

Accessing to vocational training: trends, issues and challenges

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Most European countries aimed at developing the employability of young adults with SEN by fostering their access to VET programmes, to apprenticeships and to active labour market initiatives (OECD, 2011). For example, Norway has developed vocational education and training programmes placing young adults in a working environment enabling them to gain skills required by the labour market while Ireland emphasized on VET courses within secondary. France developed additional supports to facilitate the access to upper secondary VET courses of students with SEN, and increased their opportunities to access both to apprenticeship as well as to VET courses provided within the active labour market policies. Such initiatives increased the number of students with SEN following VET courses or programmes as for example in France where the number of students with SEN enrolled in upper secondary VET education tripled between 2000 and 2008 or in Ireland where the number of students with SEN preparing the applied leaving certificate increased by nearly ten times between 2003 and 2007 (Ebersold et al., 2011). In Finland, the number of students with SEN enrolled in vocational training courses doubled between 2005 and 2007 to reach 12% of all young people in vocational training (Teittinen, 2010)

Despite the diversification of VET opportunities and progress made in providing students with SEN with the same opportunities as their non disabled peers, difficulties still remain.

- Access to apprenticeship remains indeed difficult, especially when they are not supported in finding an employer and in France, students with SEN represent only 0.9% of all young adults who accessed to apprenticeship in 2010.
- Access to vocational courses taking place in firms is still more difficult for SEN students as for the general population as for example in Germany where 50% of the disabled applicants get integrated in standard vocational education and training compared to 90% of the young people without disabilities (Waldschmidt et al., 2010).
- Accessing to mainstream VET opportunities may still be restricted in many countries as for example in Poland where 79% of SEN students following vocational courses at secondary education level are enrolled in special schools (Wapiennik, 2010)

In addition, vocational training opportunities fail very often in preparing young adults with SEN to enter the labour market and the latter tend therefore to be overexposed to unemployment or to work in sheltered workshop as for example in Germany where 90% of the school leavers with cognitive disabilities end up in such a facility (Waldschmidt et al., 2010).

- When students are enrolled in special schools, these difficulties may result from outdated qualification programs or qualification programs that are not linked with the labour market.
- When students are enrolled in mainstream vocational courses, the latter may not equip adequately students with academic and professional skills required by the labour market especially in countries where VET is undervalued compared to general education.
- Difficulties in finding employment may also be due to the compartmentalization between mainstream schools, employers, employment support services as well as rehabilitation services hindering schools to support adequately

students in their career choices, to provide them with high quality internships opportunities and to foster effective transition from education to work.

- Difficulties in finding employment upon VET courses may also be due to lack of effective support provided to employers during both internships and recruitment processes.

In so far, enhancing high quality VET opportunities for students with students could for example require

- education policies giving the same value to VET and general education
- Education policies fostering a competence based approach allowing for transfer from general and VET courses and from education to employment
- Education policies fostering the development of integrated transition systems fostering synergies between stakeholders
- education policies providing students, schools and employers with effective support to develop effective VET courses
- schools developing policies and strategies linking academic success to professional inclusion and involving employers.
- schools establishing and formalising links with employers and employment support services to take advantage of existing initiatives to promote employment of young adults with disabilities.
- educational strategies connecting the implementation of individual education plans with the development of individual transition plans

References

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