



Out of the maze. Easing the path to vocational education and training for young newcomers in Europe

Summary

Since 2014, more than five million adolescents and young people have fled or immigrated to the European Union (EU), or have moved across borders within the EU. When transitioning into adulthood, vocational education and training (VET) offers young newcomers a practice-oriented gateway to skilled employment. This may create a win-win situation for both the newcomers and countries of immigration: VET not only promotes these young people's social integration, it also contributes to filling skills shortages.

The aim of this SVR Research Unit's study is to draw on the example of the four EU Member States – Austria, Germany, Slovenia and Spain – in order to identify those structures and practices which facilitate young newcomers' access to VET and thus to boost their chances of finding employment. The four countries' national, regional and local rules and practices on granting access to VET were studied and 122 expert interviews analysed. Our analysis shows that the path to VET often resembles a maze. Anyone whose residence status does not permit them to take up employment, who cannot present the required certificates or is no longer under the obligation to attend (vocational) school on account of their age is at a clear disadvantage and often has to navigate longer paths to achieve their educational goals. Although all four of the case-study countries deliver language and often also subject-related preparatory courses for newcomers, the range of courses available tends to be confusing and entry requirements are often as demanding as for the vocational training itself. Financial constraints, lack of knowledge about the training system, intensive language and subject-related studies, psychological, social and housing pressures, as well as discrimination place additional burdens on young newcomers.

However, the study at hand shows that staff in advisory centres, educational establishments, public authorities and other facilities in the municipalities have a degree of discretion when it comes to shaping and granting access to VET. Their work is crucial to the young newcomers' future life course and integration in that they can either ease or impede the newcomers' path through the maze, depending on how they make use of the margin of discretion their job remit affords them. Often, the gatekeepers' commitment to easing newcomers' access to VET goes beyond their actual remit.



Three factors have a particular influence on the decisions taken by these staff members: perceived legal uncertainty, scarce resources and individual convictions. The latter are influenced by how much contact they have with newcomers, for instance.

VET can be an important driver for young newcomers' participation in the labour market and society as a whole. For many newcomers, especially refugees without a secure residence status, however, it is a goal which is hard to achieve – partly because of legal barriers. These barriers, not least, reflect Member States' regulatory concerns when it comes to managing and controlling immigration. At the same time, interests related to integration also need to be considered when shaping and granting access to VET. Many newcomers who initially have subordinate access to the labour market will in actual fact be able to stay permanently, and a lack of early preparation can hinder their long-term integration into the labour market. Finally, newcomers with full access rights also often encounter structural challenges on their path to VET which need to be addressed. **The work of local staff thus provides vital starting points for granting and further improving young newcomers' access to education and training.**

The SVR Research Unit's key recommendations for ensuring smooth access to VET are as follows:

- **Adapt training structures to 'diversity as the norm':** Language and preparatory courses should be expanded and should focus more on the needs of the migrant target group. Vocational education and training itself should be made more flexible. Close and continuous guidance needs to be provided right from the start.
- **Put multi-professional educational networks on a sustainable footing:** in order to be able to provide "one-stop" training preparation, the staff in the municipalities who support young newcomers need structures to back them up. Educational networks have proved their worth: they provide a space for information sharing and continuous professional development and help to systematise available preparatory measures. That is why they should be expanded and put on a sustainable footing. Also, the responsible education, labour and regulatory authorities at regional and national level need to work together to promote young newcomers' integration into the training system at local level.

These courses and measures need a reliable funding basis and should – based on data and specific local needs – be supported by European and national funding programmes.