

CREATING BETTER CHANCES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE ON THE LABOUR MARKET

INSPIRATION FROM
A STAKEHOLDER
CONFERENCE ON YOUTH
EMPLOYMENT AND
ENTREPRENEURSHIP

ANTWERP 2011

SALTO-YOUTH
INCLUSION
RESOURCE CENTRE



www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/BridgesToWork/



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Education and Culture

ANTWERP, 17-20 OCTOBER 2011

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SUMMARY: READ THIS IF NOTHING ELSE

Bridges to Work was three days of intensive work. The conference consisted of both parallel sessions adapted to the different groups present, and common sessions for all stakeholders (programme overview on page 10). The event provided inspirational insights into youth employment and entrepreneurship (page 16 & 22) and showcased good employment and entrepreneurship practices (page 38).

Bridges to Work was an ideal opportunity for networking and for discussions between different stakeholders (page 48). The programme also introduced participants to a variety of funding and support programmes that can be used for employment or entrepreneurship projects (page 56). This all led to an impressive set of action plans, aimed at bringing disenfranchised young people closer to a job (page 60).



WHAT MADE BRIDGES TO WORK DIFFERENT?

Bridges to Work brought together no less than 150 stakeholders, most of whom stayed for the three-day conference to discuss how we can improve the chances of young people with fewer opportunities on the labour market (page 10). Having such a diverse group of stakeholders around the table is already an achievement in itself. The conference welcomed representatives from the employment sector, youth project coaches, policy-makers, researchers and staff from funding programmes (page 9). One of the special features, though, was that Bridges to Work also invited those who are currently the worst affected by unemployment: jobless young people themselves (page 26).

UNEMPLOYMENT VERSUS JOBLESSNESS: THERE IS A DIFFERENCE!

Many projects tackle youth unemployment. Unemployed young people are those who do not have a job and who are looking for one. However, this does not take into account all the young people who are NOT looking for a job – either because they have decided to do something else or because they are out of the system (the ones that have given up). The notion of 'joblessness' also includes these young people, so projects should also focus on getting this group 'back on track' and accessing the same opportunities as others. Niall O'Higgins (page 16) and Ian Goldring (page 32) shared data and experiences with regard to the current situation as well as success stories and good practices.

WHAT MAJOR ISSUES WERE TACKLED DURING THE CONFERENCE?

IS ENTREPRENEURSHIP AN ALTERNATIVE TO FINDING A JOB?

Creating your own job can be a valid alternative to finding a job with an employer. Entrepreneurship allows young people to make a living and stay out of the unemployment (or better, joblessness) statistics. It is, however, not the only way to go about your professional life. It can be a solution for some, but not for others. Setting up your own professional project only requires two important elements: a business idea and a 'can do' attitude. The rest will follow. But beware: even if anyone can be an entrepreneur, not everyone is a business (wo)man. Madi Sharma took a closer look at entrepreneurship and what it takes for young people to make their business ideas come true (page 22).



NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US!

This was the reason we invited young jobseekers themselves to tell the conference what they thought about work and employability (page 26). But equally, we need to sit together with employers and representatives from the labour market to see what their needs and requirements are (page 48). If we want to show the impact of youth projects on young people's employability, we need to know what competences employers are actually looking for. Youth work needs to learn to present its work in a way that makes sense to employers – IF youth work wants its efforts to be recognised by the employment sector. However, we should bear in mind that youth work serves many more purposes than just employability.

BETTER TRANSITIONS FROM SCHOOL TO WORK

Young people, employers and some schools themselves recognise that formal education alone cannot respond to the growing needs of the labour market. Schools do not always provide students with the necessary competences that meet the demands of modern jobs. But other types of learning can complement formal education. A lot of learning happens outside school, for instance in youth work, through non-formal learning. Some skills are even more easily learnt in non-formal settings than in schools. There is a demand for a more holistic approach to education and learning. Cooperation between formal and non-formal education providers is important and should be further encouraged.

LEARN FROM EACH OTHER

During Bridges to Work, participants presented many examples of best practice and also visited local employment and entrepreneurship projects. Many successful initiatives exist to support young people in accessing the labour market, so there is no need to reinvent the wheel. Bridges to Work was a great opportunity to learn from each other's success stories and to visit local initiatives (page 38). As well as this, a set of workshops also explained to participants where they could get funding for such employment or entrepreneurship initiatives (page 56). 100% concrete!





TIME FOR ACTION

Even a marathon starts with a single step. Bridges to Work provided the necessary space for the most important elements of the event: networking, gaining new inspiration and setting up future employment and entrepreneurship projects. The participants brainstormed on how they could have a positive impact on combating youth joblessness and promoting entrepreneurship across Europe.

They designed concrete action plans to create better chances for young people on the labour market. Participants committed themselves to cooperation projects, exchanges of information, new campaigns, future contact, local initiatives, mobility projects and new ways of working (page 60). The suggestions for action went along the following lines:

A MORE HOLISTIC APPROACH TO LEARNING AND EDUCATION

Education should respond to the needs of individuals (everybody is different), of society (become an active citizen) and of the labour market (find a job and become independent). School is not the only place where you learn, and public bodies should promote and support different learning opportunities for young people. Employers can take advantage of the competences acquired through youth work and other non-formal learning. Young people themselves should be more aware of their competences and learn how to present them (and fill gaps where needed).

SUSTAINABLE COOPERATION BETWEEN DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS

Learning and professional development is not done in a little corner. It happens in many spheres of life. This calls for a cross-sector approach to learning and skilling young people for the labour market. Better cooperation between the different actors is needed. They should target their combined actions to young people, and especially those with fewer opportunities. More dialogue, more information, and better visibility of good practice would allow a coordinated approach towards developing solutions to youth unemployment, and towards targeted interventions.



A MORE INCLUSIVE APPROACH IN TRAINING PROGRAMMES

If there is a role for youth work in helping young people gain competences and become more 'employable', then youth workers should also be trained to support young people in their search for work or in the set-up of their own entrepreneurial activity. Youth work can team up with other stakeholders who have expertise in the employment field, contributing its methodology, which is particularly adapted to working with young people (with fewer opportunities). Including potential employers in projects from the start will create more ownership and commitment from the business world and will link those projects to the real needs of the workplace. This gives companies the opportunity to 'invest in young people, not in banks!', as one participant put it.

These are only some of the highlights of Bridges to Work. Further down this report, you will find more concrete insights, project descriptions and useful information to inspire you in your work on youth employment and entrepreneurship.

NOW IT IS YOUR TURN TO CONTINUE TO BUILD THOSE BRIDGES TO WORK!

Gisele Evrard
General Rapporteur

Tony Geudens
Coordinator, Bridges to Work



CONFERENCE PROFILE:

FACTSHEET

BRIDGES TO WORK FACTS & FIGURES

Type	Stakeholder conference mixed with a youth seminar
Topics	Youth employment and entrepreneurship – focus on inclusion
Venue	Antwerp, European Youth Capital 2011, Belgium
Dates:	17 to 21 October 2011
People:	150 participants
Outcomes:	New insights, new contacts, new projects and recommendations
Organiser:	SALTO-YOUTH Inclusion resource centre at JINT vzw, Brussels
Funding:	(European Commission) SALTO-YOUTH, Youth in Action (Training & Cooperation Plan) and participant contributions

BACKGROUND

WHERE DOES BRIDGES TO WORK COME FROM?

- ✦ The 'Europe 2020' strategy aims to stimulate smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in Europe by 2020. Young people are vital to making this happen.
- ✦ 'Youth on the Move' is an EU flagship project that aims to develop young people's full potential (also on the labour market) through mobility.
- ✦ The 'new EU cooperation framework in the youth field' focuses on 'employment' and on 'creativity & entrepreneurship' as important fields of action.

SALTO Inclusion supported these policy objectives through a three year strategy to 'combat youth unemployment', especially for those that are at a disadvantage compared to their peers. Bridges to Work brings together reflections and participants from three years of youth unemployment interventions by SALTO.

✦ SALTO Inclusion's strategy at www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/InclusionUnemploymentStrategy/

OBJECTIVES

WHAT DID BRIDGES TO WORK WANT TO ACHIEVE?

- ✦ Increase young people's chances on the labour market by making the link between youth (work), employment and entrepreneurship.
- ✦ Three days of networking between stakeholders to gain new inspiration, contacts and funding for employment and entrepreneurship projects.
- ✦ Exchange good employment and entrepreneurship practices for combating the (long-term) unemployment of young people (with fewer opportunities).

✦ More background information at www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/BridgesToWork/



ON THE PROGRAMME

WHAT HAPPENED AT BRIDGES TO WORK?

- 2 official opening addresses
- A youth seminar for 23 young jobseekers
- 3 keynote contributions from experts
- 15 good practice workshops and 9 visits to local projects
- 1 theatre workshop for young people
- 7 workshops on funding programmes
- 1 round table session evaluating SALTO's 'combating unemployment' strategy
- 4 speakers sharing concluding remarks
- Many recommendations, suggestions and ideas for next steps

PARTICIPANTS

WHO WAS AT BRIDGES TO WORK?

- 150 stakeholders took part in Bridges to Work:
- 23 young jobseekers involved in employment or entrepreneurship projects
- 25 coaches from those employment and entrepreneurship projects
- 20 representatives from the employment sector (employers, employment agencies, social enterprises)
- 20 members of staff from European funding programmes (Youth in Action, EURES, Grundtvig, Leonardo, Erasmus for Entrepreneurs and Eurodyssey)
- 34 local, regional and European policy-makers, researchers and experts
- 9 speakers
- 4 facilitators (2 for the youth seminar, 2 for the stakeholder conference)
- 1 general rapporteur
- 12 staff and 2 coordinators

 A complete list at www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/BridgesToWorkParticipants/

PARTNERS

WHO WAS INVOLVED IN BRIDGES TO WORK?

- A variety of experts (researchers, employment agencies, employment projects, Youth in Action national agencies, SALTO Resource Centres, European Commission, Council of Europe, European Youth Forum) took part in the consultation meetings for SALTO Inclusion's 'combating youth unemployment' strategy and to develop the framework for Bridges to Work.
- Bridges to Work was organised by SALTO Inclusion with co-funding from SALTO Cultural Diversity, SALTO Training & Cooperation and the Youth in Action national agencies of Belgium-Flanders, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Denmark, Hungary, Spain, Germany, Croatia, Slovenia, Liechtenstein and Luxembourg.
- SALTO Inclusion and Bridges to Work linked into the European Commission's and the OECD's work on youth and unemployment, into Antwerp Youth Capital 2011 and various funding programmes.

 All partners at www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/BridgesToWorkPartners/

PROGRAMME
OVERVIEW:
SESSIONS
WITH A
MESSAGE

0|INTRO A summary of the main highlights of Bridges to Work and a profile sheet of the conference, detailing the facts and figures of this inspiring event. (page 2)

1|CONTEXT Koen Lambert (JINT vzw and Pascal Lejeune (European Commission) raised the importance of youth employment and entrepreneurship in the current climate: the reasons for Bridges to Work. (page 12)

2|CONCEPTS Niall O'Higgins explained why 'youth joblessness' was a more relevant term than 'youth unemployment' and what consequences this had for employment interventions. Madi Sharma shared her entrepreneurial experience as well as key principles for successful entrepreneurship. (page 16)

3|YOUTH Young people shared their take on the unemployment debate. They presented a few key messages to the stakeholder conference by way of a theatrical performance, followed by discussions with participants from different backgrounds. (page 26)

4|SUCCES What works and what doesn't? Ian Goldring presented the findings of the SALTO Inclusion research that distilled the key factors for success in employment interventions for young people, in the context of the current crisis. (page 32)

5|PRACTICES We can learn a lot from other people's failures and successes. Fifteen good practice workshops and nine local project visits inspired participants with a wide and diverse range of ideas, examples and approaches. (page 38)

6|EMPLOYERS How do employers do it? Three employers shared their ideas and visions on recruiting young people with fewer opportunities in an interactive panel debate. They pointed out the possibilities, but also the limitations when it comes to staffing. (page 48)

7|FUNDING Staff from seven different funding programmes explained how their programmes could fund employment and entrepreneurship projects for young people, using concrete examples and links to relevant websites. (page 56)

8|ACTIONS Participants designed an action plan aimed at having a positive impact on youth unemployment and entrepreneurship across Europe. Many ideas and suggestions for action saw the light. (page 60)

9|CONCLUSIONS Three days of hard work were channelled into various conclusions. The general rapporteur extracted some key messages to keep in mind for the next steps in the ongoing story of youth employment. (page 70)

10|EVALUATIONS Facts and figures about what participants thought of the conference. (page 76)





THE BIGGER PICTURE: WHY BRIDGES TO WORK?

The stakeholder conference started with a warm welcome by Tony Geudens, coordinator of the event. It was a privilege to have so many people together who all, in one way or another, work to give young people better chances on the labour market. Koen Lambert (director of JINT, mother organisation of SALTO Inclusion) and Pascal Lejeune (Head of Youth Unit, European Commission) sketched out the framework in which Bridges to Work was taking place.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S
CONTRIBUTIONS
ARE CRUCIAL.
NOTHING WILL
WORK WITHOUT
THEM, WHATEVER
WE DO.



KOEN LAMBERT (JINT) pointed out the significance of Bridges to Work and in particular, the involvement of young jobseekers in it. '*Nothing about us without us*' has not only been one of the key mottos of Bridges to Work, but also the basis of the main message: more than ever before, we need to consider and address the needs of young people, and not only those in the labour market.

Koen Lambert pointed out that in this economic climate, with youth unemployment rates soaring, there is a greater need to work on employability and social inclusion. SALTO Inclusion took on that challenge and has focused its work since 2009 on combating youth unemployment, especially regarding those who are most disadvantaged, compared to their peers. A number of SALTO training courses and educational publications, for example, show youth workers how they can use mobility projects to raise young people's employment chances.

We should make sure that young people's potential is fully used and provide a variety of learning opportunities, both formal and non-formal. We have to recognise non-formal education as a valid way of developing, both professionally and personally. Youth work is a respectable provider of such alternative ways of learning. But we need to take care that we do not focus solely on employability, because reducing people to their economic value has given birth to recent civil society movements, such as the *indignados* or the 'Occupy Wall Street' movement.

Koen highlighted the need for all sectors to cooperate to improve the situation of young people, especially those at the margins of society. Seeing such a diversity of participants from different backgrounds at Bridges to Work, was already a huge step in the right direction. It laid the foundation for three days of exchanges and discussions, which will hopefully lead to new cooperation projects. Let the bridge building begin.



YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT HAS BECOME EMBEDDED IN SOCIETY. WE NEED TO COMBINE OUR EFFORTS TO COMBAT IT.

PASCAL LEJEUNE (European Commission) highlighted that Bridges to Work was not 'yet another conference'. It was an important event, because young people facing unemployment have become a common and problematic feature in society. Therefore, the topic of Bridges to Work is a top priority on the political agenda. Even though there is a lot of diversity in Europe, all countries, without exception, are affected by a level of youth unemployment that goes from 15% to 40%. We cannot be indifferent to this situation. Therefore, the European Commission is calling for concrete actions and clear political support to help unemployed young people improve their lives.

The Europe 2020 strategy aims at focusing on a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy. The EU Youth Strategy, and its flagship initiative 'Youth on the Move', define a set of national and European actions over three areas:

- better education and training systems at all levels
- stronger policy efforts to improve youth employment
- more EU youth mobility for both learning and employment purposes

These three fields of action are completely in line with the objectives of Bridges to Work. Pascal pointed out that unemployment today also concerns young people who are far more highly qualified than previous generations. The situation is even worse for young people in disadvantaged situations. Too much human potential and resources goes to waste. It is almost impossible to realise your dreams as long as access to employment remains a challenge.

Like Koen Lambert, Pascal Lejeune also highlighted the fact that non-formal learning should be better recognised. Young people gain many valuable experiences in youth work and especially through learning mobility experiences, such as 'Youth in Action' (YiA) and its 'European Voluntary Service'. YiA offers young people non-formal learning opportunities to increase not only their employability, but also their active participation in society. A recent survey of 5000 participants emphasised the positive impact of the YiA programme:

- 72% of YiA participants considered that the experience they went through increased their chances on the labour market.
- A considerable number of the youngsters said that such non-formal learning experiences had prompted them go back to formal education.



GETTING IT RIGHT SOME IMPORTANT CONCEPTS

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT? OR IS IT JOBLESSNESS?

No more 'Youth Unemployment in Europe'! These words launched the first session of Bridges to Work. Niall O'Higgins from the University of Salerno, Italy, detailed the reasons for being unemployed in an increasingly diverse Europe. He explained that there were different kinds of youth unemployment, and introduced the term 'youth joblessness' as opposed to 'youth unemployment'. It is important to define these terms and concepts to be able to talk about them. ¹

UNEMPLOYMENT VERSUS JOBLESSNESS

'Unemployed' refers to those people who are not working, but who are willing and able to work AND actively seeking work.

The problem with this definition is that the 'unemployment rate' does not cover all people 'without a job'. This commonly used unemployment indicator ignores certain categories of people without a job such as:

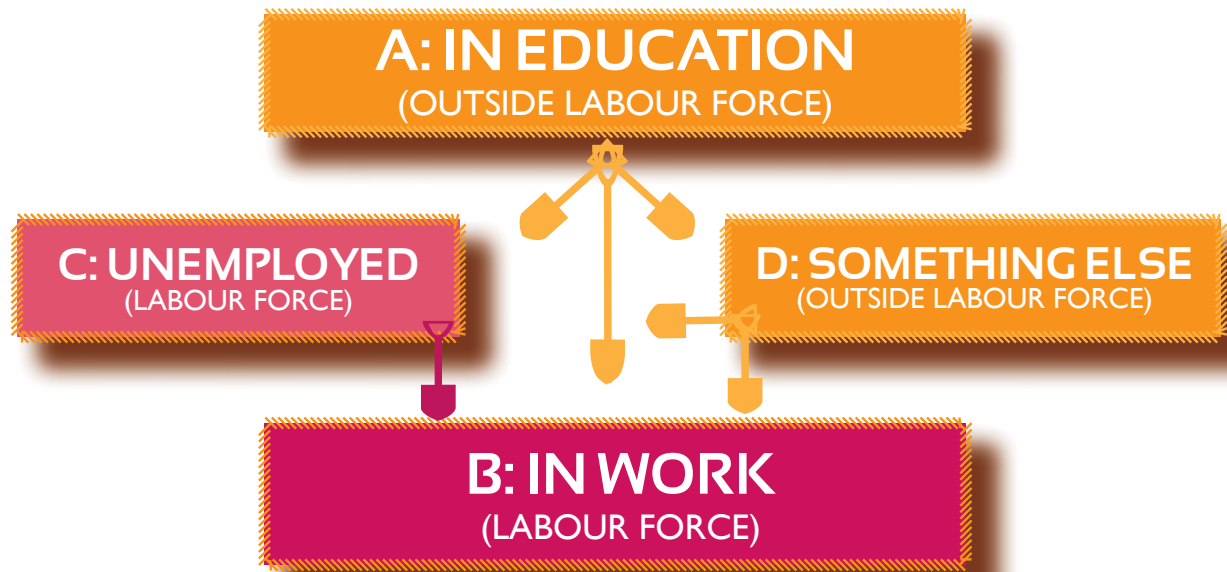
- the 'discouraged ones' who would like to work but stopped looking for a job because they believe that no suitable work is available for them.
- those who, given the current labour market conditions, choose to do other things (for example have and look after children, enjoy leisure pursuits or travel, do a volunteering project, etc.).

The unemployment rate does not accurately reflect the effects of the crisis or economic interventions on the labour market as a whole, because the people who are not actively looking for a job do not show up in this indicator. But it is still relevant to know how many people have left the labour force out of choice or because they have 'given up trying'.

Therefore 'joblessness' would be a more inclusive indicator of the economic performance of certain groups. People in this group are also often referred to as 'NEETs' meaning 'not in education, employment or training'. The joblessness rate includes all those who are not working or in school. It includes:

- Those traditionally considered 'unemployed' and who are available on the jobs market and actively looking for a job.
- But also those who could be available for work but who are doing 'something else', rather than looking for a job.

The joblessness rate is defined as being all those people who are neither in education nor employment, as a proportion of the population. It has the advantage of giving a sense of the size of the 'labour market problem'. The joblessness rate shows the proportion of young people who are not 'productively' or 'usefully' occupied. It indicates the extent to which the potential employment of young people can be maximised.



$$\text{UNEMPLOYMENT RATE} = C/(B+C)$$

$$\text{JOBLESSNESS RATE} = (C+D)/(B+C+D)$$

The financial and economic crisis does primarily affect young people. If this is a rather uncontested fact, it nonetheless requires a closer look at the facts and figures in a period of recession: between 2007 and 2011, and with the exception of Sweden, all young people living in the member states of the European Union have seen a drastic fall in their employment status, dropping from minus 2% to minus 52% fewer employment opportunities. In other words: going from bad to worse.

EMPLOYMENT IN TIMES OF CRISIS

These figures however ignore two important dimensions:

- ✦ Unemployment has a different significance for young people.
- ✦ Long-term unemployment has more negative consequences than a short period of temporary unemployment.

Unemployment has a deeper impact on young people than it has on adults because the former are just entering the labour market and are in a much more formative period of their lives. If young people remain unemployed for long periods of time, this often has a negative impact on their 'employability' and on their job stability later on. Long-term unemployment possibly pushes many of the unemployed into the NEET category of young people that simply give up looking for a job. Therefore, long-term unemployment is the true core of the problem and creates the greatest damage to young people. The decreasing quality of jobs and the increase in temporary jobs can also discourage young people.

INTERVENTION PROGRAMMES

Labour market regulations should counter these factors, which potentially create permanent employment instability for young people. Niall distinguished two fields of action:

- education and training
- active labour market programmes

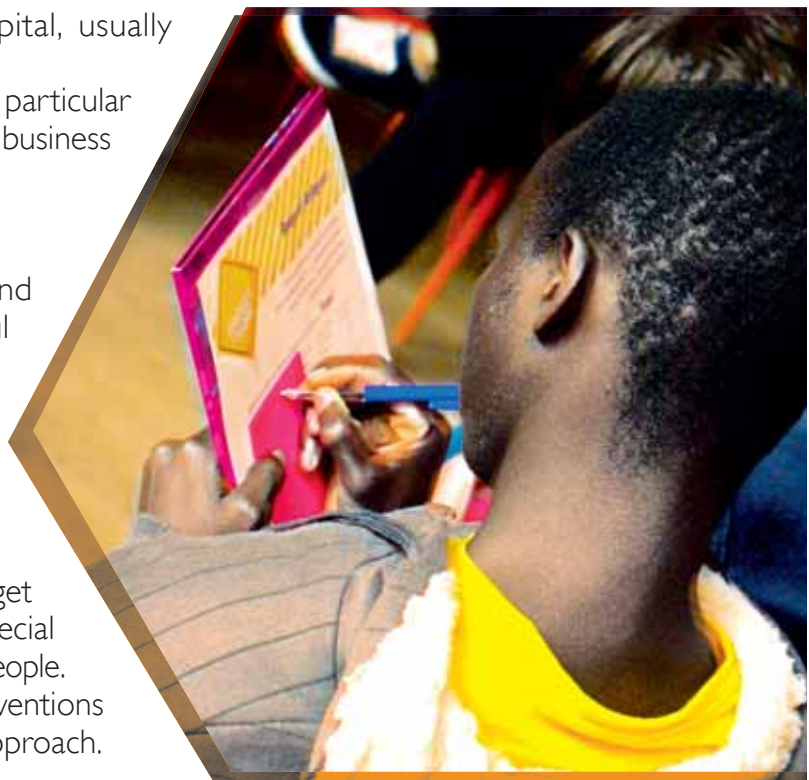
One of the reasons for unemployment is the lack of education and skills which are needed on the labour market. Formal education in some cases is not equipping young people with the necessary knowledge and skills, and firms are reluctant to invest in training new staff. The current recession is an ideal time to improve this situation, because it would create better economic perspectives. On top of this, these much needed programmes would require less funding than in times of prosperity. Some initiatives have been taken at national and EU level, but too little is done to better match education and skills to what is needed in the world of work.

Parallel to this, a number of so-called 'Active Labour Market Programmes' have appeared, such as:

- Programmes to enhance human capital, usually through training and education.
- Programmes to promote employment (in particular employment subsidies and support for business start-ups and expansion).
- Job search assistance.

Some of these programmes generate real and concrete results. We can extract some useful principles from these programmes, such as:

- Training programmes appear to be less useful in times of recession, while wage subsidies have a more immediate effect.
- Programmes tailor-made for specific target groups are very helpful, for example special measures aimed at 'disadvantaged' young people.
- Comprehensive (and targeted) interventions are more effective than a fragmented approach.



- ✦ On-the-job training has proven to be very successful and effective. Interventions involving the private sector are more useful than exclusively public programmes.
- ✦ Job Search Assistance is generally thought to be very effective, but is less useful in times of recession when jobs are scarce.
- ✦ Start-up assistance includes a wide range of services, but you should keep in mind that not everybody can be an entrepreneur.



NIALL O'HIGGINS

is a Professor of Economics at the University of Salerno.

Prior to taking up his position in Salerno in 2001, Niall was Senior Employment Specialist at the ILO. He holds degrees from Trinity College Dublin, York and Sheffield Universities and a Ph.D. from the European University Institute in Florence.

Currently, his main research interests cover various aspects of labour economics (School-to-Work Transition, Human Capital Investment, Youth Labour Markets, Evaluation of Labour Market Policy, Vulnerable Groups in the Labour Market, Labour Markets in Central and Eastern Europe) and experimental economics (Social Capital, Imitation and Reciprocity).

Niall O'Higgins has written a book on Youth Unemployment and Employment Policy and published numerous articles in scholarly journals on the subject. He regularly collaborates with various international agencies such as the ILO, the World Bank, UNDP, the European Commission, the Asian Development Bank and the Council of Europe.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP: IT STARTS WITH AN IDEA

Madi Sharma came to share her experience as an 'Asian, penniless single mother, victim of domestic violence...' who still found the courage to set up her own business against all odds. When talking about 'inclusion', Madi had "all the disadvantages possible except for a wooden leg," as she put it. She inspired the audience with her take on 'how to become a successful entrepreneur when a priori you have no chances of succeeding?' Madi highlighted what she considered to be the key principles of entrepreneurship, relating them to her own experience.

BUSINESS IS NO PLACE FOR A WOMAN

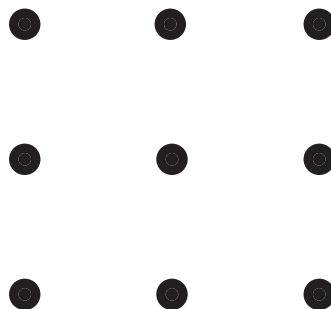
At 16, Madi was told that business was no place for a woman. At 21, she had an arranged marriage (she arranged it, running off with a boy to escape from her family). At 23, her boss told her that she was 'overenthusiastic for her job' and 'let her go'. She took her enthusiasm back home and had two beautiful daughters. At 29, she was told that she would never be successful in anything she wanted to do because she was a woman. Beaten by her husband in front of her four-year-old daughter, lying on the floor at the age of 29, Madi realised that her whole life had been about people telling her that she 'can't do something'.

Passionate for change, willing to see her human capital valued and recognised, she decided to change her life. She had no qualifications, no skills, no training, she came from an ethnic minority, was Asian, female, a survivor of domestic violence and a single parent after a much needed divorce. Without any money, she decided to go into business, and started baking samosas in her kitchen and selling them. Eight years later, she was at the helm of two factories with thirty-five employees and was selling ten thousands products a week.

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

**Join these nine dots with four
straight connected lines
without lifting your pencil
off the paper.**

(Solution on page 25)




The reason we find it difficult to connect the nine dots is because we tend to see them as a box. We often see the world in a limited way. This is a metaphor for Europe's attitude towards entrepreneurship nowadays. If we keep to a clearly defined box, policy-makers can make policies around us. The box impedes stepping out of a given comfort zone. Within that box, we are told to get a good education, to get a good job, to get a good salary, to pay taxes, and contribute to the government and to the well-being of our country. There is not necessarily anything wrong with that, except that it may prevent us from seeing and experimenting with something different, and from seeing the opportunities outside of that box.

✂ Find the solution to the 9 dots exercise in the back of this booklet on page 25.






IT IS TIME FOR A RE-THINK

Madi Sharma challenged the audience: "What is it that you would really, really like to do? You do not need any money, you do not need any qualifications, and you do not need anyone to tell you that you can do it. You just have to do it." 95 percent of the people in Europe do not know how to do this, because we are not taught that life is a blank piece of paper and that we are in control of it. However, this is the essence of an 'entrepreneur's mind'. At this stage, there is no need for a business plan, no need for methods, it just happens because you want and know that it will happen. In other words: it all starts with an idea. Entrepreneurship starts with a wish, an idea, something you know that you 'really want to do'.





But how do you do what you really want to do? Whether here and now or whether related to a project you have at home, in your organisation, in your structure, there are 'five Fs' to consider:





-  **FEASIBILITY:** is what you want to do feasible? Maybe it won't happen in the way you imagined it, but if you believe in it, it will be feasible.
-  **FOUNDATION:** equip yourself with the right expertise and associate with people who know how to do it. If you need help, ask for it.
-  **FAILURE:** get the best out of your failures. Failure is not something negative. Rather, it is something you can build your experience upon, and move on. Failure is a learning curve. If you have not failed, you have not learnt.
-  **FIT FOR PURPOSE:** have you got the 'can do' attitude? If you have it, you can achieve anything. Why can't we have the so-called 'American attitude'? We need to learn to celebrate success.
-  **FOCUS:** can you see where you want to get to? No matter how many strategies you develop, you first need to plan the final outcome. The rest of the 'how to's will automatically flow.



ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN PRACTICE

Madi said there were no boundaries to her entrepreneurial mindset today. Instead, she has six global businesses, an import-export company, she is about to set up a portal for entrepreneurs and she has an education business teaching entrepreneurship.
(www.entrepreneurenvoy.org)

Madi repeated the main points of her presentation on entrepreneurship:

-  It all starts with an idea, and this is what matters at that very moment. You don't need to have a business plan, you don't have to hope for miracles, you just need some space to let the idea grow.
-  You have to think outside the box. Remaining within the limits of what frames you and prevents you from evolving will not help. You need to have the 'yes I can' attitude.
-  Everybody is an entrepreneur, though not everybody is a business person.
-  Ask for help, support and network.

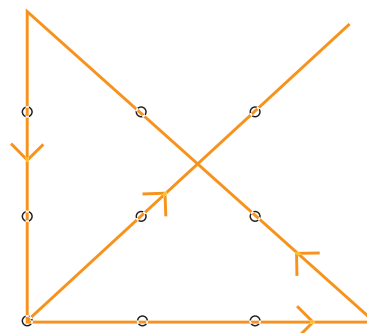
Entrepreneurship creates self-belief and self-confidence. It stimulates growth in the economy and regeneration in local areas. It creates jobs. It gives people skills and training and generates innovation and technology transfer. And most importantly, it produces a profit. And we have a choice as what we do with that profit. In this sense, we should not confuse entrepreneurs and small businesses with multinationals and banks, which often misuse their profits.



MADI SHARMA is a proud businesswoman who currently runs the Madi Group, a group of private sector and not-for-profit companies whose philosophy is to create innovative ideas tailored to local action, which can achieve a global impact that benefits society.

Additionally Madi is a Nottingham Ambassador and an East Midlands Business Champion, as well as a member of the Employers' Group of the European Economic and Social Committee in Brussels, a European Consultative institution for civil society.

She is actively involved in issues surrounding SMEs, women, young people, education, food, CSR, protection of children and entrepreneurship, with global experience on many different topics. Madi Sharma gained her own experience when she began her first company in her kitchen at home, which grew into two factories, employing 35 staff, for which she received the honours of Asian Woman of Achievement and UK's Best Boss.





YOUTH EMPLOYMENT: YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVES

NOTHING
ABOUT
US
WITHOUT
US

Bridges to Work would not be credible without the involvement of those primarily concerned with the topic: unemployed young people themselves. Therefore, 25 young people from employment or entrepreneurship projects took part in the conference to present their own perspective. They arrived a day before the start of the main stakeholder conference to allow time for group building.

TIME TO TAKE ACTION

The young people worked in separate sessions, using interactive methods, on the same topics as the stakeholder conference. This parallel process guaranteed a space for the young jobseekers to work, reflect and share ideas amongst themselves. At strategic moments in the programme, the young people's views were shared with the other participants to enrich the discussions and to root the different suggestions, programmes and initiatives in reality. For example, they pictured a 'typical young unemployed person' in their country. These images could be summarised as 'it is getting worse and therefore it is time to take action!'



The young jobseekers used 'the river of learning' to identify what they had learnt, not only at school, but also at other key moments in their lives. This was an important step towards making them aware of their potential, as well as of further learning needs to succeed in (working) life.

Next, the young people used theatrical methods to prepare and present what they saw as the main challenges in finding a job or setting up their own businesses. These methods allowed them to portray the challenges facing them, without the extensive use of language, and allowed them to take action in a concrete way. The young participants came up with a variety of statements that were important to them.



Tackle infrastructure problems, so that young people actually can reach the work place, practise computer skills, and so on.

In the recruitment process, there should be less focus on diplomas, and more on competences. What a person is capable of is more important than the papers the person can show.

A number of jobs could be kept specifically for young people to allow them to gain the much needed experience for future jobs.

Discounts for young people would allow them to be more financially independent, even if they have lower 'entry-level' wages.

The formal or academic education system and its regulations could be improved and better adapted to evolving needs (of young people, but also of the business world).

Anti-discrimination laws should be implemented more effectively, so that young people from different backgrounds (ethnic, sexuality, disability,...) truly have equal opportunities in their job search.

An environment of understanding of different (young) people would be greatly beneficial. Young people are confident and smart. They are the future and worth investing in.

Young people could benefit greatly from professional counselling to help them find their way onto the labour market more easily, or to support them in setting up their own businesses. Such counselling centres should have expertise in youth-specific issues.

Employers could be encouraged or required to take on a number of qualified young people without workplace experience. This would allow for easier entry onto the labour market for young people, and employers would be able to vet and train future employees.

Different attempts have been made to positively integrate young people into the jobs world. Networking between those projects and sharing good practices should inspire new initiatives.

Young people need to improve their practical skills. Adapted school curriculums, internships, dual study & practice systems, activities in the non-formal sector, etc. could address this need.

It is not motivating to work at the minimum wage if you would get nearly the same amount in benefits if you were unemployed. Active participation in the labour market should be rewarded.

There should be more opportunities to access jobs in different countries. The experience of working abroad opens people's minds and gives them extra competences and confidence for future employment.

Informal and non-formal education need greater recognition so that no competences or experiences remain unused. Because (young) people learn in many more contexts than just in school.

The young jobseekers chose the three most important messages for them, and presented them to the stakeholder conference using image theatre. Those three key messages can be summarised as follows:

- 🔪 Celebration of Young People: 'we are your future'!
- 🔪 Those who have diplomas get the jobs! What about other skills?
- 🔪 Schools should teach more practical 'hands-on' subjects.

After the presentation, participants were divided into smaller working groups around a few young people who gave more background information on their theatrical presentations. The working groups focused on the issues of unemployment and the obstacles to employment that young people currently face, especially in a period of economic crisis. Together with the other stakeholders, they reflected on possible answers to the different challenges they highlighted.

“We need a change of mentality. We need to build bridges between young people and employers, but we also need to build bridges between generations.”

The messages and discussions that followed were important moments in Bridges to Work. They not only helped participants to better understand young people's views and realities, but they also prompted people to think about recommendations and action plans.

🔪 Find an overview of the actions and recommendations on page 60.



EMPLOYMENT
INTERVENTIONS:
SUCCESSFUL
CONTRIBUTIONS

SALTO INCLUSION: COMBATING UNEMPLOYMENT

TONY GEUDENS presented SALTO Inclusion's work to 'combat youth unemployment'. As Koen Lambert and Pascal Lejeune (page 12) have already pointed out, employment is important to take full advantage of what life has to offer. Unemployment blocks many opportunities and wastes young people's potential in society. Therefore, tackling unemployment is high on the political agenda.



That is why SALTO Inclusion (www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/inclusion/) decided to address this important issue, focusing on those groups that are at a disadvantage on the labour market (so-called 'inclusion groups'). There are many opportunities within the Youth in Action programme to support the employability of young people with fewer opportunities. SALTO Inclusion carried out a three-year strategy to combat unemployment. This strategy included the following elements:

- † A training course and manual for youth workers to show them how to use international mobility projects to improve young people's employability.
www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/WorkingOnWork/
- † A seminar and manual for youth workers to help them use 'Youthpass' with inclusion groups to show and develop young people's competences.
www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/YouthpassForAll/
- † Good practices for project organisers and national agencies regarding how to use Youth in Action to improve the employment chances of young people.
www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/GoodPractices/

A crucial element of the strategy was to learn from previous experiences. A lot of employment projects had already been carried out, both inside and outside the youth field, so SALTO Inclusion commissioned some research to extract the success criteria for such employment interventions.

- ✂ This research is presented by Ian Goldring below.
- ✂ The 'Inclusion through employability' publication documents these successful youth work approaches to employment
www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/InclusionThroughEmployability/

In an attempt to respond to one of the questions raised earlier by Niall O'Higgins, Ian Goldring (ProjectWorks) addressed the audience with the issue of what works and what doesn't in youth employment projects? An ambitious question which nonetheless seems to have some answers.

SUCCESS CRITERIA: WHAT WORKS AND WHAT DOESN'T?

KEY FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

As previously highlighted by Niall O'Higgins (page 16), certain approaches and initiatives work better than others. Based on years of experience, months of research and a round-table meeting with a diverse range of youth employment projects from all over Europe, Ian Goldring came to four main conclusions for success.

1. INVOLVEMENT AND MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE


Employment interventions work best when they are built up around the individual young person's needs and wishes. Having the young jobseekers on board is vital for the success of the project. They should be involved in the preparation, development and evaluation of programmes and processes. These are *sine qua non* conditions for achieving meaningful and credible actions and projects.

When young people can determine their own path to a job they want, they will be far more motivated to reach that goal. Their goal becomes more reachable and more achievable. They see the project as an opportunity to reach a better life. They value their involvement in local, regional, national and even European initiatives. The involvement and participation of young people requires commitment from stakeholders, who need to provide a convenient and inviting space where the young people can get involved to their full potential.

2. HOLISTIC COORDINATION AND GOVERNANCE

A holistic approach is a pre-requisite to the success of employment initiatives. An employment project should be as close to the young people as possible and address their needs and challenges in a coherent, joined-up way. Projects should be interdisciplinary to best suit the young people's individual mindsets. Employment projects can benefit greatly from the involvement of other stakeholders in the young people's lives, particularly their families. The cooperation and support of parents is an important factor for the success of employment projects.

It is important to build up trust between the community (to which the young person belongs) and the institutions or organisations running the employment project. This combined approach is very effective because it takes into account the different facets of a young person and of the community. Holistic coordination and governance is about long-term thinking. The most vulnerable young people require complex and lengthy transitions and it is important to build stable and longer-term relationships with them and their communities.




The focus should not only be on getting young people into work, but on getting them stable and long-term jobs (of at least a year) in order to make lasting change.

3. NON-FORMAL APPROACHES

For some young people, formal education and programmes do not work. Therefore, we need to pay more attention to non-formal approaches. There are different ways of learning that are more adapted to young people and which are more effective for their personal and professional development. Non-formal learning can make a significant contribution to young people's employability. The challenges, however, are numerous and need to be urgently addressed. Among those stands the need to identify the skills gained through non-formal learning.



“Before they can convince others, young people must be made to see their own competences. They need to be coached on how to explain this to others.”



Several initiatives exist throughout Europe, but the validation of learning outcomes remains a sensitive and complex issue. It is relatively easy for educators to assess whether young people have learnt what they wanted to learn. But the difficulty is showing this to the 'outside world', e.g. to employers. If we want non-formal learning (for example in youth projects) to have an impact on young people's employability, we need to make sure that employers and employment services understand and recognise its value. Non-formal learning does not aim to compete with formal education, but it is part of an overall and holistic approach towards education.

4. STIMULATING ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Entrepreneurship is not the solution to unemployment, but it can be an option for some young people, allowing them to become economically active. Entrepreneurship and the necessary skills for it can be taught and developed, but above all the young person needs to feel comfortable about going into business. Several obstacles need to be removed before entrepreneurship becomes a real option. Bureaucratic burdens and a negative attitude to failure can hold back the most courageous, no matter how good their business idea is.

Entrepreneurship programmes should:

- Give young people experience of what it is like to run a business.
- Encourage an entrepreneurial spirit.
- Make the link between involvement in youth projects and setting up a business.
- Support and create training programmes and support structures (e.g. business incubators) for entrepreneurship.

These four criteria for success in combating youth unemployment can guide new interventions. You can read the findings of the research in the “Inclusion through employability” publication.

Download the research findings from
www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/InclusionThroughEmployability/.



IAN GOLDRING is the Director of ProjectWorks, a Brussels-based association dedicated to boosting the capacities of people and organisations, from the public, private and third sectors, to allow them to participate in and benefit more effectively from European-level activity, policies, research, funding and networking.

Ian is a Lead Expert for the Urbact programme and author of SALTO Inclusion’s research publication ‘Inclusion through employability: youth work approaches to unemployment’. Prior to ProjectWorks, Ian worked for several years as a freelance Project Manager and Consultant, focusing on EU co-funded project management and consultancy work for NGOs and local administrations, concerned with social, cultural, educational and regeneration issues.

Ian has lived, worked and studied in various countries, has one wife, one daughter and four nationalities.



GOOD PRACTICES: PARTICIPANTS SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES

Like previous events in the series, an important aspect of 'Bridges to Work' was to provide participants with an opportunity to exchange ideas and learn from the rest of the group and from good practices and experiences. In this respect, Bridges to Work was no different from the earlier events.

Fifteen workshops and nine visits to local projects were organised on a wide range of topics, from personal entrepreneurship and mobility experiences, to structured support, and entrepreneurship and employment programmes and initiatives. Testimonies, success stories, tailor-made approaches, and 'do's and don't's' were the ingredients of a tasty menu for those who wanted to hear more about how to better support young people and their transition towards sustainable employment and personal development.

⚙️ 'I HAVE AN IDEA!'

(Lithuania)

Irmantas Sujeta presented 'Enterprising Generation', an initiative that supports idea generation and business plan writing, to improve young people's knowledge of entrepreneurship and the local market: ideas are turned into practice. Unemployment is one of the biggest problems in today's society - can entrepreneurship be the right solution? What is entrepreneurship, where should I begin, can I be an entrepreneur, what do I need? Youth participants on the project 'I have an idea!' worked with entrepreneurial ideas and business plans. Were they successful? In this workshop, participants were able to find some answers to the questions above and in small groups, discussed action they could take. The project is funded by Youth in Action - Youth Initiative.

✂️ For more information: NGO Mazeikiu 'Enterprising Generation', Irmantas Sujeta, irmantas@verslikarta.lt, www.turiuideja.eu

⚙️ 'FROM SCRAP WOOD TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP'

(Belgium-Portugal)

Michael Doom introduced the organisation 'Oe Knows?!', which provides youngsters with a basic learning process on how to work with scrap wood. The aim is to enable the youngsters to improve their working competences and skills to increase their chances on the labour market. The organisation's target group is socially isolated youngsters in Cascais, Portugal. They learn how to make street furniture out of scrap wood and sell it - generating a multitude of competences as well as some income. The project is funded by Youth in Action-Youth Initiatives.

✂️ For more information: Oe Knows?!, Michael Doom, michael.doom@gmail.com

⚙️ 'EMPLOYMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES'

(Croatia)

Introduced by Marijeta Gregov was the project of R.E Centar, which works to empower its target group – young people with disabilities - through education and rehabilitation. The aim is for those young people to become as independent as possible, building new skills to allow them to find a job and put them on a path towards a fulfilling career. The work includes educational activities, workshops, and activities related to social inclusion and consultation. The Project is funded by the Ministry of Health.

✂️ For more information: R.E Centar- education and rehabilitation, info@re-centar.hr, www.re-centar.hr/re_centar.php.



'JUMP START' (Estonia)

Umberto Dorus Geerts shared information about 'Jump Start', a combination of Youth in Action projects for young people facing employability problems. Exchanges and voluntary work activities promote active citizenship, participation and employability. 'Jump Start' responds to the needs of young people by helping them develop competences so as to increase their participation in society and their access to the labour market. The project pays particular attention to young people with fewer opportunities with different profiles and backgrounds. As well as the above, the young people are provided with extra support, such as classes in Estonian language and culture, and they take part in evaluation meetings where the progress of the project and their personal learning are assessed. The project is funded by Youth in Action.

 For more information: NGO Continuous Action, Umberto Dorus Geerts, udgeerts@gmail.com

Link to Less is More and Iter project:

www.continuousaction.ee/?module=news&id=103

Link to Jump Start first project:

www.continuousaction.ee/?module=news&id=58



'EMPLOYABILITY WORKSHOPS'

(Finland)

Heidi Elo and Niina Veko presented the 'Liedon kunta / Kisällikellari' organisation, which runs activities and workshops for young people who are neither in school nor in work. The activities help guide them towards services that improve their chances on the labour market. The main aim is to improve the young people's basic educational skills and abilities, as well as life management skills, through providing them with regular work situations (e.g. through the organisation's cooking, mechanics, textiles, carpentry, or media sections) under the supervision and with the guidance and support of professionals. The project is funded by the Ministry of Education.


 For more information, Heidi Elo, [heidi.elo@](mailto:heidi.elo@lieto.fi)

[lieto.fi](mailto:heidi.elo@lieto.fi) and Niina Veko niina.veko@valtti.fi, www.lieto.fi/kisallikellari

'COMPETENCE AGENCY'

(Germany)

Presented by Petra Klein, the 'Kompetenzagentur' aims at helping young people with fewer opportunities to identify their strengths and find a job or apprenticeship. As such, competence agencies assume an important advisory and guiding role in the integration of particularly disadvantaged teenagers. This especially applies to those who 'got lost' in between leaving school and finding a job. The objective of the competence agencies is the inclusion of disadvantaged teenagers. By offering them tailored socio-pedagogical support, they are given an opportunity to boost their employment prospects. The motto of their work is 'reach, hold, empower'. Networking with firms, politicians, schools and jobcentres is key to the work of the 'Kompetenzagentur', which is funded by Youth in Action and the EU Social Fund.

 For more information: Petra Klein, petra.klein@kompetenzagentur.com, www.kompetenzagentur.com, www.hot-sinzig.de, www.die-zweite-chance.net.

'VITAMIN TRAINING COURSE'

(Iceland)


Frimann Sigurdsson introduced the work of Hitt Húsið and in particular its 'Vitamin training course', which aims to support and strengthen young people to better connect them to the labour market. The project includes developing a platform for young people to understand the educational and employment opportunities which exist around them. The Vitamin course offers young people a space to discover their strengths and gain motivation, further developing their competences so they are better equipped for the labour market. The training course lasts for eight weeks and is funded by the Reykjavik municipality and Directorate of Labour.

 For more information: Hitt Húsið, hitthusid@hitthusid.is, www.hitthusid.is

'COMMUNITY TRAINING CENTRE'

(Ireland)

Anna Peplinska presented the work of the Blanchardstown Community Training Centre (CTC). This organisation aims to respond to the training needs of early school leavers and local young people in a holistic and integrated manner, to empower them to enter employment, training or further education. Their work is funded by FAS, the Irish employment authority.

 For more information: Blanchardstown Community Training Centre, anna.peplinska@blanchardstownctc.ie, www.iacto.ie





'JOBBOX CAREER CENTRE'

(Norway)

Mona Mauseth Evensen and Somaya Elfarri walked their group through the work of 'JobbX / Antirasistisk Senter' which consists of four main projects: job application workshops, entrepreneurship counselling, business workshops and job research. JobbX tackles the path from a voluntary initiative to an entrepreneurial business. Through explaining the methods of their key activities, as well as the results and outcomes for participants, the presenters also highlighted how these could possibly be adapted for other European countries. JobbX is funded by public funding and private corporations.

 For more information: Mona Mauseth Evensen, mona@jobbx.no,
www.jobbx.no

'OLD SCHOOL CLOTHING CO.'

(United Kingdom)

David Plumtree presented the Old School Clothing Co., a vintage clothes and art store run and staffed by young volunteers to allow them to gain tangible experience in retail, merchandising, art and business management. The aim of this social enterprise is to support young people's development through fashion, creativity and an 'entrepreneurial mind'. This includes involving the young people in decision making at all levels of the organisation, providing them with a platform to sell their creative work and develop their own social enterprises, and providing volunteers with increased chances of employment and access to further opportunities. The target group consists of so-called 'NEET' young people aged from 16 to 25, with a particular focus on those at risk. The project is self-financed.

 For more information: Ed Taylor, Let There Be Light Productions,
Ed@tlblproductions.com

'H2O' (HEADING TOWARDS OTHER OPPORTUNITIES) AND **'CO3'** (CARRYING ON TO OTHER OPPORTUNITIES) (United Kingdom)

Joan McVicar presented H2O, a 12-week programme designed to provide young people (16- to 19-year-olds) with an opportunity to improve core skills, work with others and gain in confidence and maturity, leading them towards further opportunities. The programme also focuses on social skills development, active citizenship and goal setting with a focus on employability. CO3 is an intensive five-week programme that explores and develops employability skills specifically for NEETs who are ready to apply for jobs. Young people from H2O often continue on to the CO3 sister programme to help them with the next step towards gaining employment. Both initiatives are funded by the European Social Fund and the South Lanarkshire Council.

 For more information: Joan McVicar, H2O and CO3 Programmes, South Lanarkshire Youth Learning Services,
Joan.mcvicar@southlanarkshire.gov.uk



'BELGIAN CHOCOLATE ENTERPRISE'

(Finland)

Rudy Verschoren shared his story of being a former Belgian EVS volunteer who went to Lapland and wanted to stay. He set up a Belgian chocolate and pastry shop. A testimony to 'how volunteering leads to entrepreneurship'? Rudy explained the different steps along his entrepreneurial journey, going from his EVS experience, the culture shock, the desire to stay, the back and forth between Belgium and Finland, the emergence of the idea and the difficulties in finding out how to set up a business in Finland, before he finally succeed in doing so. The factory constantly recruits and the staff are aged from 15 upwards. This includes a large number of young people doing internships or work experience at the company.

 For more information: Rudy Verschoren, Suklaakahvila Valentina oy,
suklaa@suklaaterie.fi, www.suklaaterie.fi

'COLAB G8WAY'

(Sweden/Germany)

Erik Wallin and Frank Tillmann presented the Conersivity of Busyland project, which engages young people in a transition process. There are four to five different milestones to reach along the transition from education to work, or from work to education. They also introduced two specific projects launched by the German Youth Institute and its partnership: the Project 'G8WAY', which provides information about opportunities concerning the transition from school to work, and Mol@m, which targets professionals and semi-professionals working with low skilled people, and offers information about mobility in the European labour market. These initiatives are partially funded by the EU Lifelong Learning programme.

 For more information: City Conersivity AB, dinerwa@conersivity.eu and
Deutsches Jugendinstitut, schlimbach@dji.de, www.dji.de

'YOUNG FUTURE'

(Sweden)

Elisabeth (Lisa) Lindroos presented the 'Young Future' project which involves young people from 16 to 24 years old. The project consists of setting up a competence development plan for and with young people, so that they can integrate themselves into society. The project represents a full-time job with tasks, assignments and colleagues, to prepare the young people for the regular labour market. It is developed in close cooperation with trade and industry and is funded by the European Social Fund and Trelleborg Municipality.

 For more information: Elisabeth Lindroos,
Young Future Navigatorcentrum,
elisabeth.lindroos@trelleborg.se, www.ungramtid.se

'WORKSHOP ON ENTREPRENEURSHIP'

One of the workshops that had the greatest impact on the young people was definitely the one on entrepreneurship that Madi Sharma designed and facilitated for them. The objectives of the workshop were not only to work on an idea, but also for the young people to try to 'set up their own business' and sell products from India. The workshop included a motivational speech, marketing theory, tips and tasks, a recall of Madi's five Fs and a concrete assignment, which consisted of selling their own product.


 For more information: Madi Sharma, madi.csi@hotmail.com

GOING LOCAL: PROJECT VISITS IN ANTWERP

Bridges to Work took place within the framework of Antwerp, European Youth Capital 2011, so it was only logical to discover some of Antwerp's good practices in a series of project visits.

'PASSWERK' EMPLOYMENT FOR PEOPLE WITH AUTISM

Passwerk aims at enhancing the employment opportunities of young people with autism spectrum disorder and at integrating them into a regular economic working environment. Their methods include tailor-made approaches, job coaching, a high quality of services, a new model (called 'convergence market'), and 'win-win' situations. The project is funded by three types of stakeholders: IT companies, non-profit associations and 'business angels'.

 For more information: Dirk Rombauid, dirk@passwerk.be,
www.passwerk.be

'CO-ACTIEF' ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROJECT

Co-Actief is a social cooperative that supports job seekers and unemployed people in setting up their own businesses. The work is done in small groups where participants work together on issues related to entrepreneurship. They develop and present their business plan, with the support of coaches. The workshops take place one day per week over a period of three months. The next phase involves prospecting and setting up an actual economic activity. After a coaching period of 18 months, the participants can decide to set up their own business, and receive support to find funding for their enterprise. The project is funded by the Flemish authorities.

 For more information: Evelien Verschroeven,
Evelien.verschroeven@co-actief.be, www.co-actief.be



'JES' YOUTH COMPETENCE CENTRE

The target group of this Youth Competence Centre is young people with low qualifications and school dropouts. Competence centres are open centres where young people receive support for their development into adulthood through tailor-made approaches and a variety of activities. They become aware of their competences and develop them further – leading to formal recognition where possible. This centre brings together youth work, education and the labour market. Funding comes from the District of Borgerhout, the City of Antwerp and the Flemish Government

 For more information: Philip Balthau, filip.balthau@jes.be,
www.jes.be/antwerpen/

'LEVANTO' SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

Levanto is a social enterprise that aims to create tomorrow's all-inclusive labour market through supporting jobseekers with low qualifications and young people who face obstacles in accessing the labour market. Levanto's work includes coaching, training, work experience and job matching, and tackles projects in the fields of care, cleaning, construction, environment, logistics, and removals, among others. Levanto considers itself a 'supermarket' for job coaching. It obtains 40% of its income through sales of products and services and receives 60% in government financing for the training and coaching it provides.

 For more information: Caroline Beyne, caroline.beyne@levanto.be,
www.levanto.be



'FIETSHAVEN' BICYCLE WORKSHOP

Fietshaven is Levanto's social economy project that promotes the bicycle as an ecological means of mobility in the city. Fietshaven aims to provide work experience, education and training for long-term unemployed people with low qualifications. As a social enterprise, Fietshaven facilitates ecological mobility with its bike rental and bike repair services. Fietshaven started out with five co-workers in 2005 and now has 26. It is supported by the European Fund for Regional Development, the City of Antwerp, the Flemish Community and the Federal Government, as well as by self-financed initiatives.

 For more information: Tim Digneffe, Tim.digneffe@levanto.be,
www.fietshaven.be

'DE PLOEG'

De Ploeg is a centre for vocational training and support for people with a disability, which, on top of its usual activities, is currently also running two youth projects:

- 'Voortraject' works with minors who follow a part-time education programme at school but do not have the necessary skills to find or keep a job, due to personal reasons or because of their attitude.
- 'Brugproject' involves minors who follow a part-time education programme at school but do not have the necessary skills to find or keep a job because of their lack of experience on the labour market.

Both projects involve training these young people on their attitude towards work, developing their skills and motivating them to 'get ready to work'. The most important methods are tailor-made approaches and training on the ground with the support of employers. The youth activities of de Ploeg are funded by the Flemish government (department of education) and the European Social Fund.

✂ For more information: Veerle van den Bosh,
Veerle.van.den.bosch@deploeg.be, www.deploeg.be

⚙️ **'LEJO' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PATHS**

Lejo works with young people who face multiple obstacles in accessing professional education or professional work and who are usually sent by the Centres for Student Coaching. The 'Personal Development Trajectories' are part of the 'Learn and work' system which aims at giving young people the chance to follow a trajectory (path) that fits their needs. It also provides them with the opportunity to develop competences which allow them to move back into (part-time) education or work. Lejo is funded by the Ministry of Education.

✂ For more information: Frank Depoortere, frank@lejo.be,
www.lejo.be/persoonlijke-ontwikkelingstrajecten/p-o-t-antwerpen/

⚙️ **'WORK AND LEARN ANTWERP'**

Work And Learn Antwerp (WELA) organises and supports projects for students in part-time education or vocational training through combining working and learning. Their project includes teaching participants to learn or improve their Dutch (the 'preliminary project'), followed by the 'transition project', which supports young people of about 15 years of age to bridge school and work through experiencing real work situations. (After this comes 'work-matching', for young people aged 18+.) WELA is funded by the European Social Fund and the City of Antwerp.

✂ For more information: Ines De Bruyn, ines.debruyne@wela.be,
www.wela.be

⚙️ **'COUSCOUSCOLA'**


With a strong focus on creativity and multiculturalism, CousCousCola aims to 'reach the world with a positive eye' through creating a different and positive image of the new multicultural generation. The project combines Middle Eastern oriental features with Western elements in an exclusive collection of fashion and shoes for all, as well as ornaments, jewellery, leather handbags and other items. CousCousCola is one of the concrete entrepreneurship initiatives resulting from the Co-Actief's workshops.

✂ For more information: www.couscouscola.be



EMPLOYERS' VIEW: HOW DO THEY DO IT

A common and recurrent theme when tackling (un)employment is that 'there aren't any jobs anymore'. Is that the reality? What are human resource managers looking for? What do they value? Do youth employment projects actually provide what employers are looking for? What advice can employers give to young job seekers?



Bridges to Work invited three panellists from the business world to answer these questions: Andrea Drenne Elek (Project Leader of the General Electric Foundation, Opening Doors, Hungary), Jean-Paul Van Avermaet (Managing Director of G4S Security Solutions, Belgium) and Tanel Joost (Equa, Estonia). They shared their vision on innovative recruitment and human resources approaches to young people with fewer opportunities.

THERE ARE JOBS Although the situation may vary from country to country and from sector to sector, generally there are jobs available. Jean-Paul Van Avermaet gave an example, saying they constantly had vacancies for about 100 jobs at G4S. Tanel Joost highlighted the fact that there were certainly more opportunities in so-called 'technical jobs' (requiring 'hard skills'), but in general employment, prospects belonged more to reality than to utopia.

What has changed in Europe over the past few decades is that jobs are not for life anymore, continuing until a worker retires. Young people have to be ready to compromise, to be challenged and to enter a step-by-step process where they can work, learn and develop at the same time.


Setting up your own business can be an alternative to finding a job working in a company, but young people need to be realistic. Being an entrepreneur is a process. It will not just happen overnight, but requires perseverance, creativity and commitment. As Tanel Joost put it: "This situation can be frustrating for young people, but we need to encourage them. If you want to run, you first need to pick up your foot and take the first step. Then take a second one, a bit faster. It is only then that you will be able to run."

CREATING YOUR OWN JOB?



WHAT COMPETENCES IS AN HR MANAGER LOOKING FOR?

Tackling the issue of competences, the three panellists agreed that formal education does not always provide a satisfactory response to the needs of the labour market. Competition on the labour market is high, so the best candidates are chosen first for a job. But in some contexts, recruitment approaches tend to exclude young people with fewer opportunities and lower levels of education. Many programmes and initiatives exist to support these groups to get into employment.




Andrea Drenne Elek shared information about GE's Opening Doors programme that supports students and teachers in an underprivileged region of Hungary, through global knowledge transfer. To do this, General Electric contributes to knowledge-building through the experience of its employees, who volunteer a number of hours to training, meetings, job counselling and language courses. It does not matter if the Hungarian situation differs from Belgium and Estonia, the focus needs to remain on those who wish to learn a profession. If young people have concrete practical skills, they are bound to find a job.

Cooperation with employment services is crucial. Networking between different partners is one of the most important elements in building effective solutions to unemployment. Job placements needs to be combined with extra or on-the-job training to develop young people's knowledge and skills. More and more companies now invest in providing a pleasant working environment and try to provide sustainable and high quality jobs for their employees. Because this is what will keep them, motivate them and also allow them to do a good job.

Competences are composed of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Traditionally, recruitment has focused mainly on knowledge (diplomas) or skills (for more technical or practical professions). But what attitudes, soft skills and other life experiences are relevant?

THE VALUE OF ATTITUDES AND EXPERIENCE

Social competences are increasingly important and relevant for teamwork, for instance. Employers naturally want to employ people who have relevant experience. However, a young job seeker will probably not have all the necessary competences and experience when leaving school. But we can encourage young people to enrol in parallel initiatives, such as youth work and volunteering activities. This will enhance their creativity, their values, competences development and potential on the labour market.



'Soft skills' or competences acquired through youth work are very valuable, and it would be a mistake to believe that they are not taken into account in the recruitment process. On-the-job training can also complement a lack of skills and competences. Jean-Paul Van Avermaet gave the example of a 54-year-old employee who requested IT training. If justified, such training can contribute to the well-being of the employee, as well as to the company's ability to retain that employee. In this sense, it is worth investing in training.




WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY IS IT?

Do companies have social or moral responsibilities to recruit disadvantaged young people? Do companies need to be 'more social'? "In a way, a company is only responsible for making a profit," Tanel said, tongue in cheek. "If a company does not aim to make profit, it would be an NGO." Yet Tanel also explained that it would be irresponsible to ignore what is happening around us. Therefore, companies have no choice but to 'go social', to invest in training and social programmes and to advocate a change in attitude, for the benefit of all. Jean-Paul Van Avermaet agreed, saying that 'traditional' bosses and companies would have huge problems in ten years' time if they did not change their attitude towards employment and recruitment.

SMARTER IS BETTER?

Would there be any reasons not to simply recruit the best and smartest candidates? Some of the panellists pointed out that less qualified and experienced candidates can also bring benefits to a company.

Less experienced and less skilled young people are in the early part of their professional lives and can grow with the company, whereas others can be (too) set in their ways. Even though, from a purely economic perspective, this means lower salaries at the start, it does offer beginners an opportunity to develop in their jobs. This in turn guarantees a sense of belonging to the company and a commitment to the job.



It would be nonsense to employ someone and not want to get the best out of that person. If a person grows, develops and is trained, then that person stays longer, according to Jean-Paul. And if an employee stays longer, it means more stability and sustainability for the company and its staff. This in turn translates into more benefits and higher growth. Hence, going social does not mean you have to become a charity, but you invest in the potential of the people who work for you. This is beneficial both for the company and the worker.

Jean-Paul, Andrea and Tanel ended the panel session by sharing some advice and hints with the job seekers and the other employers present at the conference, based on their experiences and employment vision:

ADVICE FOR YOUNG JOB SEEKERS

- Be creative with your CV. It is all about storytelling, and a good story must be entertaining. Think about how best to sell yourself, how to narrate your experiences.
- Some approaches to preventing discrimination advocate anonymous CVs. This is nonsense: show who you are and what you are passionate about.
- Be brave, confident and flexible.
- Give a net to fish with, don't give the fish itself. We need to share our experiences and best practices.
- Never give up. Train yourself be open to learning and do not become disappointed. At some point, someone will see your real value.

A rich exchange of opinions and ideas which made a real impact, as you will see when you look at the recommendations and action plans, the main outcomes of Bridges to Work on page 60.



JEAN-PAUL VAN AVERMAET

G4S Security Solutions (Belgium)

Jean-Paul Van Avermaet studied Business Engineering in Leuven and Ghent (Belgium). He started his career in catering management at Avia Partner and Restorail. He moved into financial and administrative management and became managing director of Rain Gourmet Belgium (2005-2010), before making the step to G4S Belgium. There, he has worked as managing director of the Secure Solutions Division since June 2010. Jean-Paul is also very socially active and has carried out a variety of functions within VOKA (Chambers of Commerce), he was chairman of Jobkanaal (a project promoting diversity at work) and has been involved in many other projects.

When asked about his personal views on business life, he says: it is important to have a goal and a good strategy. Know where you are going and how to get there. Be open-minded, a good listener, be able to accept other people's errors and different personalities.

Whenever he has some spare time, he adores travelling, squash, athletics and mountain biking.

ANDREA DRENNE ELEK

GE Foundation, Opening Doors (Hungary)

Andrea Drenne Elek graduated in Hungarian, Russian and English language and literature from Debrecen University in 1991 and 1996. At present, she is continuing her studies at the faculty of Education Management (University of Technology and Economics, Budapest). Besides her university studies, she has participated in several special training sessions and courses in the fields of career counselling and teaching business English for students.



As for her work, she started her teaching career at a technical secondary school in her town. The school was able to experiment with new methods and approaches to vocational and technical training, in a project supported by the World Bank in 1998. Since then, she has been working in the area of career counselling.

Since 2002, Andrea has been the project leader of the Opening Doors Programme, which is supported by the GE Foundation and GE Hungary (General Electric). The GE Foundation's Opening Doors Secondary School Talent Development Programme was established to create a new generation of competitive intellectuals in the underprivileged north-east region of Hungary.

Over the years, this programme has created a competitive edge for 474 students and 59 teachers living in an underprivileged region, through global knowledge transfer. GE has invested in the future via 4000 volunteer hours by GE leaders and USD 1.1 million in grants from the GE Foundation. The company not only provides money, but also its experience and a network of partners in the programme.



TANEL JOOST

Equa and Afterone (Estonia)

Tanel Joost studied for a BA in Public Administration and a second major in Business Administration. In 1995 he co-founded Equa, a company that produces medical furniture and equipment for people with a disability. He takes care of the general management of the company and the export management, as well as new projects and product development initiatives and ideas.

He developed the company from a small workshop of two workers, to a manufacturing company employing 26 people. Today, the company is considered one of the biggest exporters in its field in Estonia. Equa has many long-term cooperation agreements with major international medical equipment manufacturers as the sole supplier of components and products. In the 16 years since the company was founded, it has grown by an average of 20% per year.

Since 2004, Tanel has also diversified his business activities, becoming a strategic decision maker and export marketing manager for Afterone, a metal-works company. Together with his brother, he turned the loss-making company (when they bought it) into a profitable enterprise. Efficiency has been increased to the highest level thanks to the implementation of leaner methods.

In a former life, Tanel was also active as a youth worker and trainer in a variety of activities. He was also politically active in his home town of Tartu.



FUNDING: MONEY FOR EMPLOYMENT

Many organisations set up projects to improve young people's chances on the labour market. But who pays for this? There are a number of funding schemes and programmes that support employment and entrepreneurship projects. And because organisations are constantly looking for money for their activities, Bridges to Work offered seven informative workshops on different funding programmes that can be used for youth employment and entrepreneurship.



YOUTH IN ACTION PROGRAMME, EUROPEAN VOLUNTARY SERVICE (EVS)

Marit Kannelmäe-Geerts from the National Agency of Estonia told us how a young person can 'learn many skills on a voluntary project abroad through a programme open to all young people'. The European Voluntary Service (EVS) is part of Youth in Action, a European Union programme that promotes the mobility of young people through international activities with a non-formal education dimension, such as youth exchanges, voluntary service, youth initiatives and training of youth workers.

 For more information: <http://ec.europa.eu/youth/>

YOUTH IN ACTION PROGRAMME, YOUTH INITIATIVES

Peter Pieters (Youth in Action Programme, the Netherlands) shared information about funding for creative projects developed by groups of friends or young people in their own country or with a partner group abroad. Youth Initiatives are projects entirely devised, planned and implemented by young people at local, regional or national level. The goal of these important non-formal learning experiences is to stimulate young people's creativity, resourcefulness and initiative. Youth Initiatives are aimed primarily at 18-30-year-olds, but 15-18-year-olds can take part if accompanied by a coach or youth worker.

 For more information: <http://ec.europa.eu/youth/>

EURODYSSEY

Diane Carvalho presented Eurodyssey, a funding programme from the Assembly of European Regions (AER). It allows young job seekers aged between 18 and 30 to benefit from a traineeship placement abroad for a period of between three to seven months in the participating regions of the Assembly of European Regions (AER).

 For more information: www.eurodyssee.eu

ERASMUS FOR ENTREPRENEURS

Hajar Zamouri (Agentschap Ondernemen/Enterprise Europe Network) walked her group through entrepreneurship, with a particular focus on entrepreneurs who are just starting out and who can shadow an established entrepreneur in another country. Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs is a cross-border exchange programme that gives new or aspiring entrepreneurs the chance to learn from experienced entrepreneurs running small businesses in other European Union countries.

 For more information: www.erasmus-entrepreneurs.eu





EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND (ESF)

Caroline Meyers (ESF-Flanders) provided a thorough explanation of the EU's structural programme for employment, equal opportunity and social solidarity. This European money is given to member states to fund different projects. It largely depends on the country as to how this money is used, but it has to fit the ESF objectives. More information is available from your national ESF-agency.

 For more information: <http://ec.europa.eu/esf/>.

EURES

Lizzy Bradley (Youth Ambassador, EURES Netherlands) encouraged us to 'find job opportunities abroad with EURES and experience the EURES game'. The purpose of EURES is to provide information, advice and recruitment/placement (job-matching) services for the benefit of workers and employers, as well as anybody wishing to benefit from the principle of the free movement of people. In European cross-border regions, EURES has an important role to play in providing information and helping resolve various problems related to cross-border commuting that workers and employers might experience.

 For more information: <http://ec.europa.eu/eures/>

PEFONDES PRIZE

Interested in the social economy? As presented by Sophie Chiha (Pefondes) and Karolien Claes (Plotform), Pefondes is a European network of social economy foundations which awards a 'European Prize for youth employment in the social economy' each year. Plotform was the winner of the 2011 Pefondes Prize.

 For more information:
www.pefondes.eu and www.plotform.eu





NEXT STEPS: BUILDING MORE BRIDGES

After three days of discussing and sharing, the different stakeholder groups were asked what they saw as the next steps towards building effective bridges to work.

They identified the existing opportunities, the challenges and the possible further steps towards increasing young people's chances on the labour market, particularly for those at a disadvantage, compared to their peers. One of the most important outcomes of Bridges to Work was a series of recommendations and proposals for further actions linked to youth employment and entrepreneurship.



WHAT CAN SUPPORT PROGRAMMES DO?

(E.G. YOUTH IN ACTION)

Opportunities for those in charge of a funding programme tend to lie in better cooperation between different stakeholders and programmes.

Communication about the benefits of the projects they fund can be more effective.

This leads to better recognition for the skills gained through these projects. Bridges to Work certainly highlighted the importance of these elements, not only throughout the sessions but also throughout the numerous workshops, testimonies, best practice examples and informal talks.

However, the challenges remain as complex as they are varied. It is often difficult for support programmes to reach out to certain groups of young people, especially those in a situation of exclusion. It also remains extremely difficult to get the projects, and young people's learning in them, recognised by employers as being valuable. Developing a more effective multi-disciplinary approach to young people's employability is not easy in a period of budget cuts.

So, to take advantage of the opportunities and overcome the challenges, certain actions can improve the situation. For example, more and better training for young people, more effective targeted messages about the outcomes of projects, a stronger focus on recognition of competences acquired in projects and closer cooperation between different educational providers and employers.



OPPORTUNITIES

- The business sector can discover the value of youth and mobility projects;
- The potential to connect youth work and projects with companies' social agenda;
- The business sector may be predisposed to recognising skills and attitudes gained through youth work and mobility projects;
- The will to create synergies between different funding programmes;
- If entrepreneurship starts with an idea, our programmes can support these ideas.

CHALLENGES

- To reach young people and inform them of existing opportunities;
- To highlight and value the skills acquired through projects (especially to employers);
- To support young people in describing their learning and their competences;
- To train project workers to use the 'right language' that is understood by employers;
- To have a holistic / multi-disciplinary approach and towards engaging with other stakeholders;
- To tackle unemployment in a period of recession;
- To better spread information about European funding at the national level.

ACTIONS NEEDED

- Train youth workers and young people to better communicate the impact of projects and youth work;
- Cooperate with other stakeholders using methods that are acceptable to all parties;
- Target messages e.g. to policy-makers, to employers – using the right language;
- Recognise non-formal education and value soft skills;
- Highlight and demonstrate how non-formal and formal education complement each other;
- Simplify application procedures and access to funding programmes and mobility projects for young people;
- Make messages and information more user-friendly and adapted to the target group;
- Ensure a proper follow-up after a young person's project experience;
- Compile best practices and make them visible.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

- How can we make sure youth work and mobility projects are not reduced to just finding a job?
- How can we sustain organisations and longer-term work through project-based grants?
- How can we motivate and support organisations working with (young) people with fewer opportunities?
- Is mobility always the answer?
- How can we ensure more stable employment for young people?

WHAT CAN EMPLOYERS & JOB AGENCIES CONTRIBUTE?

For an employer, and especially for small and medium-sized enterprises, the economic crisis and the current period of recession are not easy to handle and this does not favour youth employment. Even though public

services tend to develop social measures, employers do wonder whether this really benefits employment and adequately motivates jobseekers. Obstacles to training as well as to entrepreneurship remain too numerous and result in a waste of human potential.

Nonetheless, there is a margin for manoeuvre. Cooperation between different stakeholders in the employment sector is possible, if encouraged by different programmes and policy. Being more 'social' and training (future) employees is beneficial for both the company and the workers. Employers can share experiences and best practices and learn from each other. Mentoring of new staff and corporate volunteering in training and coaching programmes are effective ways of investing in people and companies in the longer run. A change of perspective and attitude opens the door to new opportunities.

OPPORTUNITIES

- ← Cooperation with other stakeholders;
- ← Corporate social responsibility;
- ← On-the-job training, mentoring hours, creative hours, coaching, share good practices;
- ← Tap into EU funding programmes;
- ← Support for entrepreneurship through volunteering and coaching of staff;
- ← Young people are *young*: this is their strength and the opportunity to involve a new work force;
- ← Take some distance to better see the context, the different situations and the perspectives;

CHALLENGES

- ← Facing the crisis: uncertainty and difficult long-term planning;
- ← There aren't many jobs that just require 'low skills';
- ← Do social benefits really motivate young people to work?
- ← People look abroad: the work force emigrates;
- ← To avoid a waste of human potential;
- ← To match education to the needs of the labour market;
- ← To comply with the minimum standards for employers;
- ← To establish effective cooperation mechanisms.

ACTIONS NEEDED

- Influence policy-makers to create a favourable climate and better conditions for hiring young people;
- Change [employers'] attitudes and behaviours towards young job candidates;
- Be more open to competences acquired outside school e.g. in youth work or international projects;
- Build bridges with local employment agencies and different funding programmes;
- Explore the possibilities of different funding programmes (European Social Fund, Eurodisney, etc.)
- Make it part of corporate social responsibility to support (disadvantaged) young people in their first steps towards employment or entrepreneurship;
- Create networks e.g. with schools, businesses, job agencies, employment projects for recruitment
- Share your innovative recruitment and staffing approaches, gain visibility.
- Support or encourage new youth employment projects and reap the benefits from them.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

- How can we combine economic performance with social projects?
- How can we effectively build bridges between job seekers, employers, social platforms, PES, entrepreneurs, etc.?
- How can we be sure of the contribution of youth work/projects to a young person's employability?
- How can we use the potential of youth workers and young people who have been active in youth work?
- How can we reach and work with 'young people with fewer opportunities'?

Bridges to Work as a conference title already indicates that leading young people (with fewer opportunities) towards employment requires an interconnected approach between different stakeholders. However, the young people and the employment projects they are on can also take action to make the most of the opportunities available to them.

WHAT ABOUT YOUNG JOB SEEKERS & YOUTH PROJECTS?

The available information and widespread funding opportunities do not seem to properly reach young people and those who need it the most. Hence, youth or project workers have an important role to play in trying to make the best use of the existing funding programmes. International learning mobility projects, for instance, can substantially increase the competences and employability of a young person.

Another challenge for young people, as well as for their coaches, is to make visible and applicable what they have learnt in an employment project. Self-recognition is a pre-requisite for young people to be able to show others (e.g. employers) what they have learnt and what they are able to do. Coaches can support this process, but employers should also be challenged to open up to competences acquired outside of school.

This proves the need for a change in perception about 'non-formal learning' by the 'outside world'. Youth work and mobility projects have to be better at showing the impact of this experience on young people. Moreover, youth work is particularly apt at reaching out to young people in situations of exclusion. Sharing examples of positive employment projects can contribute to wider recognition of non-formal learning as a tool for improving young people's employability.

OPPORTUNITIES

- A variety of funding programmes;
- Attitudes to work are increasingly being perceived as more important than technical skills;
- More innovation and creativity resulting from cross-fertilisation and cooperation between sectors;
- The dynamism of the youth sector and its methods ;
- The experience gained through international activities (for young people and for youth workers).

CHALLENGES

- Information overload or not knowing the relevant information, networks, funding;
- To make the best use of the knowledge gained;
- For young people to show what they have learnt and apply this to 'real life' situations (e.g. on the job);
- To adequately prepare young people for the labour market;
- To make use of the available funding sources locally, to support young people in accessing them;
- To break through the boundaries of a given sector, to work towards effective cooperation and networking.

ACTIONS NEEDED

- Disseminate best youth employment and entrepreneurship practices and gain inspiration from them;
- Promote the value of attitudes and soft skills (compared to technical skills) to young people and employers;
- Train young people in how to analyse and present their competences (e.g. in job interviews) using relevant language and concepts;
- Work on the self-confidence of the young people and do not give up;
- Be innovative and creative in your approaches;
- Cooperate with different stakeholders e.g. schools, employers, job centres;
- Promote non-formal education as an alternative way of gaining competences;
- Show the seriousness and concrete impact of youth employment projects (e.g. to funders, to policy-makers, to employers).

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

- Which funding can be used for what types of projects?
- How can we change the perception of youth projects outside the 'inner circle'?
- How can we share our knowledge about youth employment and entrepreneurship projects in an effective way?
- How can we connect with employers, schools, policy-makers?
- How can we support young people who face additional barriers/obstacles?

WHAT SUPPORT IS NEEDED FROM POLICY-MAKERS?

If youth employment is an important issue for policy-makers, and if authorities want to avoid young people sliding away into NEET status with dramatic consequences, they need to make the 'employability' of young people a top priority.

Policy-makers create the framework in which employment efforts take place. In this sense, they can create a supportive climate or incentives for the different actions outlined above. At the same time, they can also create legislation that reduces obstacles for young people in search of a job or for those who want to set up their own businesses.

Policy measures could encourage the following:

- ✔ Acknowledge that (young) people learn in different ways and in different contexts (e.g. in youth work, civil society, etc.). Youth work and out-of-school projects use more adapted methods for some young people (e.g. school drop outs) and deserve support.
- ✔ Systems should be put in place to recognise the value of non-formal learning (and prior acquired competences) as complementary to formal education. Impact studies could raise the recognition level of non-formal education projects.
- ✔ Develop a cross-sectorial approach and support holistic programmes that take care of young people and their professional futures. Joined-up thinking is more effective than fragmented interventions by different agencies.
- ✔ Employment programmes work best if they are built up around the young person's needs. Therefore it is important to include young people in the conceptualisation of the programmes that target them. Nothing about them without them.
- ✔ Effective anti-discrimination measures should be developed and enforced to reduce the obstacles for specific groups of young people (ethnic minorities, different sexuality, disability, those facing social challenges, etc.).
- ✔ Create incentives for employers to join programmes which allow young people to gain practical work experience, competences needed for the labour market and a realistic view of their professional opportunities.
- ✔ Create a favourable climate and better conditions for hiring young people, especially those with fewer opportunities. Different programmes could be developed to bridge the gap between school and work e.g. traineeships, job shadowing, dual systems combining school and practical experience.
- ✔ Partnerships between the private sector, the public sector and civil society should be supported in order to improve the chances of young people on the labour market, whether in finding a job or setting up their own businesses.
- ✔ Young people could benefit greatly from professional counselling to find their way onto the labour market more easily, or support to set up their own businesses. Such counselling centres should have expertise in youth-specific issues.

FUTURE PLANNING: CONCRETE ACTION PLANS

Small groups of young people together with their coach and other stakeholders sat together to think about the actions each of them could

concretely carry out to achieve better opportunities for young people on the labour market, especially for those at a disadvantage compared to their peers. The participants based their ideas on the previous Bridges to Work sessions and drafted a concrete 'action plan' to take back home.

A summary of the proposed actions:

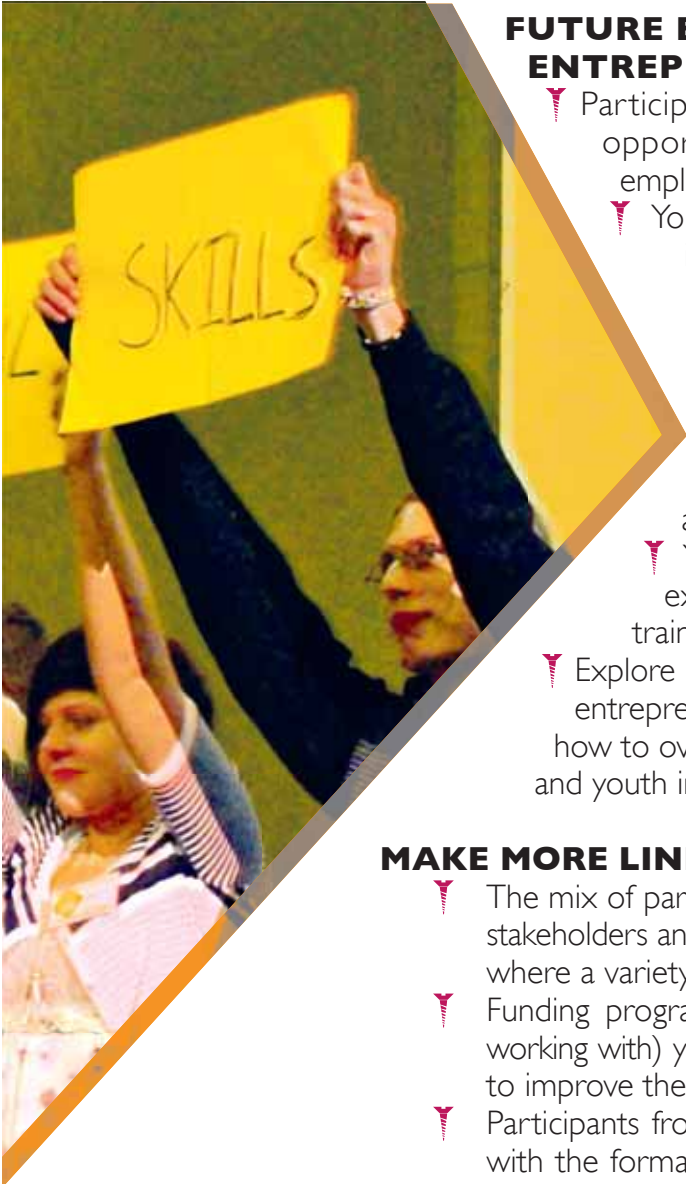
FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

- ✦ The results of Bridges to Work should be disseminated as widely as possible to relevant stakeholders, by all participants and by SALTO Inclusion and the contributing partners. The conference report will be ready at the beginning of 2012.
- ✦ SALTO Inclusion needs to follow up on Bridges to Work and create or disseminate future activities regarding youth employment and entrepreneurship.
- ✦ Similarly, participants are encouraged to set up follow-up projects after Bridges to Work, making use of the contacts, content, methods, concepts and inspiration gained. SALTO Inclusion can support these initiatives.
- ✦ Plan a workshop on 'Entrepreneurship for young people' (for example the Youth in Action national agency in Poland is organising just such a training session in March 2012).

SPREAD THE LEARNING

- ✦ Participants are invited to share what they learnt at Bridges to Work within their networks and put it into practice in their projects.
- ✦ The different stakeholders can take the resources of the SALTO-YOUTH resource centres to their networks: e.g. SALTO Inclusion publications, Youthpass, training opportunities (training calendar), training tools (Toolbox), project partners (Otlas database), good practices, ...
- ✦ SALTO Inclusion and others should document good employment and entrepreneurship practices in their sector and disseminate them, even beyond the usual channels (e.g. to other sectors).
- ✦ The European Commission should launch a survey at EU level about the impact of Youth in Action and non-formal learning on young people's employability. This should show its impact and encourage recognition of non-formal learning.





FUTURE EMPLOYMENT & ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROJECTS

- ✔ Participants should take advantage of the different funding opportunities presented at Bridges to Work for their employment and entrepreneurship projects.
- ✔ Youth workers, policy makers and funding programmes should involve young people in the development of programmes that concern them, so that they are adapted to their needs. This will allow for greater ownership and will motivate the young people to be involved.
- ✔ Young people can explore the possibilities of the Youth in Action programme (e.g. youth exchanges, voluntary service, group initiatives) to gain experience and increase their competences and employability.
- ✔ Young people can find opportunities to gain practical experience on the labour market through job shadowing, traineeships, entrepreneurship projects, etc.
- ✔ Explore how both formal and non-formal learning can encourage entrepreneurship amongst young people. Train young people in how to overcome the most frequent obstacles to entrepreneurship and youth initiatives.

MAKE MORE LINKS

- ✔ The mix of participants at Bridges to Work was very enriching. Different stakeholders and institutions should keep on organising events or meetings where a variety of stakeholders are present.
- ✔ Funding programmes should continue to reach out to (organisations working with) young people with fewer opportunities and support projects to improve their chances on the labour market.
- ✔ Participants from the non-formal education sector should seek contact with the formal education sector: schools, education ministries, etc. and explore complementarity and ways of cooperation, especially for young people with fewer opportunities.
- ✔ Initiate a space for dialogue between employers and the non-formal education sector (e.g. youth work providers). Establish partnerships to work on youth employability together.



CONCLUSIONS: BRIDGES TO WORK HIGHLIGHTS

Gisele Evrard, the general rapporteur, summarised the different elements and learning points of Bridges to Work at the end of the conference. Besides the highlights and conclusions, she also presented the main outcomes.

It is certainly not an easy task to summarise a three-day event, which gathered about 150 people from very diverse backgrounds, who held discussions on many different areas of work. The richness of the discussions leaves no doubt about the usefulness of bringing together all stakeholders to improve the odds for young jobseekers today. Together, participants can create synergies for more joined-up and targeted actions.

NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US!

This was the central principle at Bridges to Work. Young people from employment and entrepreneurship projects joined the conference, together with a coach from their project. They shared their experiences of unemployment and realised that 'they are not alone'. Together, they planned steps to help them find a job in the near future.

The young people told the stakeholder conference what was important for them as job seekers. They urged all the stakeholders to see *them*, to take them seriously and to give them a chance. They asked for recognition of their skills, for a more realistic and adjusted education system, and for true opportunities that allow them to fully enter an ever-more competitive jobs market.

Pascal Lejeune highlighted the relevance of Bridges to Work at the conference opening. The employment of young people is high on all agendas and needs to remain there until effective and sustainable solutions are found. The Europe 2020 strategy, the EU Youth Strategy and its flagship initiative 'Youth on the Move' define a set of national and European actions which are all in line with the issues tackled during Bridges to Work:

A POLITICAL PRIORITY

- policy efforts to improve youth employment, education and training,
- the need to recognise competences acquired through non-formal learning and learning mobility.

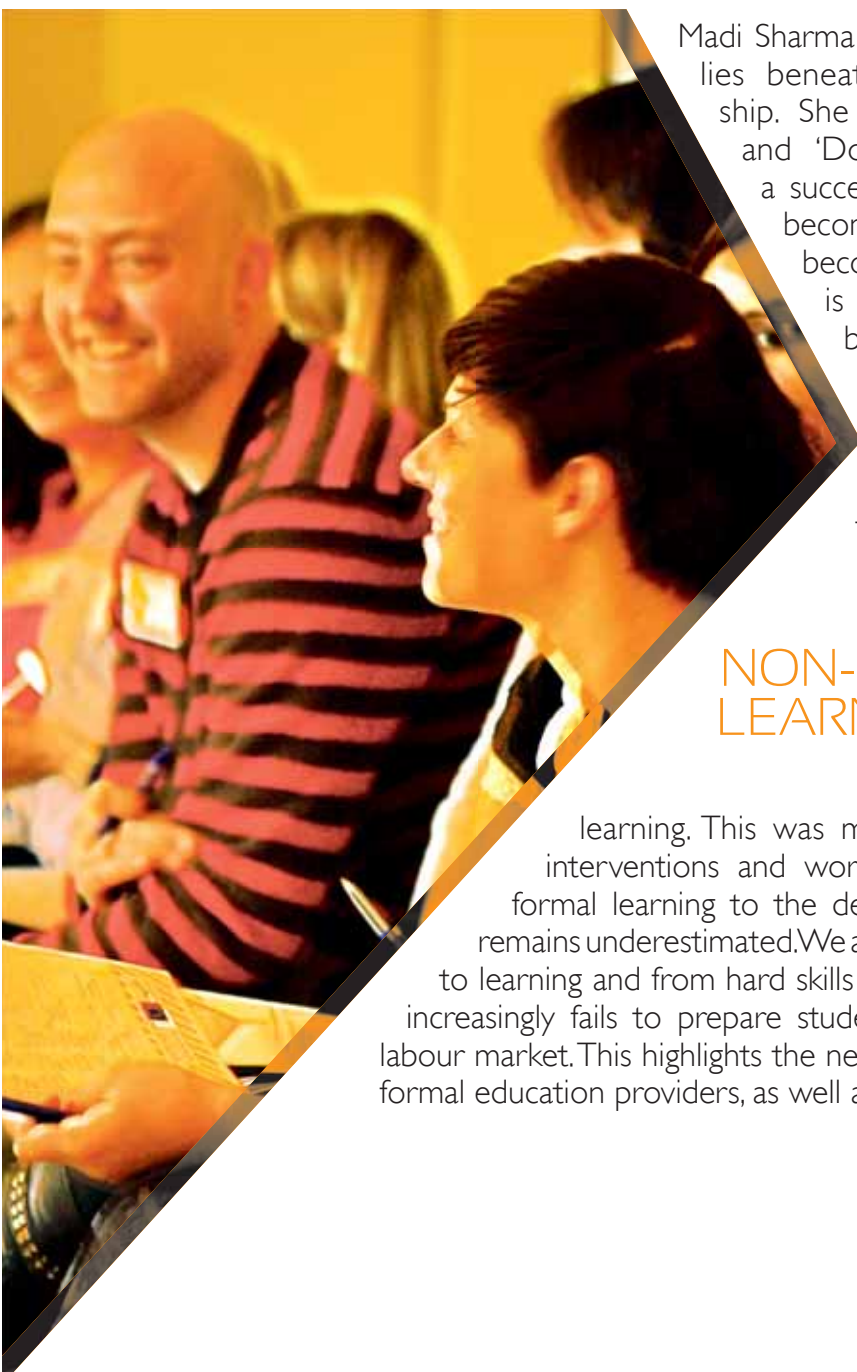
Non-formal learning and learning mobility are addressed to a great extent by the Youth in Action programme. But more broad-based and coordinated efforts are needed. Youth work contributes to the development of competences and soft skills. This was widely acknowledged and praised during Bridges to Work. However, we need to keep in mind that youth work goes far beyond aiming solely at employability.

UNEMPLOYMENT VERSUS JOBLESSNESS

Different speakers at Bridges to Work addressed the issue of unemployment versus joblessness, the current employment situation in Europe, and success factors for employment projects and entrepreneurship. Even though the approaches, ways of understanding and perspectives differed, commonalities emerged from the enriching discussions.



The crisis and the recession are about to leave a dark and profound mark on young people's present and future. Young people are the group that suffer most of the consequences of the economic crisis, such as lower quality jobs, repetitive internships, short-term employment and long-term unemployment. Young people may enter a danger zone where uncertainties 'pile up'. And this is even truer for those with fewer opportunities. Therefore, we should increase our efforts to find solutions and develop inclusive and successful initiatives, such as those highlighted by Niall O'Higgins and Ian Goldring.



Madi Sharma uncovered what lies beneath entrepreneurship. She shared the 'Do's and 'Don't's of becoming

CREATE YOUR OWN JOB

a successful entrepreneur. However, if anyone can become an entrepreneur, not everyone can become a business (wo)man. Entrepreneurship is not the sole answer to unemployment, but it can certainly contribute to finding solutions. There are also some pre-requisites to consider, such as adequate support and programmes, a shift of mentality towards entrepreneurship and an acceptance of failure as a learning experience.

NON-FORMAL LEARNING

Another key outcome of Bridges to Work was the importance attached to recognising competences acquired through non-formal learning. This was mentioned in numerous recommendations, interventions and workshops, because the contribution of non-formal learning to the development of competences and 'soft skills' remains underestimated. We are currently witnessing a shift from knowledge to learning and from hard skills to soft skills. Furthermore, formal education increasingly fails to prepare students appropriately for the demands of the labour market. This highlights the need for cooperation between employers and formal education providers, as well as with non-formal education providers.



THE ROAD TO FOLLOW

The discussions at Bridges to Work led to a set of recommendations and proposals which are detailed from pages 60 onwards. Let us just highlight the 'most desirable' ones:

- ✦ A more comprehensive approach towards the development of competences and soft skills in schools;
- ✦ Recognition of non-formal learning and mobility projects as a complementary way of learning to formal education;
- ✦ More and better training programmes for youth workers and employment agencies who coach young people towards a job;
- ✦ More holistic interventions adapted to the target group: a joined-up approach rather than fragmented services, especially for vulnerable groups;
- ✦ Closer relations between the business world and young people through job shadowing, entrepreneurship Fridays, internships, company days, etc.;
- ✦ A coordinated dialogue and closer cooperation between different stakeholders: formal education, employers, youth work and young people;
- ✦ More effective information about funding programmes that can be used for employment or entrepreneurship, but also disseminate the results more widely;
- ✦ Change our behaviour and attitudes: take risks, take (social) responsibilities, be ready to be challenged and to take on different perspectives;
- ✦ Continue organising and funding youth employment and entrepreneurship projects.

At Bridges to Work, policy-makers, employers, coaches, employment agencies, funders and young people alike all expressed their desire for quality employment opportunities for young people with fewer opportunities. Their dedication undoubtedly sparked off a number of projects that improve young people's chances on the labour market.

Because together we can build those bridges.



YOUNG PEOPLE: WHAT DID WE LEARN?

One of the outcomes of an educational event like Bridges to Work, is the learning. Bridges to Work included a parallel process for the young job seekers, so that they could gain from and contribute to the conference through adapted methods. That is why at the end of the conference, they also had a separate session to reflect on what they had learnt in Antwerp.

Madi Sharma's workshop on entrepreneurship and the joint sessions, such as 'How do employers do it?' were undoubtedly inspiring and motivating for the young people. The young job seekers said these moments represented a real boost, helping them design their own action plans. "It helped them to reflect on and recollect all that they had learnt over the past few days," as one trainer put it. "It also helped them to look ahead." They worked quite concretely on the next steps to take towards finding a job, with the support of other stakeholders. These connections were the essence of Bridges to Work.

Here are some of the learning outcomes, assessed by the young participants themselves at different intervals during the conference:

INSPIRATION

- I was inspired by the different sessions at the conference.
- I can use the different methods and tools back home in my country.
- I discovered new and innovative projects.
- Young people should focus on their strengths to sell themselves to employers.
- It is important to be creative and develop self-confidence (believe in yourself).
- If you really want something in life, you can achieve it.

CULTURAL AWARENESS

- Similar youth work and employment activities exist in different countries.
- Everybody has different learning styles.
- We probably learn much more from life than from school.
- It is good to know that other young people in different countries have the same problems, but it is hard to compare because our structures in our hometowns are different.

EMPLOYMENT PROJECTS

- Experience is just as important as qualifications.
- I learnt how to create my own project.
- Networking is very important.
- Organisations should focus more on concrete and specific problems that young people face.
- The employment situation is bad and we have to do something to fix it – not give up!

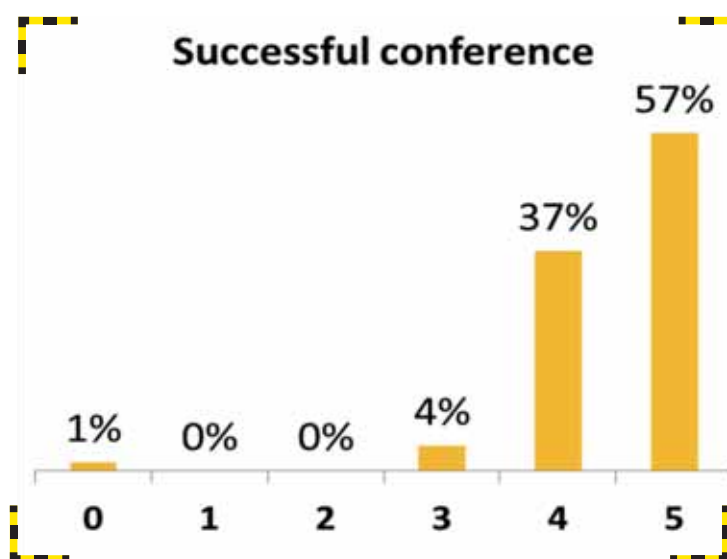


What did participants think of Bridges to Work? What were the highlights of the programme? What did participants learn? What were the main outcomes of the conference? Did the conference reach the aims it set out to reach?

EVALUATION: PARTICIPANTS' OPTIONS

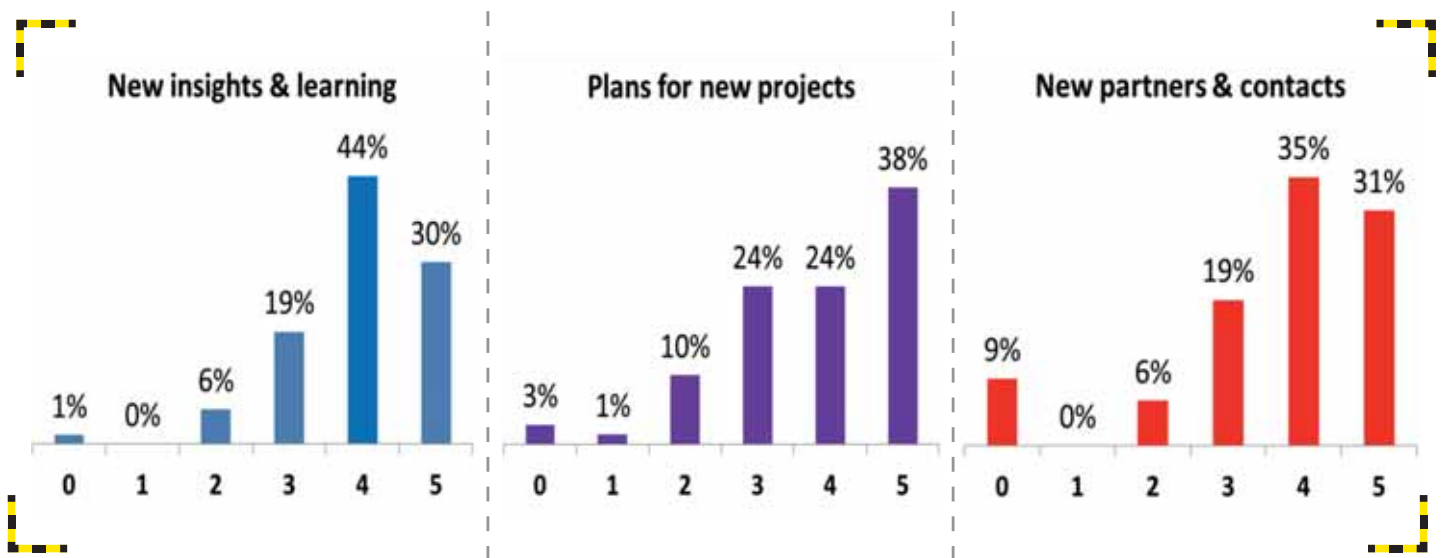
BRIDGES TO WORK WAS A SUCCESS

That is at least what 99% of the participants put on their evaluation form, rating the conference 3 or higher on a scale from 0 (lowest appreciation) to 5 (highest appreciation). Three out of five participants (57%) even gave Bridges to Work full marks.



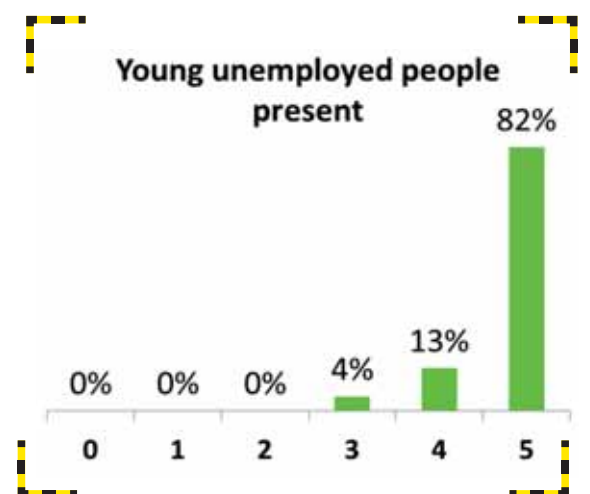
NEW IDEAS, CONTACTS, PROJECTS

Bridges to Work set out to bring together different stakeholders to discuss employment issues and share experiences. It was hoped that three days of inspiration would spark off new projects. When looking at the evaluation forms, 93% of the respondents said they had gained new insights (a score of 3 or higher). They said they had learnt a lot from the speakers, but also from other participants. The diversity of the participants was certainly beneficial for networking, 85% of delegates said they had found new contacts and potential partners at Bridges to Work. When looking at putting the new ideas and contacts into practice, 86% of participants said they had made plans for new employment or entrepreneurship projects.



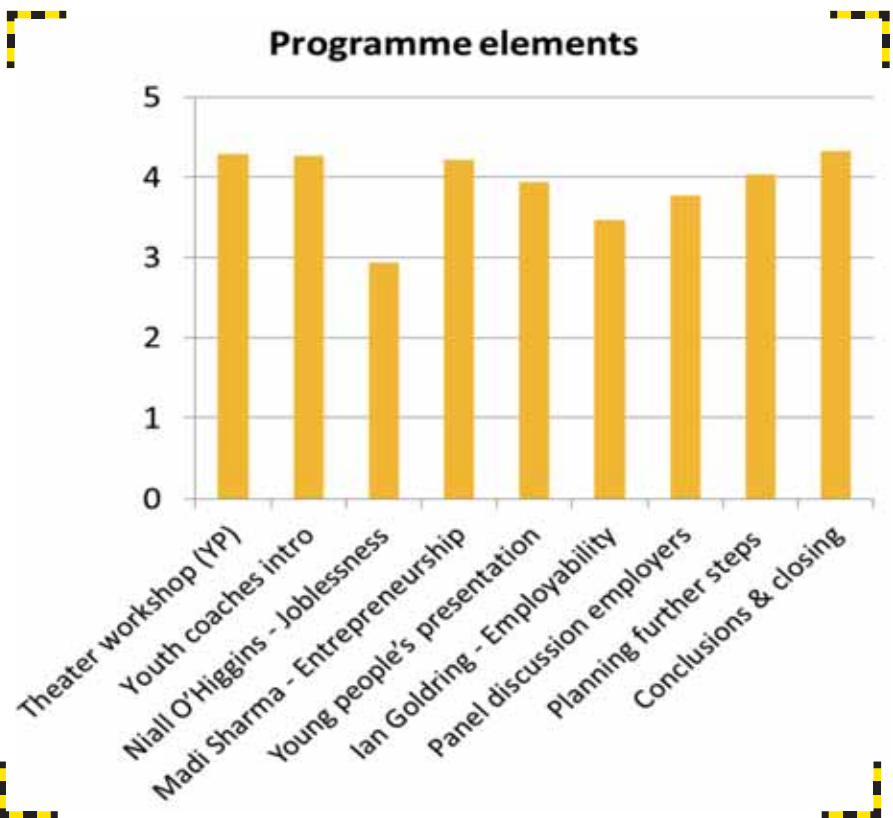
WITH OR WITHOUT?

It was certainly an innovative feature of the conference to **invite young job seekers** themselves, because ultimately, Bridges to Work was about them and for them. All participants were positive about young people's involvement. 82% of respondents even gave the highest level of importance to their presence (a mark of 5 out of 5). A feature to be kept for future activities.



A PROGRAMME FOR ALL

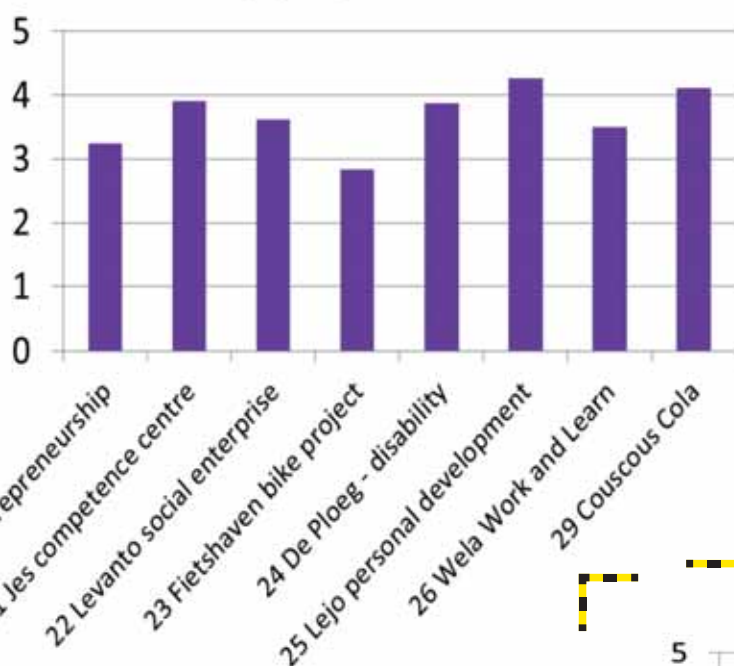
As always in a conference, some participants liked certain **programme elements** better than others. Bridges to Work tried to cater to a wide range of stake-holders with a varied programme which included more static key-note speeches, as well as dynamic workshops and interactive discussions. In general, the evaluation was positive: averages were all above 2.5 out of 5. Some even reached an average of 4 out of 5.



A central element of Bridges to Work was the sharing of experiences. The good practice workshops as well as the project visits in Antwerp were evaluated very positively. Maybe the scores also indicated how useful each 'good practice' example was for the participants' own project ideas... Many felt inspired.

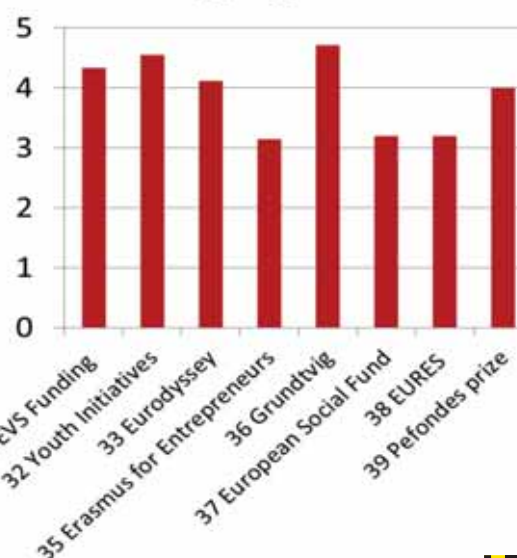


Antwerp project visits

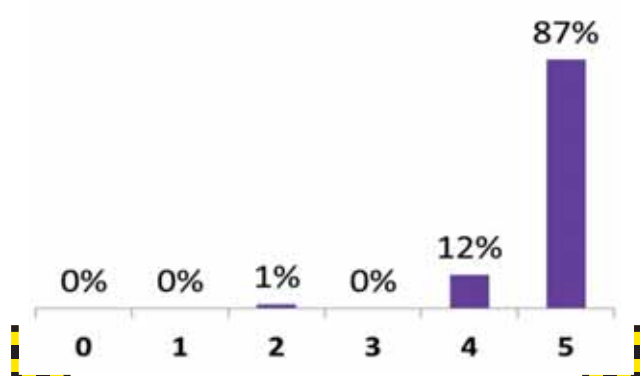


Similarly, people are usually looking for practical ways to make their projects happen. Besides finding partners for their projects, Bridges to Work also offered information about funding opportunities. This was very much appreciated, as you can see from the graph.

Funding programmes



Event organisation



Last but not least, the organisers wanted to see how participants rated the organisation of the event itself. The success of a conference often lies in the backstage preparation and in the facilitation. So, compliments go to the trainers, facilitators and staff who were given a big pat on the back from the participants.

- 🔑 A more detailed overview of the outcomes of Bridges to Work: www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/BridgesToWorkResults/
- 🔑 A complete list of participants is available at: www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/BridgesToWorkParticipants/
- 🔑 The detailed programme of Bridges to Work: www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/BridgesToWorkProgramme/

THANK YOU

BRIDGES WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE WITHOUT YOU

SALTO Inclusion Resource Centre, the organiser of Bridges to Work, would like to thank all those funders, partners, speakers, panellists, facilitators, trainers and participants for their contributions and dedication before and during the event.

A special thanks goes to all the staff and volunteers without whom Bridges to Work would not have been so perfectly organised!

Special thanks also to the partners of Bridges to Work: SALTO Cultural Diversity and SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centres, but also the Youth in Action National Agencies of the UK, the Netherlands, Denmark, Hungary, Spain, Germany, Belgium-Flanders, Croatia, Slovenia, Liechtenstein and Luxembourg.

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Bridges to Work was an engaging European conference aimed at creating better opportunities for young people on the labour market, especially for those who are at a disadvantage, compared to their peers.

150 stakeholders, including young job seekers, employers, youth projects, policy-makers, funding programmes and researchers, exchanged experiences and developed future actions to help lead young people into employment or entrepreneurship.

This report shares the key-note contributions, the inspiring project examples and the proposals for concrete action to improve the employment situation of young people with fewer opportunities.

We give you the bricks of inspiration, but you will have to build the bridges.

This booklet is developed by the SALTO Inclusion.
Download it for free at

www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/BridgesToWork/



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