

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Transition from School to Employment</b> <b>Key Principles and Recommendations for Policy Makers</b></p>
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At the end of 1999, the European Agency began a major project investigating the process of transition from school to employment across Europe. This project involved practitioners in the field of transition nominated from the 16 countries.<sup>1</sup> National information was collected relating to existing policies, transition process implementation, problems and results. Practitioners were asked to provide relevant information relating to issues such as access to educational opportunities for young people with disabilities following compulsory education; the existence of transition programmes; the employment/unemployment situation for people with disabilities; the existence of legislation and policy measures regarding transition or actions in favour of employment; sensitive and positive elements in the national situations.

In order to make national information more complete, a significant number of projects/practices were selected for analysis. The projects covered initiatives in secondary schools, vocational training centres or similar types of educational settings dealing with students presenting any type of special need. No specific target group was aimed at, as the purpose was to have the widest possible view of the situation in different countries, respecting the national priorities expressed by the countries. Additionally, no selection was made according to the type of provision – mainstream or special.

With all this information to draw upon, practitioners participated in several study visits and working meetings involving different countries. The purpose was to identify similarities and differences of practice as well as to produce the first analysis – similarities and contradictions – evident in experiences that made it possible to highlight key aspects to be considered, reinforced or modified in the field of transition.<sup>2</sup> Results of the work achieved by this project identify main problems, key aspects and main factors in relation to transition.

**Main problems** faced by students with special needs, their families and practitioners regarding transition from school to employment. This aspect was approached through an examination of existing documentation at the European and international levels. Problems, raised by the education and employment sectors are quite consistent and inter-related. The main problem issues identified focus upon:

*Data* in this field is very limited, so any comparison between countries is difficult. Despite different terms used by the countries – disabled or special needs students – the average population presenting special educational needs can be identified as 3 to 20% of young people less than 20 years of age.

**Completion rates.** In 1995, the percentage of young people from 20 to 29 years old without a final upper secondary school leaving qualification was around 30%. This

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and United Kingdom.

<sup>2</sup> For specific information related to the different country situations and particular areas of interest, details can be found in the online Transition Database: [www.european-agency.org](http://www.european-agency.org) 3 See [www.european-agency.org](http://www.european-agency.org)

percentage is even higher for students with special educational needs. It is difficult to estimate the number of pupils, who will leave education immediately after the compulsory phase, but it is possible to state that many will never go beyond compulsory education.

*Access to education and training.* In theory, students with special educational needs are presented with the same educational choices as other students, but in practice it is only programmes oriented towards social welfare or low paid work that are mainly offered to them. They are not necessarily interested in the choices proposed and education as well as training programmes are not always suited to their interests and needs. This places them in a disadvantageous position on the open labour market.

*Vocational preparation and training* is often not related to real employment practices; it often takes place within segregated settings and it is not usually oriented towards complex professions. People with disabilities do not receive the appropriate qualifications required for employment; training initiatives need to be more tailored to the current demands of the labour market.

*The unemployment rate* amongst people with disabilities is two to three times higher than among the non-disabled. National data from countries only includes registered unemployed people, but a high percentage of people with special needs are not registered - they don't have even a chance to obtain a first job. Unemployment maintenance for people with disabilities has become the third highest item of social protection expenditure, after old age pensions and health expenditure.

*Expectations and attitudes.* All documents agree on this issue. Teachers, parents, employers as well as the public in general underestimate the abilities of people with disabilities. Co-operation is very important to develop a realistic view of a student's skills in all sectors of education, including during transition to work.

*Workplace accessibility.* There are still problems related to physical accessibility to work places, as well as access to personal and technical support. Information and support to employers is also a key issue referred to in many documents.

*Implementation of existing legislation.* Legal frameworks regarding transition to employment in some countries are absent, or they may lead to an inflexible system. Setting employment quotas as a support measure in favour of the employment of people with disabilities seems to present some failure regarding application and enforcement. Most countries have a combination of measures in place that are perceived to be effective to differing degrees.

**Key aspects** that need to be considered in the field of transition, taking into account existing problems. This area was investigated through discussion and analysis of the documentation provided by different practitioners from the 16 countries involved in the project. Six key aspects emerged with regards to the concept of transition:

- Transition is a process that must be supported by the existence and implementation of legislation and policy measures.

- Transition needs to ensure student participation and respect the personal choice of the student. The student, their family and practitioners must work together to formulate an individual plan.
- Transition needs to include the development of an individual educational plan focussed on the student's progress and on any change to be made in the school situation.
- Transition must be based upon the direct involvement and co-operation of all parties concerned.
- Transition requires close co-operation between schools and labour market, in order for the students to experience real working conditions.
- Transition is part of a long and complex process preparing and facilitating young people to enter into economic and adult life.

**Main factors** which seem to either facilitate or prevent the implementation of a successful transition process at the practical level. These factors were identified from local practices selected by different practitioners. Genuine transition situations highlighted a range of factors that facilitated a more detailed description of the six aspects outlined above.

These factors seem to act either as barriers to, or as facilitators of a successful process of transition. The description of the factors shows that very few of them correspond to factual and simple situations – simple factors. The majority correspond to complex and inter-related situations – complex factors.

### **Policy Recommendations**

The analysis of the three areas listed above has resulted in the identification of recommendations for the future of transition. They are addressed to policy makers and aim to provide guidance on how to improve the development and implementation of the process of transition. These policy level recommendations are to be considered as guidelines to be implemented by countries at national, regional and local levels.

Recommendations are based on aspects and factors listed in the final report <sup>3</sup> and try to highlight practical actions that need to be undertaken in order to facilitate transition from school to employment for young people with disabilities.

### **Existence and implementation of policy and practical measures**

Policy makers should:

- Promote and/or effectively improve co-ordinated policies between different services, avoiding the creation of new legislation that is in contradiction to or overlapping with existing legislation.
- Ensure concrete measures for the effective implementation of adopted legislation, in order to avoid differences and/or discrimination as a result of unequal human or technical resources.
- Systematically consult, taking into consideration and respecting the opinions expressed by voluntary organisations working with and for people with disabilities.

<sup>3</sup> See [www.european-agency.org](http://www.european-agency.org)

- Search for and promote active policies in order to reinforce employment and personal autonomy.
- Ensure more focussed control and evaluation of any “facilitating” measures in favour of people with disabilities, such as quota systems, tax facilities, etc. and ensure the effective functioning of services at national, regional and local levels.
- Ensure the availability of extensive information concerning any legal or policy measure addressed to employers.
- Ensure the creation of local networks, involving all the partners in order to implement national policy.

### **Student participation. Respect for Students’ personal choices**

Policy makers should:

- Provide the necessary resources (time and budget) to the schools in order for them to implement work with the student and their families.
- Ensure that resources have been used effectively in order to guarantee this collaborative task is achieved.

### **Development of an adequate individual education plan**

Policy makers should:

- Provide schools with the necessary resources to ensure that individual educational programmes are developed. In particular, teachers should have sufficient time and receive the necessary guidance for their tasks.
- Ensure that a transition programme is included in the individual educational programme.
- Provide quality standards concerning individual educational programmes.
- Ensure that qualifications achieved by students are reflected in the certificates they obtain and that any discriminatory situation is avoided.

### **Direct involvement and co-operation of all parties involved**

Policy makers should:

- Ensure practical measures for co-operation between services, as well as ensure a follow-up of this co-operation.
- Establish clear responsibilities to be allocated amongst services in order to ensure effective co-ordination.
- Ensure an evaluation of co-ordination as well as of distribution of responsibilities in order to introduce any required changes.
- Ensure that all services fulfil their obligations and participate in the coordination task.
- Motivate employers and trade unions through specific measures to be directly involved.
- Encourage co-operation and co-ordination between all departments involved at the national level.

### **Close relationships between the school and the labour market**

Policy makers should:

- Ensure that all young people experience real working conditions.
- Guarantee access to some type of practical training for all students respecting the different needs they might have.
- Organise flexible training measures, for example, setting up preparatory periods before getting trained on the job.
- Promote formal and informal incentives for companies (e.g. tax reductions, social recognition, etc.) to encourage them to provide working-learning places for young people.
- Emphasise and demonstrate the mutual benefits possible through evaluation of good transition examples.
- Involve employers in these types of initiatives, in co-operation with employment services, by means of information campaigns; networks of employers and trade unions.
- Recognise the need for formal co-operation between education and employment services.
- Provide resources available for the on-going professional development of teachers.

### **Transition to employment is part of a long process**

Policy makers should:

- Put into place all the necessary measures in order to ensure a successful transition process, identifying and solving barriers or difficulties to this process.
- Avoid rigid educational procedures (e.g. regarding assessment).
- Facilitate co-operation between and within services and recognise the time spent by practitioners in co-operation and co-ordination tasks.
- Ensure the development of transition plans early enough in a student's school career, not just at the end of compulsory education.
- Recognise the need for one specific professional to act as an advocate or reference person and support for the student in the transition process.

Practitioners, policy makers and representatives of employers and trade unions involved in this project came to the conclusion that the implementation of the suggested recommendations would undoubtedly improve the process of transition and minimise problems that students currently face when they leave school and are confronted with issues related to securing employment. Specific information relating to country situations and/or particular areas of interest is available from the online Transition database at: <http://www.european-agency.org/transit/index.html>

### **More information**

More information about the Transition project (including copies of the project report in 13 languages) and the work of the European Agency in general is available from:

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