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## **TRANSFER OF GOOD PRACTICES FOR PROFESSIONAL TRAINING OF DISADVANTAGED YOUTH IN BULGARIA**

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**The current article is developed with regard to the implementation of „Innovative approaches for identifying and responding to vocational education and training needs of disadvantaged youth” project, contract number BG051PO001-7.0.01-0014-C001, implemented with the financial support of the Human Resources Development Operational Programme 2007-2013, co-financed by the European Social Fund of the European Union.**

**Keywords: professional education, young people in disadvantage, innovative practices for professional education of people in disadvantage**

### **Resume**

The implemented activities under the current project are focused on the systems for professional education and training in Bulgaria and Germany and are oriented at researching the practices in this field and at finding good examples for successful and effective initiatives in the sphere of professional training targeted at the disadvantaged young people and expert trainers.

The project activities were structured in the following way: review and comparison of the legal framework in Bulgaria and in Germany, the place, role and approaches for implementing the policies by the respective institutions in the two countries; research and analysis of the approaches used in identifying the needs for training of the disadvantaged youth for the ultimate development of programs for them which can be transferred to Bulgaria.

Upon an analysis of the numerous practices for professional education for disadvantaged youth in Germany and implemented discussions with representatives of the target groups during workshops, organized within the project, 7 good practices were chosen which are presented below and which include innovative approaches of training that can be adapted and implemented in Bulgaria.

### **1. „Talents – Integration of Young People in the Labor Market”**

This practice for professional training is focused on the provision of opportunities for the young people in order for them to have a wide spectrum of professional choice and in order to encourage them to make use of the provided opportunities in a self-defined way.

After their graduation, the young people work at different places in order to accumulate professional experience. At this stage of their life, they often need motivation, support and guidance with regards to the field of work and training. For the young people with disabilities it can be stated that they have less trust in themselves and in this way they limit their own search for job to the one which they know or which is socially and traditionally ascribed to their main field of expertise. This is even more valid for the disabled women (the topic on discrimination with regards to the women with disabilities is more and more discussed and acknowledged in the last years). The hardships which these women face are double because they have to find discrimination because they are women on one side and because they are disabled, on the other. In addition, in fact, they are less qualified compared to the men with disabilities; they are not proportionally affected by unemployment and are not that well represented in the measures for professional re-qualification and training. The integration in labor market for the women with intellectual disabilities is even harder because of gender, the specific characteristics and prejudice; thus, they often look for job only within the family or in family environment.

The main method of work used within the practice has been the personal future planning method. The idea behind it is that the person gets closer to fulfilling his/ her wishes with the support of a circle of supporters. Presently, in Germany this method is being used specifically for young people who have to decide what they want with regards to their free time, the daily work and partnerships, but the concept is implementable at different stages of life. The determination of the young person with disability and the feeling of influence on their own decisions are of crucial importance to the process of planning of their future. The person receives the support, thanks to which, accumulates the competences necessary for forming their own decisions.

The young people with disabilities can hardly plan their life alone. They receive the support of a circle of supporters which can help them organize the steps which have to be taken to fulfill their wishes and plans. In the practice, the supporters could be at the same age as the disabled young person. They assist him/ her to form a clear idea about their life and work on a specific topic, which should be followed in the process of planning (for example: work, life, partnership, change of work place, etc.) The planning of their personal future can be a long process when this is necessary.

## **2. “Kukuk – professional training on key competences for people with learning disabilities”**

The practice provides opportunity for training on specific key competences which can find implementation in the professional and personal life of everyone. It is suitable for unemployed and employed youth.

The professional pedagogic concepts which deal with the persons who have specific learning needs and who want to find their workplace at the labor market are not developed enough. It looks unthinkable that the people with significant problems can be integrated in the labor market when they have to compete for one and the same workplace with people with no disabilities. Apart from the high expectations and the requirements which have to be met by these people, the acquisition of the so called key competences is also necessary. The people with specific learning needs have the capability of acquiring key competences, in contrast to the common perception.

The current programme is based on the analysis of the problematic areas which the people with disabilities often face. This analysis led to the listing of a number of individual competences such as communication skills and handle conflict situations, to cooperate and to take initiative, independence, responsibility, flexibility, attentiveness, assiduity, commitment, complex thinking, etc. At the same time, it became clear that not all competences are equally important. It can be accepted, that in some companies where the work process is slow, the limit of patience towards the various “inadequate” social skills in most of the cases is bigger. The opportunity for the people with disabilities to integrate in a functioning team is a complex process which requires a set of different skills. There is a need of good communication skills as well as ability to solve various conflict situations in an appropriate way. This is why, the analysis of the important problematic areas would lead to the definition of three main key competences – communication skills, ability to solve conflict situations and cooperation. The programme envisages training on these competences within the framework of workshops. The challenge is to structure the seminars in accordance to the specific needs of the people with learning problems. This is why the programme has been developed in a way to ensure that the people with cognitive difficulties and low level of literacy will be able to work on more complex themes. The interrelatedness of the discussed topics with the issues which evolve in real business practice, the good usage of the methods (work in small groups, self-analysis, artistic activities, interactive role-plays, physical exercises and relaxing activities), as well as the specifically developed graphic study-materials written in an accessible way to allow the participants to think about and evaluate their behavior and attitudes through the prism of the overall methodological framework, and to try alternative behavioral models within the group.

### **3. „LOEWE – Initiative for development of small and medium sized enterprises”**

This initiative for professional training is directed towards people employed by small and medium sized enterprises (SME) who are less qualified, older people, migrants or other target groups which are often discriminated against their ethnic background, age, gender or other reasons. Currently, the quickly changing economic framework causes problems for the SMEs and their employees who have to acquire new skills in short periods of time which would allow them to form relationships for development of the production process.

The early evaluation of the needs for qualification and respective timely adaptation are very important. The traditional system of life-long learning is not flexible enough with regards to the future – there is no significant impact upon the levels of unemployment through additional qualification despite the search for specialists. SMEs experience great difficulties with regards to the recruitment of adequately trained specialists. This phenomenon will become even more important at the regional labor market having in mind the ageing population and the diminishing share of young people in the labor market. Because of this reason, the qualification of the work force has to be improved constantly. The neglect of a certain group in the companies on behalf of the opportunities for qualification because they consider that it is not perspective to invest money in training them makes the potential of this group progressively diminishing. The programme is oriented at first place at qualifying of the already existing human capital in the SMEs (women, older employees, migrants) through the structures of life-long learning, and, secondly, they aim to escape from the de-qualification of the future development of the company through trainings.

#### **4. „TAC – theater approach to activate and improve the skills for education and employment and for preparation for successful integration into the common educational and labor market”**

This practice for professional training envisages training for young people who have quitted or have lost their opportunity to complete their education. The programme includes activities for choosing a profession, individual professional orientation, practical exercises. It also provides intensive socio-pedagogical support, consultation and care to support the young people and to direct them to qualification which they want to acquire, for example, acquisition of supplementary to high school diploma. Through the individual improvement of competences, this programme contributes to the sustainable integration of young people in the professional fields and in society. The inclusion of the theater approach in the process of consulting and professional orientation allows the young people to acquire self-confidence and good relations with one another through tolerance and respect, to present themselves in the best possible way and to cooperate with professionals at all levels.

They also learn theory, but practice is most important. The participants are responsible for their masks, for the stage and the equipment. Sometimes, the participants can cooperate with other courses as well. For example, if the course is on art, the participants can be responsible for the design of the stage, if the course is on food, they will be responsible for the catering, etc. “Role and development of the image” is part of the course; it allows the participants to look at themselves from outside, to imagine the skills and the character which may not be their own. This also supports the process of identity shaping.

Within the practice, a database of companies is used which are willing to accept interns. All youth and trainees are encouraged to look by themselves and to identify their place for their practice. There is a close cooperation with the local trade chamber.

The main pedagogical approaches used for the work with the young people are: work with the body, voice exercise, role-plays, feedback method, improvisation, bio-theater, and other media. The participants can attend museums and to create a story of a museum picture or to use a newspaper story as a baseline for certain scene.

#### **5. „Initiative InVia – to learn at the scene –theater approach for studying language by immigrants”**

The programme aims to unite through theatrical work people of different age, culture, religious and social belonging so that they work responsibly with each other, to learn from each other and support each other. All participants in this process are trained and training. By playing, young people learn. Theater improves their language skills, allows them to accumulate experience and learn new competencies to work in a team, trains their perseverance and skills to handle conflicts. The main thing in this initiative is theater as a living experience which is necessary for establishing relations through tolerance and respect. The programme offers to unemployed women, men and young people support in integration into the professional labor market through work and qualification. Theater is used because it focuses on real motivation for learning, through practice. These are the soft skills and communication skills. At the end of the learning period, the youth present their plays in front of an audience.

#### **6. Theater project “The Ramp”**

In the world which surrounds us, we meet with various forms of aggression and violence. The transfer from communication to aggression has become a conscious and rationally undertaken strategy for achieving the aims in life. This is why, it is not surprising that violence and torture is part of our daily life and the Bulgarian school. There is a serious necessity of unified policies at schools as well as of training of the teachers with regards to torture. It is necessary

to support the schools in developing programmes for effective prevention of torture as well as programmes for prevention of intervention by taking into account not only the European and world best practices but also the cultural and socio-economic peculiarities of the country.

In the instances of aggression, in most of the cases the perpetrators and the authors of the violent acts are teenagers who are motivated by mixed feelings towards the victims such as envy, jealousy, competition, demonstration of superiority through attempts to humiliate the weaker ones. Long-term attitudes are formed which have cognitive, emotional and will component and which are becoming stereotypes and models for behavior.

The study programme offers an opportunity to handle the daily experience to accumulate daily experience, to illustrate the presentation of problematic situations, to revisit the concepts and to stimulate the fantasy of young people. The young people with potential propensity towards aggression receive the opportunity to change their perspective through role plays and to ponder upon certain behavioral manifestations. The educational goal here is to embody the other and to develop deductively through your own experience related to aggression, openly and independently to develop alternative approaches for solving of conflicts.

A theatrical project will be developed – role plays with the participation of all participants. The goal is in the phrase staging as a theatrical truth and related entertainment to the public. In this specific situation, the embodiment in certain stage personage might raise an intensive discussion and debate among the various people. The work upon the personal aspects of life and the one of the others makes possible the limitation of the personal opinion for oneself.

Of course, in the framework of the programme, the attention is directed towards the preparation of the play but the role work is understood as part of the pedagogic process while the individual preconditions and consequences are taken into consideration and are analyzed rationally.

## **7. „Professions Play Job Act® – from the stage to the place of training”**

The programme is focused at unemployed people and is based upon the three-pillar method of training JobAct®. JobAct® connects the theatrical pedagogic methods and the work on the biographies of the young people for the objectives of applying the creative and classical approaches of managing the application process. The company practice and training add to the ways of action within the programme.

Big part of JobAct® training actually happens on the stage. As part of the joint challenge to make the play, the young people not only accumulate practical skills but also the knowledge about stage management, costumes, marketing and PR. The main accent is at stimulating the

internal creativity of the participants so that to allow them to take control upon their own life, their training and their work.

JobAct is of total duration of 10 months. The programme is separated into two stages – work on theatrical play and company practice. Both stages are 5 months long.

As it was mentioned before, the programme is based upon the three pillar-method of training JobAct®. The participants learn professional skills together with social skills. They are supported by individual, artistic approaches for elevating their self-confidence. This can be achieved through implementation of techniques, used in the theatrical training and the personal development.

More specifically, the programme is separated into two stages: during the first stage, the participants develop a theatrical play from the idea to the premiere. In this process, they are being supported by a theatrical pedagogue and if necessary, by additional specialized personnel (for physical work, language development, stage management, preparation of masks, visual equipment, etc.)

Parallel to that, an intensive course on management of the application process which is supported by the work of the theater pedagogue and the analysis of the individual strengths and weaknesses.

At the same time, enterprises are being recruited to participate in the implementation of the theatrical play through various services (masks, wood job, carpentry, masks, etc.) in order to establish the first contacts among the participating people and the companies. The theater will be played at the end of the first stage.

The second stage of the programme will include intensive company practice which will be completed by the young people within the firms, participating in the programme. In this process, the participants will be constantly supported and trained by the consulting pedagogues. The regular discussion of the experience will solve the potential conflict at their birth in order to build a stable final situation for starting a training/ profession.

## **Conclusion**

The adaptation of some of the good German practices, analyzed in the field of professional training of young people in unequal situation within the project is delivered with the aim to prepare the young people at risk professionally who are in socio-economic isolation. The innovative approaches used in the educational process of the presented practice aim to imply the concept of specific focus on the individual who needs to be supported for sustainable integration in education.

The programmes provide the opportunity to increase the skill level of the young people in order to be employed as well as the abilities to work in a team through practical learning, development of the organizational skills for having both a profession and a personal life, personal empowerment through practical experience; training through interdisciplinary qualifications for the successful introduction into the professional life.

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### **Resume**

The activities conducted under this project focus on vocational education and training (VET) in Bulgaria and Germany and aim to investigate the practice in this area and display examples of successful and effective initiatives in the field of vocational training, with a target group of disadvantaged youth and expert trainers.

The project activities were structured so that after reviewing and comparing the legal frameworks for VET in Bulgaria and Germany; the place, the role and approaches to VET provision by the institutions; studying and analyzing the approaches used to identify the training needs of young people in disadvantage and the methods for the development of VET programs for this target group in both countries, to come to identify good practice in VET, which can be transferred to Bulgaria.



After analyzing a number of practices for vocational training of disadvantaged young people in Germany and after discussions with representatives of the target groups during 6 workshops, organized within the project, 7 best practices were selected, all of which include innovative approaches for education, and which to be adapted for use in the VET system in Bulgaria.