actors, thus slowing innovation diffusion (e.g., in Belgium and Spain). (b) Over-centralized administrative structures, dominance of fragmented project-based solutions and inability to convert such projects into long-term sustainable policies (e.g., in Greece and Turkey). (c) Political culture and values (e.g., a strong liberal tradition in the United Kingdom) and party-political expediency (e.g., in Slovakia), not allowing for a systematic and coordinated flow of information into high levels of (strategic) policy decision-making.

(2) Mechanisms of policy learning and innovation

These embrace: (a) Evidence-based incremental changes in policy delivery and policy instruments (e.g., in Denmark and the UK) and/or a “layering” process with new elements drafted on existing policies that alter the focus of a policy (an example being the VET reform in Denmark). (b) Multiactor/multiagency partnerships with the potential to trigger a paradigm shift in policy design and implementation in specific regions (e.g., in the Mid-Brabant region in the Netherlands, and in some regions in Belgium and Spain, though with a less wide-ranging impact), or in specific policy fields (VET in France, Slovakia, and the United Kingdom). And, (d) the mobilization of policy entrepreneurs (Greece and Slovakia) - mainly under the influence of EU-level initiatives (such as the “Youth Guarantee” and the “European Alliance for Apprenticeships”) - have introduced and developed new ideas and instruments.

(3) Pathways of learning

These range from more or less systematic diffusion of policy knowledge among the different levels of administration (e.g. in Denmark and in specific regions in the Netherlands) and peer-to-peer learning (in Denmark, the Netherlands, the UK), to weak (or highly fragmented) diffusion channels (e.g., in Slovakia, Spain, Greece and Turkey). Markedly, devolution of policy functions tends to facilitate learning and experimentation with innovative interventions because local/regional administrations and agencies are more likely to exchange knowledge on policy processes and tools among themselves and also get involved in EU-wide mutual policy learning. EU influence through conditions linked to programme funding, mutual learning activities, EC country recommendations, or coerced transfer (under the bailout deal for Greece) has had varying degrees of importance in most of the countries studied.

Finally, manifestations of policy learning and innovation hardly embrace the intersection of disadvantage linked to youth, gender, ethnicity and employment. Yet the segmentation of youth labour markets has lifelong repercussion on the risks of vulnerability.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis of a number of youth-related programmes in the countries studied revealed a range of interventions that proved effective in facilitating STW transitions, including those youth at risk/NEETs. The following policy pointers can serve as recommendations for successful policy learning and innovation in relation to effective STW transitions in the EU:

- Prevention and early intervention at key transition stages over the full cycle of school-to-work transition
- Policies designed with enough flexibility to cater for the different needs of specific sub-groups of NEETs, or targeted at particular sub-groups
- Proactive outreach work, including through active involvement of NGOs and/or youth organisations and e-outreach
- Systems for diagnosing vulnerable young people's specific needs
- Early, integrated and person-centred interventions to address complex needs
- Effective case management combined with individualised action planning together with personalised mentoring, help and support as well as follow-up well after the end of the
- Sufficient PES capacity and resources to properly service youth at risk who require much more intensive and personalised attention
- Programmes integrating and combining services to offer a comprehensive approach tailored to young people's individual needs in relation to school-to-work transition
- Involvement of all relevant stakeholders, including youth organisations and youth workers
- Partnership/multi-agency working and co-ordination for an integrated service to youth at risk, especially at local level
- Individualisation of learning pathways based on good understanding of how the young person actually learns, flexible/modularised curricula and alternative learning environments together with a focus on attitudes/self-esteem, 'soft' and basic skills
- Programmes combining work and study such as quality apprenticeships, traineeships and work experience placements together with, where required, pre-vocational/pre-apprenticeship training
- Financial support acting as a safety net for vulnerable NEETs taking part in an intervention

Overall, the improvement of coordination capacities vertically and horizontally among key policy actors is crucial for facilitating the spread of good practices nationwide. Moreover, a more consistent gender mainstreaming approach with regard to education and youth employment policies needs to be adopted across EU countries, so as to systematically tackle gender gaps in youth labour markets and their intersection with ethnicity and migrant status.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

The main objectives of this work package were to critically examine the triggers of, and barriers to, innovative policies for better youth labour market outcomes among the countries studied, to analyze policy transfer and policy learning processes, and to develop a database of effective youth employment measures in selected member states. In addition, it aimed at integrating the findings across the work packages of STYLE with regard to how gender and ethnicity affect youth employment trajectories. Research focused on nine countries (France, Belgium, the Netherlands, the UK, Denmark, Greece, Spain and Slovakia) that joined the European Union at different stages of enlargement, including Turkey as an accession country. These countries also represent different social protection patterns and STW transition regimes. The primary research consisted of interviews conducted in each of the nine countries with policy experts, officials, academics, and researchers on the basis of semi-structured, in-depth interviews (following a common format). Also the available literature on each country has been scrutinized with the aim of unravelling the major planks of academic and public debate on facilitators or constraints of policy innovation. The explanatory framework used for assessing the way policy transfer and change take place, and what the major aims change and innovation are, draws upon a combination of the main typologies developed in the respective literature.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME	Strategic Transitions for Youth Labour in Europe (STYLE)
COORDINATOR	Prof. Jacqueline O'Reilly, University of Brighton, UK J.O'Reilly@brighton.ac.uk
CONSORTIUM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels, Belgium• Copenhagen Business School, Copenhagen, Denmark• Cracow University of Economics, Cracow, Poland• Democritus University of Thrace, Komotini, Greece• Economic & Social Research Institute, Dublin, Ireland• EurActiv, Brussels, Belgium• Grenoble School of Management, Grenoble, France• Institute for Employment Studies, Brighton, United Kingdom• Institute for the Study of Labour, Bonn, Germany• Koç University Social Policy Centre, Istanbul, Turkey• Metropolitan University Prague, Prague, Czech Republic• National University of Ireland Galway, Galway, Ireland• Norwegian Social Research, Oslo, Norway• Slovak Governance Institute, Bratislava, Slovakia• Swedish Institute for Social Research, Stockholm, Sweden• TARKI Social Research Institute, Budapest, Hungary• University of Brighton – BBS CROME, Brighton, United Kingdom• University of Graz, Graz, Austria• University of Oviedo, Oviedo, Spain• University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom• University of Salerno, Salerno, Italy• University of Tartu, Tartu, Estonia• University of Tilburg, Tilburg, Netherlands• University of Trento, Trento, Italy• University of Turin, Turin, Italy
FUNDING SCHEME	FP7 Framework Programme for Research of the European Union – Collaborative project. SSH - ACTIVITY 8.1: GROWTH, EMPLOYMENT AND COMPETITIVENESS IN A KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY, Area 8.1.2 Structural changes in the European knowledge economy and society - SSH.2013.1.2-1 Overcoming youth unemployment in Europe.
DURATION	March 2014 – August 2017 (42 months).
BUDGET	EU contribution: €4 999 056.
WEBSITE	www.style-research.eu
FOR MORE INFORMATION	Contact: John Clinton, University of Brighton – J.M.Clinton@brighton.ac.uk
FURTHER READING	<p>Gökşen et al. (2016), <i>Vulnerable Youth & Gender in Europe</i>, STYLE Working Papers, WP4.3. CROME, University of Brighton, Brighton.</p> <p>Hadjivassiliou et al. (2016), <i>Database of effective youth employment measures in selected Member States</i>, STYLE Working Papers, WP4.4b. CROME, University of Brighton, Brighton.</p> <p>Petmesidou M. and González-Menéndez M. (eds.) (2015), <i>Barriers to and triggers of policy innovation and knowledge transfer</i>, STYLE Working Papers, WP4.1. CROME, University of Brighton, Brighton.</p> <p>Petmesidou M. and González-Menéndez M. (eds.) (2016), <i>Policy learning and innovation processes drawing on EU and national policy frameworks on youth – Synthesis Report</i>, STYLE Working Papers, WP4.2. CROME, University of Brighton, Brighton.</p> <p>Petmesidou M., González-Menéndez M. and Hadjivassiliou K. (2016), <i>Policy Synthesis and Integrative Report</i>, STYLE Working Papers, WP4.4a. University of Brighton.</p>