



Youth unemployment: an inevitable fate?

Editorial Few would disagree that a combination of vocational training and international mobility can help young people access the job market and contribute to shaping them into responsible citizens. A period spent in a foreign country enables them to acquire the sort of work experience called for by employers and to benefit from getting to know other languages and cultures.

A statistical analysis of the AER's Eurodyssey programme, which offers young people work experience abroad as part of an interregional exchange, contains some revealing figures: 60% to 80% of participants find a job within a few months of returning from their placement.

Even so, 20 years after Eurodyssey was first set up by Edgar Faure, the then President of the Region of Franche-Comté (F) and also of the AER, only 25 regions are currently involved in the programme - despite growing demand from young Europeans, who face high levels of unemployment.

More than ever before, every level of governance in Europe is called on to contribute to improving the employment situation. What is needed is a policy designed to actively promote the younger generation. After all, investing in young people is investing in the future! And when it comes to lasting solutions for the problem of unemployment, it is the regions, with their close links to the citizens, that offer the most effective bridge between young people, training institutions and employers.

I would like to invite all European regions to an AER conference where they will be able to find out about the experience and expertise gathered by Eurodyssey partner regions over the years. Entitled "Fostering vocational training and youth mobility - an investment in the future of Europe", it will take place on 15/16 September 2005 in Besançon, Franche-Comté (F). I also hope that many new regions will mark the programme's 20th anniversary by joining the Eurodyssey network and demonstrating the contribution that interregional co-operation can make towards improving the lives of our young people. <

Marie-Dominique Simonet

Minister for Foreign Affairs of the region of Wallonia (B), President of the AER Eurodyssey-Programme

Investing in young people is investing in the future

NEARLY 20% OF YOUNG EUROPEANS ARE CURRENTLY OUT OF WORK. OTHERS HAVE BEEN FORCED TO TAKE ON INSECURE JOBS, HAVING FAILED TO FIND PERMANENT EMPLOYMENT IN THEIR PARTICULAR AREA. IT IS A DISTURBING TREND THAT IS INCREASINGLY LEADING TO MARGINALISATION AND IMPOVERISHMENT. ACTION BY BOTH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS IS URGENTLY NEEDED. THERE IS NO TIME TO BE LOST!

On the 22nd of March 2005 the European Council gave its approval to a European Youth Pact. At the same time, youth unemployment in the Europe of 25 topped the 19% mark for the first time ever. The figures from Poland, Greece and Italy are particularly worrying (36.4%, 27.8% and 24% respectively), but unemployment also remains high in France, Germany, Finland and Belgium.

Is the Luxembourg Process, that was launched in 1997 to promote integration of young people into the labour market, grinding to a halt? Was the goal of achieving full employment, as laid down in the Lisbon Strategy, unachievable - or even unrealistic? The answer from other member states is a definite "no" - especially from Denmark, where the proportion of jobless youngsters decreased steadily from 9% in January 2004 to the current figure of 7.1%. Another example is Ireland, where youth unemployment was reduced in the three months between January and March 2005 from 8.5% to 8%. In Cyprus and Slovenia, it is currently running at a mere 5.1% and 5.8% respectively. And in Lithuania the number of young people seeking work fell from 23.1% to 14.3% within the space of a year!

A forward-looking policy that pays dividends

Was the Lisbon Strategy over-ambitious? Apparently not - provided that deeds follow words and employment is really made a central focus of regional, national and European policies. That is the message from the successful examples mentioned above. It is simply not enough to sit back and wait for growth to return and boost employment levels. Only a pro-active, forward-looking policy will bring results. In this respect, Denmark has been something of a pioneer, having started to tackle the problem back in 1995 by developing the idea of a global strategy to combat unemployment. This was renewed



Young people, faced with the difficulties of finding a job, are often left idle.

in 2003 on the basis of a decentralised approach, involving consultation with the social partners and industry, as crucial players in any employment strategy. Denmark also succeeded in reducing its non-wage labour costs, bringing its education system into line with international requirements and introducing a system of individualised support for young job-seekers. Part-time work for students was also promoted and - importantly - the national budget was adjusted to take account of these initiatives.

In Ireland, an ambitious political programme was launched with the "Youth Act", which focuses on the personal and social development of young people. Key concepts here are creativity, innovation, entrepreneurship and commitment - all qualities prized by companies, who are keen to recruit individuals capable of adapting to constantly changing circumstances. The strength of these policies lies in the fact that they do not involve sitting back and waiting for better times to come, but rather tackle the problems head-on with forward-looking strategies aimed at creating a Europe that generates economic prosperity and supports the personal development of individuals.

From school to work: an obstacle race

THEY ARE BETTER QUALIFIED THAN IN THE PAST - BUT STILL CANNOT OFFER WHAT THE MARKET REQUIRES. AS A RESULT, YOUNG PEOPLE ARE TAKING LONGER AND LONGER TO GET INTO THE JOB MARKET, AND - IN A SORT OF YO-YO EFFECT - OFTEN ONLY END UP IN INSECURE JOBS. BUT THERE ARE WAYS OUT OF THIS SITUATION.

Longer training and greater vocational specialisation were supposed to be the key to success. But nowadays a qualification no longer automatically opens the door to the world of work. Young Europeans are well-qualified - even overqualified - but are given little contact with the realities of the working world. As a result they have great difficulty finding a secure job that gives them financial and social independence. While a British youngster requires five years to achieve this, young people in Italy take 11 years to get into employment! During this time, many young people alternate between poorly paid internships, insecure jobs, periods of job seeking and unemployment. They are in great danger of ending up in poverty.

Improving vocational training provisions

Dr. Katy Orr, of the European Youth Forum, a specialist in this area, sums up the situation: *"In many areas there are skills gaps, skills mismatches and unfilled posts due to the lack of adequately trained young people"*.

How can young people be guided more towards those areas of education and training that will offer the best future in five or ten years time? How can the many training opportunities currently available be made more visible and more attractive? Examine the situation more closely

and you find that solutions do exist - and frequently involve a closer dialogue between the public and private sectors. The Canadian model is particularly well developed and has already been reproduced in Denmark and the Netherlands. It consists of a dual approach to training that puts great emphasis on creativity and innovation, for example through arts. The importance of arts in education and training of young people was particularly highlighted by the AER's Culture, Education and Training Committee at its conferences on the future of education in 2003 in Budapest (H) and in 2004 in Killiney (IRL).

A stronger international dimension combined with greater mobility

In a constantly changing and increasingly globalised world, knowledge of other cultures and languages is a valuable additional skill that can help individuals find a job. Transnational mobility helps you become more independent and adaptable and generally boosts personal development. *"The mere fact of being away from home and having to stand on one's own two feet is almost more important than the actual outcome of a period spent abroad"*, confirms Rui Jorge Da Silva Bettencourt, head of the Youth, Employment and Vocational Training department on the Azores (P). *"Youngsters are obliged to grow up and stand up for themselves"*.

The development of youth promotion programmes

When young people leave the structured school environment they face a crucial period in their lives: it is then that they are at their most vulnerable and most prone to marginalisation. To achieve independence they need advice and support - and it is local, public institutions that are best placed to set up individualised support structures for young people that help them benefit fully from further education and training provisions and assist them in finding their first job.



More and more young people are required to move around Europe in order to find a job.

What European instruments exist?



COMBATING UNEMPLOYMENT IS REGARDED AS AN IMPORTANT PRIORITY BY 75.7% OF YOUNG EUROPEANS. THERE ARE A NUMBER OF SUCCESSFUL INSTRUMENTS AT EUROPEAN LEVEL, INCLUDING THE EU LEONARDO PROGRAMME AND THE AER EURODYSSIEY PROGRAMME.

Modelled on the AER's Eurodyssey programme, which was set up 10 years previously (see pp. 3-4), the Leonardo programme was first launched for the period 1995-1999, and subsequently extended to cover 2000-2006. It offers participants from 31 countries - mainly young people - an opportunity to enhance their capabilities and skills by spending periods abroad during basic training. Carefully targeted pilot projects also improve quality and access to vocational training. Every year, 30,000 young people and 5,000 trainers benefit from spending periods of between 3 weeks and 12+ months abroad under

the Leonardo programme. Local management of the programme is in the hands of the regions, which also make a significant contribution towards its funding.

The Leonardo programme represents an innovative approach to vocational training that enables possible obstacles to transnational mobility to be identified. The recent launch of the "Europass" scheme has now made mutual recognition of qualifications and training programmes amongst member states possible. But many problems still remain. One of the challenges is to create a legal framework for

the social security and taxation status of participants, as these aspects still represent an obstacle to mobility. There are also two further problem areas to be tackled: foreign language acquisition and inadequate supervision structures during and after the period spent abroad.

Despite Leonardo's importance as a recognised instrument forming part of the EU strategy for combating youth unemployment, the limited resources available to the programme mean it has to reject large numbers of applications. Following an initial budget amounting to 793.8 million euro (1995-2001) and some 1.4 billion euro between 2001 and 2006, estimates by the EU Commission suggest that funding would have to be trebled for the next edition of the programme to 4.5 billion euro to make it function effectively in a Europe of 25. Such levels of funding are only possible if the member states do not make excessive cuts in the proposed 2007-2013 budget.



Eurodysee - something different

EURODYSEE IS AN INTERREGIONAL PROGRAMME FOR PROMOTING THE INTEGRATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE INTO THE WORLD OF WORK THROUGH ENHANCED TRAINING AND MOBILITY. IT IS BASED ON A DOUBLE PARTNERSHIP: CO-OPERATION BETWEEN THE REGIONS OF EUROPE AND COLLABORATION WITH COMPANIES AND REGIONAL TRAINING BODIES.

Since it was first set up in 1985, Eurodysee has offered young people between the ages of 18 and 30 the possibility of spending a period of between 3 and 7 months gathering work experience abroad and, in some cases, also acquiring foreign language skills. 25 regions currently participate in the scheme, and every year almost 1,000 youngsters benefit from it.

Flexibility and self-determination

If you ask the partner regions what the difference between Eurodysee and Leonardo is, the first thing that comes to mind is the greater flexibility of the former. "There are no requirements in terms of target regions, numbers of participants or operational management", says Sigolène Desmaris, Officer for European Affairs in the Region of Champagne-Ardenne (F). Rosa M. Ramirez Quintana, her opposite number in the Region of Valencia (E) adds: "In contrast to Leonardo, where we have to meet a detailed catalogue of requirements, our hands are free when we manage an

exchange under Eurodysee - which gives us a lot more room for manoeuvre". As Stéphane Berdat, responsible for international co-operation in the Swiss Canton of Jura puts it: "Eurodysee is special in the sense that - throughout Europe - it is based entirely on the political will of the member regions in all their individuality and diversity. The system works because it accepts that there is no such thing as a single model of co-operation within Europe". Exchanges are financed by the regions, though support from the European Social Fund is possible and some regions, such as the autonomous region of Murcia (E), have already drawn on this.

Personal supervision of the young people

Eurodysee offers more than just the experience of living abroad - it provides participants with a vocational qualification. An important feature of the programme is the degree of personal supervision of the young people. Gabriel Talon, a participant from Franche-Comté

(F), was delighted: "As soon as you arrive you get everything you need to integrate successfully". Esther Estany, head of the Department for International Exchange Programmes in Catalonia (E), stresses the importance of such an approach: "It is all about preparing for the arrival and integration of participants, but also about recognising the knowledge and skills they acquire by means of regular performance evaluations within the partner companies. If a problem is identified, it can be discussed with the individual concerned and the company - but this is very rarely necessary".

A win-win partnership

All the players and partners within Eurodysee benefit. The vocational, cultural - and often also linguistic - training the youngsters receive helps them become more independent. The companies have an opportunity to demonstrate their sense of social responsibility and benefit from the intercultural contact. And the regions are also winners, as their investment pays off to an even greater extent than anticipated.

European regions pin their hopes on training and mobility for young people

ON 15TH AND 16TH SEPTEMBER 2005, THE REGION OF FRANCHE-COMTÉ WILL BE HOSTING AN AER CONFERENCE ENTITLED "FOSTERING VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND YOUTH MOBILITY - AN INVESTMENT IN THE FUTURE OF EUROPE". THE AIM OF THE CONFERENCE IS TO MARK THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE EURODYSEE PROGRAMME BY SHARING THE EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE OF THE PARTNER REGIONS INVOLVED.

The region of Franche-Comté (F) played a leading role in setting up the Eurodysee programme and now operates a regional policy that actively encourages international mobility and vocational training for young people. The Conseil Régional funds no fewer than 7 youth promotion programmes, which it manages through its Mobility Department - the first of its kind in France. Whatever the title - Dynastage, Aquisis, Socrates-Erasmus, Leonardo or Franche-Comté/Québec - what lies behind the programmes is a determination to enable young job-seekers and students to

gain international experience. Regional President Raymond Forni describes the rationale underlying these measures as follows: "The advantage of transnational mobility in education and training of young, independent people is that they become more open to other people, more responsible and more future-oriented - and they have easier access to the world of work".

Regional alliance for young people

The most important instrument for this strategy is without doubt the Eurodysee programme, launched in 1985 in Franche-Comté by

Edgard Faure, the first President of the AER. In those days the programme bore the title of "Tour d'Europe des Jeunes". "For every young foreigner who comes to Franche-Comté, a young person from our region is provided with a placement abroad. The key is an alliance of the regions to ensure that young people can more easily find a place in a different, beneficial environment", were the words of President Faure at the formal signing of the programme's founding charter. 20 years on the aim of Eurodysee remains unchanged: an interregional alliance based on regional

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solidarity to ensure that young people can gather work experience in SMEs and universities in the host region. In line with the wishes of its founder, this exchange programme, "in addition to offering the young people a job, also increases their awareness of Europe and gives them an opportunity to open up to another culture and speak a language other than their mother tongue".

Expansion of interregional provisions

To mark the 20th anniversary of the programme, the 25 regions from some 10 EU and neighbouring states (Switzerland, Norway, Romania, Croatia) who are currently partners in Eurodyssey are keen to relaunch the programme with new momentum. Their aim is to recruit at least 20 new regions as participants. "We would be delighted if regions from the new EU member states, accession states and from Ukraine and the Balkan states were to join us. A youth exchange like this also encourages the development of interregional co-operation in other fields and fosters European integration", stresses Riccardo Illy, President of the AER. "Of course regions in Italy, Germany, Austria or the United Kingdom would also be welcomed, as we have more applications for these destinations than we can cater for", adds Michel Delsaux, Eurodyssey officer in Wallonia (B).

Fostering solidarity and mutuality

The basic principle of the programme is mutuality. For every young person who gains a placement abroad, partner regions undertake to host one in return and to provide an allowance to cover his or her accommodation and other costs. As a result, the placement involves no expense at all for the participants - and the same goes for the companies in most regions. It is they who form the real bedrock of the programme, having undertaken to welcome the applicant into their workforce, support them and provide an evaluation at the end of the placement. "Companies are keen to take part in the programme and are aware that, by accepting a young foreigner from another region, they are also enabling young Walloons to go abroad themselves. This element of solidarity is a very special element of the programme", comments a representative of the Walloon employers' association.

Mobility, an investment worth making

The statistics indicate that 60% to 80% of Eurodyssey participants find a job within the first six months following their return. In other words, mobility pays dividends - both for the regions, who are making a worthwhile investment in a job creation scheme, and for the young people taking part. A total of 84% of participants believe that Eurodyssey helps them to find a job. After completing a placement in Arad (RO), Nicolas Chenut confirms: "I not only learnt a new language, but was also able to exercise my profession in a completely different historical and cultural context. I'm convinced that the placement



The AER Secretariat does its bit by receiving trainees from across Europe throughout the year.

opened new doors for me". The companies involved share this positive view: "Placements like this should be made compulsory if we want to change Europe!" enthuses Guido Van Droogenbroek of the company Austral. "A programme like Eurodyssey at least gives you an opportunity to gather work experience - unlike other placements, which only prepare you for unemployment!"

Intercultural knowledge, a further trump card

Mobility programmes like the AER's Eurodyssey programme not only open the door to employment and greater independence - they also improve intercultural understanding and broaden individuals' horizons. "I've learnt to cope on my own and work independently. But Eurodyssey also involves fitting into a different region and a different culture. The benefits are enormous", comments one participant. And the companies also see this intercultural knowledge as an important advantage "We offer participants training and in return they offer us new ideas, some of which are extremely creative", confirms Julie Schaffer from Holcim, "not to mention the cultural gains and greater openness that is generated".

To quote the words of one of the partners in the programme: "I am convinced that a programme like this helps strengthen Europe - but it needs to be extended. Instead of just a few regions, the whole of Europe should be exchanging young people". And that is precisely what the AER wishes to achieve on 15/16 September in Besançon with its Eurodyssey-Forum and conference on "Vocational Training and Youth Mobility". All regions of Europe are warmly invited to attend. After all, everyone - but particularly the regions - shares responsibility for helping young people integrate successfully into society.

Eurodyssey regions: Açores (P), Adjara (GE), Akershus (N), Baden-Württemberg (D), Bruxelles-Capitale (B), Caras Severin (RO), Catalunya (E), Castilla y León (E), Champagne-Ardenne (F), Franche-Comté (F), Harghita (RO), Hunedoara (RO), Ile-de-France (F), Istra (HR), Jura (CH), Limousin (F), Madeira (P), Murcia (E), Poitou-Charentes (F), Rhône-Alpes (F), Ticino (CH), Tulcea (RO), Valencia (E), Valais (CH), Wallonie (B). Five further regions already have sponsors.

Further information on the Eurodyssey programme can be found at: www.Eurodyssey.net and on the AER conference at: www.a-e-r.org



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AER
General Secretariat - Bureaux Europe - 20, Place des Halles
F - 67000 Strasbourg - www.a-e-r.org - Tél. : +33 3 88 22 07 07
Fax : +33 3 88 75 67 19 - E-mail : infopresse@a-e-r.org

Brussels Office - 2 place Saintelette - B-1080 Bruxelles
Tél. : +32 2 421 85 12 - Fax : +32 2 421 84 81
E-mail : s.cools@a-e-r.org