

# METHODOLOGICAL GUIDE

Innovative methods to support disadvantaged youth in education  
and employment



co-funded by:

THE VELUX FOUNDATIONS  
VILLUM FONDEN ✕ VELUX FONDEN

implemented by:



autonōmia



Fundación  
Secretariado  
Gitano

TRUST  
FOR SOCIAL  
ACHIEVEMENT

The 'Find Your Way to the World of Work' project (no. 2017-1-027) was co-funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through the EEA and Norway Grants Fund for Youth Employment.

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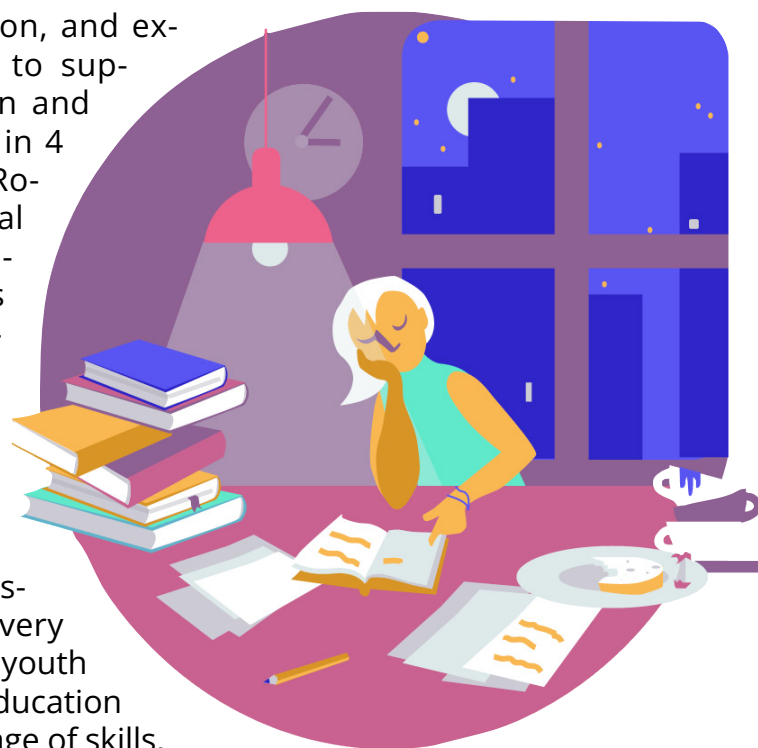
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# INTRODUCTION

The current project aimed to both share the existing broad and diverse experience of the 5 partners involved; Autonomia Foundation, Fundacion Secretariado Gitano, Asociata "Caritas - Asistentă Socială" Filiala Organizației Carita Alba Iulia, Trust for Social Achievement Foundation and Arete Youth Foundation, and explore new methods and approaches to support equal access to quality education and employment for disadvantaged youth in 4 European countries Spain, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. The transnational knowledge exchange and joint development of new methodologies, guides and policy recommendations at a European level have therefore been strong aspects of our work together.

The target group of the project was economically disadvantaged youth within the 15-29 age range, among them a high proportion of Roma, as their presence among disadvantaged youth is very high in these countries. Disadvantaged youth face multiple problems in accessing education and quality employment, due to a shortage of skills, low levels of vocational education in the partnering countries, a lack of access to marketable professions, high drop-out rates, restricted geographical mobility, and low levels of motivation and self-esteem, among other factors.

The aim of the project was to increase the educational level and employability of participants through career orientation, motivation, soft and hard skills training, personality development, channeling early drop-outs back into education, mentoring, mobility support, facilitating employment placements and extending work placements with employers.



For further information on the project concept, please visit [earningbylearning.eu](http://earningbylearning.eu).

The current document reflects our experience with different and innovative methodologies we implemented over the course of the project.

Chapter 1 focuses on different instruments to develop the soft skills of young people. Chapter 2 describes various career orientation tools as well as practical labour market training concepts, while Chapter 3 introduces training methods for teachers and human resource professionals. Each methodology provides a description of the particular target group it addresses, the problem targeted, the aim and details of the activity, the resources and implementers necessary, as well as a short summary of the results achieved.

The purpose of the methodology review is to transfer the knowledge we have gained in the most illustrative and useful way, and thus contribute to the success of future efforts directed at disadvantaged youth and all stakeholders involved in their path towards economic independence.



# 1. SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

The lack of or poor soft skills is one of the main concerns associated with youth unemployment. This is especially true for disadvantaged youth who are socially and economically vulnerable, due to low educational achievement, school drop-out, ethnicity, and lack of proper support from the family or school. These young people are less competitive in terms of qualifications, education, social image, and social capital.

Although in recent years we have witnessed a shift from the conservative understanding of professions, skills, and qualifications, the education system is still rather traditional. Schools, especially those with an overwhelming majority of students from ethnic minorities and/or students who are in some ways in a disadvantaged position compared to their peers, are still resistant to integrating non-formal educational methods and focus on theory and knowledge. In vocational education, the emphasis is on the development of hard skills, while functional literacy and soft skills are left behind. Thus, many youths aged 15+ are unprepared for life realities and the world of work.

Another aspect is that disadvantaged youth, even those who have completed secondary education face serious challenges finding employment. This includes a lack of labour market and job-seeking information and experience, as well as a mismatch between the competences, social behaviours, expectations and labour market realities.

The deficiency in qualifications combined with low-level education often pushes young disadvantaged people to the periphery of the labour market. It is even more disturbing that even those who have completed secondary education often do not have the social and transferable skills and competences that were supposed to be formed at school and are demanded by employers. Many, upon graduation, start in low-qualified, low-paid jobs that usually do not correspond to their vocational education, and become seasonal work migrants or long-term unemployed. This is partly due to a lack of information on the labour market and work opportunities, and a lack of skills to promote themselves in a proper way to find better jobs and then to keep those jobs. As a result, they have low self-esteem and rarely pursue any opportunities to improve their social and economic status.

Communication, teamwork, confidence building, applying for a first job, job readiness backed up with skills and competences are all soft skills that have

become increasingly required in recent years. So, it is critical to cultivate these skills, most preferably in the years of transition from school to employment, as employers nowadays increasingly seek young people who are flexible, adaptable, proactive, creative and collaborative. It is therefore of utmost importance how we educate young people and prepare them for the labour market.

## 1.1 SOFT SKILL TRAINING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Caritas implemented a series of soft skill development sessions that aimed at reaching out and engaging students in the program as well as preliminary skill development that can be advanced within the framework of mentoring and other forms of training.

The insecurity, social distance and lack of commitment make it difficult for disadvantaged youth to accept and participate in activities that are aimed at their development. Training implemented within the framework of school classes facilitates recognition of the benefits of such a program. Soft skills, such as control, cooperation, communication, and conflict management are developed while strengthening awareness of one's needs and strengths. At the end of the training, there is an opportunity to do more in-depth, individual development activities with the mentors.

### Target Group

The method is applicable to participants above the age of 14. The method has been implemented within the school framework for vocational school students, however, it can also be used in extracurricular activities outside school, in workshops, camps, or in children's homes.

### Activities/method

The method is comprised of the following elements:

**Meeting 1:** getting to know each other, establishing cooperation between the mentor and the students, and setting up the framework.

**Meeting 2:** personal traits – how do I think about myself – how I see myself – my feelings towards myself and towards work – developing emotional intelligence – recognising emotions, and controlling them.

**Meeting 3:** Communication skills – speaking skills, listening to others, the skills of giving and understanding instructions and the ability to adapt communication depending on the situation and the audience.

**Meeting 4:** Teamwork – working together, and cooperation in a team.

**Meeting 5:** Conflict management, problem-solving, identifying problems, developing and evaluating alternative solutions, assessing possible benefits/advantages and risks.

**Meeting 6:** Plans for the future, goals, setting action points to achieve goals, what do I have to do to realise them? Closing of the training and a summary of the process.

The meetings have a uniform structure. They start with an introductory phase, to set the rules, get to know each other, and raise the group's interest in the topic of the meeting. It is followed by a brainstorming activity to attune the participants to the topic, develop interest, and the ability to form opinions, critical thinking, etc. The actual processing of the topic is usually done by a didactic game. The event is closed by a short evaluation exercise where group members have the opportunity to express their feelings and experiences they had during the game/exercise and then a final closing, emotional circle, to end the activity both cognitively and emotionally

### Implementers

The soft skill training can be implemented by teachers as complementary activities in schools or by outside trainers. The trainers should have a minimum of 1 year of professional experience in teaching and some experiential education experience.

### Resources

The sessions should be completed in a minimum of 2 and maximum 4 months.

Basic office consumables and specific tools defined by the trainers (cards, scarfs, etc.) are required.

### Results achieved

The training was implemented within the framework of school classes. No school teacher was present in the activity; thus the students were more open and more cooperative. About a quarter of participants enrolled in further mentoring as a result of these activities.

Participants gained experience through the processed skills work, they could try out different situations, exercises and they became willing to experience similar development activities in their future mentoring, which could subsequently focus more on individual needs, desires, possibilities and existing hard and soft skills.



## 1.2 DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Participants of the project often had weak communication skills. Learning to communicate assertively as well as the ability to express opinions, concerns and ideas is necessary in many areas of life and can be an essential aspect in the education and work environment. They are therefore necessary for educational success and also for future job success.

An innovative approach was applied by FSG, in an activity that targeted, on the one hand, the development of communication skills, critical thinking, and leadership skills of the participants and on the other hand aimed at positively modifying the stereotypical image of Roma in the media.

The method targets both the relatively weak communication skills of the participants and the fight against prejudices and stereotypes (anti-gypsyism), as well as promoting a positive and diverse social image of the Roma community in the media. Participants of the project can be role models for other similarly disadvantaged people, therefore disseminating their positive experiences can generate a strong added value.

It is important that the need came from a group of youngsters, from the need to have Roma voices heard in various spaces and especially in the media. It arose from a reflection process of the Roma themselves, a process led by FSG professionals but in which the youngsters participated from the beginning and were at the core of the action during the entire process.

### Target Group

The beneficiaries and the participants of this action are the Roma students of the project, over the age of 16, pursuing post-compulsory studies at different levels (vocational education, high school, university).

Five participants were selected based on their competencies, needs and motivation through individual interviews conducted.

### Activities/method

The main training took place in the studio of a local community radio station. Participants recorded a podcast in which they talk about their personal experience in the field of education, including their challenges, problems and expectations. Once the group of participants has been selected, a meeting was held to plan some of the content of their podcast and establish the objectives that we wanted to achieve as a group. Special emphasis was put on promoting the naturalness and validity of their testimonies.



The next step was a workshop in the studio with a communication expert explaining how the radio works and sharing different techniques to express opinions assertively and passionately. This was followed by the recording of the podcasts. Once the workshop was done, we jointly evaluated the soft skill development activity.

### Implementers

Two types of experts are needed for this activity:

- The educational counsellor or facilitator who plans the activity and supports the participants in the execution and evaluation phase. This professional knows the local context and has a trusting relationship with the participants.
- A communication expert in charge of the workshop, who is familiar with the project objectives and the profile of the participants. He/she is experienced in personal communication, in training, coaching and motivating young people.

### Results achieved

Participants developed their social skills, self-esteem, self-confidence and motivation as well as the awareness of their training and employment needs along with short and medium-term goals.

## 1.3 COMMUNITY ART AS PROJECT WORK

Autonomia Foundation designed an approach that employs art-based methods and embeds soft skill development in a simulated work environment. The approach is designed to engage and support young people who have little experience of success and enjoyable work, have rarely encountered successful cooperation, have weak communication and cooperation skills, low self-esteem and self-knowledge. Their previous work experience, if any, was in low-skilled, low-quality positions that did not provide opportunities to engage in complex, cooperative work processes, and overseeing it from planning to realisation. Their work experience seldom gave them the opportunity to see the output and impact of their work and therefore did not boost their motivation. They have limited experience of successful cooperation, both in school, and at work, where they received strict instructions from teachers or managers with little opportunity for team-

work. A lack of situations where joint decision-making is needed leads to low levels of responsibility. They rarely experience partnership-based communication where participants are mutually open to suggestions, opinions and feedback, and respect for each other. Insufficient feedback contributes to poor awareness of their skills and strengths. These young people rarely talk about their feelings, thoughts and ideas; therefore their self-expression skills do not develop.

The aim of the community art project work is to develop competences and self-esteem and to strengthen the awareness of these skills. It allows participants to experience a simulated working situation, which is enjoyable, ensures success, and in which they can feel that their participation and contribution really matter.

### Target Group

We worked with disadvantaged young people aged 15-22, who are about to enter the labour market, have little work experience and poor awareness of their strengths. Most of them are still students in vocational schools or have just finished their studies and are looking for a job

#### ACTIVITIES/METHOD

Choose an art form that is attractive for the participants – a community art project can be carried out using a range of art forms, e.g., music, video, photos, fine art or dance.

There are several ways to assess participants' preferences and interests. You might have background information; you can ask about their preferences in individual and/or group discussions or by questionnaires. We found that 'trial workshops', where participants are briefly introduced to a few potential art forms, and having short hands-on experiences are very efficient for an informed decision.

#### SET UP A SIMULATED WORK ENVIRONMENT

In order to prepare participants for the labour market, soft skill development has been embedded in a simulated company environment, where participants were 'employed'.

#### HOW TO SELECT THE THEME OF THE ART WORK

We have found that fully delegating the choice of the main theme to the participants is sometimes too difficult and involves too much responsibility for them at the beginning of the development process. However, it was much easier when the options were limited to 3-4 and they voted on the most preferred one.

#### FACILITATING DEMOCRATIC DECISION MAKING

Cooperative project work allows for numerous decision points, e.g., the style and form of the art work, the tasks and responsibilities of the participants,

the finalising/editing of the work and its presentation. Democratic decisions are time-consuming but can increase the commitment of the participants.

Although the process aims to be democratic, not all decisions are made so. Some decisions should be taken by the trainer, some might come from the 'external world' (e.g., the preference of the simulated client), led by experts or by the group members responsible for that given task.

#### SET UP WORKING GROUPS FOR VARIOUS ACTIVITIES

As members have different competencies, personalities and preferences, tasks and responsibilities should be distributed accordingly. However, it is also important to ensure activities in which participants need to use a diverse range of competencies.

#### SIZE OF THE GROUP

The optimal group size is 8-16 people, led by two trainers.

It is preferable to plan both whole-group/small-group/pair and individual tasks. This way diverse group dynamics can be created and it also ensures that optimal situations are provided for everyone: for those who prefer working alone, or in small groups or who are also active when everyone is together.

#### SETTING UP GROUP RULES AND FRAMEWORK

As in most informal training situations, it is beneficial to allow the group to define its main rules and framework at the beginning of the process.

#### TEACHING BASIC ART SKILLS

At the beginning of a cooperative art work project, involving youngsters in easy and accessible activities, brings them closer to the given art form and ensures joy and success. It should also free them from their fears of "I can't do that", "I'm not good at it". For example, in a music project the participants are invited to 'pet' musical instruments and to create any kind of sounds with them, which the trainers record and the group members can listen to afterward. Or they are asked to write a short poem. In these activities it's important that they are relatively easy, and ensure some result or product within a short timeframe, which again strengthens the experience of success, motivation, boosts energy and bravery in further activities. During these initial activities the trainers can assess the competences of the participants which helps in planning the complexity of the project work and the distribution of tasks and roles for the group members.

#### JOINT PLANNING

When the group have decided on the main topic, the planning process should be continued by a brainstorming session led by the trainer. Words, pictures, or short stories can be elicited related to the topic. Facilitation is provided where all participants can share their ideas.

Besides working on the content – the song lyrics, the topic of the video, etc – you can also plan the form of realisation (e.g., a slam poetry video).

#### AGREEMENT ON THE TASKS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Having made a draft working plan, the group can plan the distribution of tasks. They might want to take part in every sub-task (e.g., writing and singing one line of the song) or specifying different roles and responsibilities (cameraman, actor, director etc.).

Try to create a balance between providing the opportunity for everyone to try many different activities and fixed roles that better simulate a work situation.

You might want to agree on responsibilities as well as the consequences of not fulfilling them.

#### COOPERATIVE CREATIVE PROCESS

The initial skill learning, the joint planning and distribution of tasks leads to the actual creative work. At this phase, participants are usually quite engaged and enthusiastic, 'simulating' motivated employees.

The creation process should be well planned, ensuring that everyone has appropriate tasks. Parallel sub-groups should be set up if needed, and shifts organised with different timings for different groups and considering whether it is beneficial if the participants observe and provide feedback to each other.

#### POST-PRODUCTION

In most artwork post-production is needed – music is mixed, video is edited, and images are selected for exhibitions, etc.

In this phase some ideas or materials should be selected, and others left out. It is important to have a group discussion, including reflection and decisions on these issues. Keep in mind that it is a community artwork process, so it is more important to engage all participants and much less important what artistic quality the final product represents.

#### CLOSING CELEBRATION AND EVALUATION

Ensure that the final product is presented to the group and an external audience that will appreciate their effort.

'It's a hard day's night' – celebrate their hard work and their cooperation in completing the project. It has an important role in their motivation and their ability to translate this experience into real work experience.

#### OTHER ASPECTS:

Ensure quality appliances and personal attention – providing professional equipment (camera, musical instruments) as well as dedicated time and attention highlights the importance of their work and boosts their commitment.

Use light pressure – as the trainer models the employer and the participants are considered professional employees, some pressure might be put on them. Ensure decisions are followed, timeframes are respected, conflicts are resolved, etc.

Provide mutual feedback – facilitate participants giving and receiving feedback, sometimes critical.

### Implementers

Trainers have to have professional skills in the respective artistic field and in addition, must have the skills and experience to work with disadvantaged young people in a cooperative way.

### Resources

The training venue, tools or equipment for the project – depending on its genre.

The timeframe can vary - intensive short-term projects completed in a 5-day summer camp have been very successful, while group meetings scheduled bi-weekly allowed for a higher drop-out rate.

### Results achieved

We have accomplished numerous community art projects in recent years. The method was tested once in a simulated company framework, to provide an explicit simulation of a potential work environment.

In the links below, you can see some work created by the young participants of this project in 2020.



[VIDEO CLIP](#)



[SONG](#)

# 1.4 A SOFT-SKILL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME 'THE 10 SKILLS TO WALK THROUGH THE WORLD OF WORK'

FSG also implemented a comprehensive soft skill development scheme, titled 'The 10 skills to walk through the world of work'

## Problem targeted

There are various ways of classifying 'Life Skills', the WHO proposal has gained wide recognition because it is quite flexible and has universal applicability. In general, three classes of skills are identified: social or interpersonal (such as assertive communication or empathy), cognitive (such as decision-making or critical thinking) and skills for managing emotions. 85% of professional success is due to the early acquisition of interpersonal skills (soft skills), strongly linked to the social and emotional field. Interpersonal/soft skills are considered in today's labour market even more important than technical skills.

The ability to develop interpersonal/soft skills is as important as acquiring knowledge and achieving academic results. Participants of the project often have weak interpersonal/soft skills in addition to low-level qualifications and a lack of work experience.

## Aim of the tool

The training is aimed to:

- Prepare young people to be able to manage the changes with the social, emotional, cognitive and digital skills necessary to face the challenges of the future.
- Work on self-knowledge, strengthening self-esteem and enhancing the ability to express feelings.
- Develop communication skills emphasising empathy, assertiveness and active listening.
- Improve highly valued skills in the work environment such as teamwork, initiative, conflict resolution and responsibility.

In multi-disciplinary environments, the worst enemy of innovation and change is rigidity. Hence the high demand for individuals with an agile mind-set. It is not a methodology, it is an attitude that is developed and that, today, is a priority in any transformation process.

At a time when hard skills are quickly becoming obsolete due to technological changes and innovations, it is the soft skills that make an employee stand out. These allow you to adapt to new realities, to learn the new necessary knowledge and, ultimately, to know how to remain a valuable asset throughout your career.

### Target group

Participants are disadvantaged young people aged 18-29, preferably Roma, with special attention to Roma women. Their competencies are evaluated, and a competency diagnosis is carried out when starting the project. The selection of participants is made based on their own needs. The final selection is done through an interview with each youngster to discover their motivation for the course, their commitment to it, and their desire to start, analysed in individualised mentoring work.

### Activity/methods used

The activity takes place over 5 training sessions, each lasting for 3 hours, with a maximum of 8 people.

- The first 3 sessions are developed by a coach, with whom they work, through a methodology that uses group debate, combining theoretical parts with presentation and reflection on the specific cases of each of the participants. The aim is to gather conclusions, experiences and lessons about the experiences of each participant and their resolutions.

In these sessions, training is provided on the 10 skills that the World Health Organisation considers to be fundamental for life.

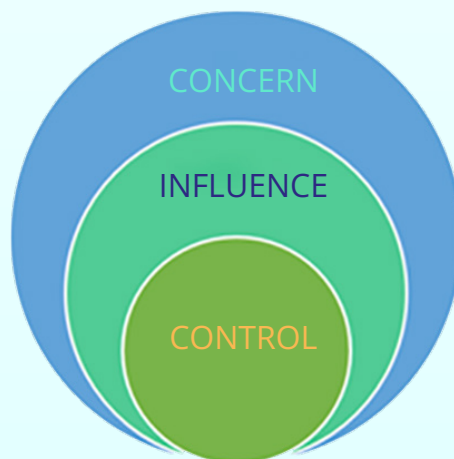
1. SELF-KNOWLEDGE
2. EMPATHY
3. ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION
4. INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS
5. DECISION-MAKING
6. PROBLEM AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT
7. CREATIVE THINKING
8. CRITICAL THINKING
9. MANAGEMENT OF EMOTIONS AND FEELINGS
10. MANAGEMENT OF TENSIONS AND STRESS

Every training session focusing on skills is divided into brief time slots combining theoretical lessons and practical activities, to fix the contents with the mentees. For example, one session on developing a personal mission and vision, self-esteem and on identifying personal strengths, was scheduled as follows:



8:00. *Installation and presentation*  
8:15. *Presentation of participants*  
8:45. *Why change is possible, what the science says about personal development*  
9:15. *Introduction to the habits by Stephen R. Covey*  
9:50. *Break*  
10:00. *Habit 1 - be proactive*  
10:30. *Circle of concern - circle of influence dynamic*  
11:00. *Habit 2 - start with the end in mind. Introduction*  
11:05. *Video Ítaca by Josep María Pou and discussion*  
12:00. *Break*  
12:10. *Visualisation mission - vision*  
12:45. *Workshop pride list - acknowledgements - strengths*  
13:45. *Visualisation of your best birthday*  
14:15. *Workshop Richard Barrett's 4 whys. Building an internal and external mission and vision.*

Focussing on one of the activities during this session, as an example, the activity on the circle of concern includes an experiential dynamic with the mentees in which they share questions that concern them, and are classified following this system:



The final conclusion focuses on the importance of realising which areas in life are under our control and should receive more attention and effort to improve our lives, and which areas, although concerning, are outside our control.

- The last two sessions focus on work orientation/guidance and are organised at a group level.
  - Working on how to prepare a CV
  - The main tools for job searches.
  - Job interviews

- Evaluation:

Once completed, participants evaluate the activity in two ways:

- Together as a group
- Through individual questionnaires (e.g., participants value the training, the coach).

### Implementers

The project technician detects the needs of the participants, as well as the organisation, searches for a trainer-coach, accompanies the implementation of the training and the development of the work orientation sessions.

This person must have experience in the field of education or social sciences. With experience in the design, planning and evaluation of projects, as well as experience in the formation of groups and in the intervention with people at risk of social exclusion and especially with young people.

The coach is contracted from an external company and is in charge of the first 3 sessions of the activity. On the one hand, it is important that the person conducting the workshop is aware of the objectives we want to achieve and the profile of the participants who will take part in it. On the other hand, the person should be an expert in personal and professional development, with training as a coach and experience in motivational work with young people.

### Specific resources

- a venue for group work, with a computer and projector
- basic office supplies, paper, markers, etc

### Results achieved in the present project

19 young people took part in the above training. They are able to manage their social skills better, they are more aware of their training and work needs, and of the objectives they want to achieve in the short and medium term.

- 80% of the young people who have gone through the workshops had a greater continuity in the project, continuing with other training activities, and with a more active individualised job search programme.

## 1.5 SOFT SKILLS FOR THE LABOUR MARKET

A complex development approach focusing on soft skills in the labour market was implemented by Arete Youth Foundation in Bulgaria for high school students and for those who have dropped out, as well as for young adults who have completed secondary education. The training involves a broad set of skills, attitudes, behaviours and personal qualities to support the transition of young disadvantaged youth from school to work and/or to enhance the employability of unemployed young adults from disadvantaged groups. The training aims to develop self-confidence and self-knowledge by identifying the strengths of participants, thus contributing to their personal development and empowerment. Furthermore, to develop core transferable/soft skills and competencies through non-formal education methods to ensure that they are better equipped to secure jobs and experience social inclusion, supporting their smooth transition from education to employment and strengthening their inclusion in the labour market.

The soft skills training includes 9 modules, spread across 6 training days. Each training module is an interactive mixture of presentations, group and individual work, discussion, brainstorming and skills practice.

### Target group

The training was available for participants of the project, i.e. disadvantaged youth, predominantly Roma, aged 15-29 who are students of vocational secondary schools, those who dropped out of school or young adults who completed their secondary education.

### Activities/method

The agenda of the 6 one-day training sessions:

#### Training 1 - Communication and teamwork

In this training session the participants:

- understand the structure and purpose of the training and get to know each other
- learn basic concepts of communication
- understand how communication works
- learn major principles of effective communication and how to tackle barriers in communication
- understand the three types of communication and practise effective communication

- understand what a team is and what the stages of building a team are
- realise the importance of identifying roles and responsibilities within a team
- learn what the key elements of effective teamwork are

*Practical exercise /game/: Participants are randomly divided into teams. They are given a task, a case study, or a problem that they have to solve.*

*For example: "You are a team of highly qualified specialists in the field of..." Here it is good to be associated with the professional focus of the vocational high school if you are working with students – e.g., one of the buildings currently being built is in danger of collapsing due to a landslide. You have 15 minutes to decide how to deal with the situation with the least amount of losses.*

*Participants should be familiar with the Kipling method in advance, which is a very quick and easy technique for dealing with a problem, a situation or a task from several different angles.*

*It consists in systematically answering six main questions:*

*Who? What? Where? Why? When? How?*

- *Who's supposed to do that?*
- *What's to be done?*
- *Where should it be done?*
- *Why does it have to be done?*
- *When is it supposed to be done?*
- *Exactly how should it be done?*

*There is no right or wrong strategy or solution here. The important thing is to understand the importance and draw conclusions about teamwork and good communication.*

## **Training 2 - Self-awareness and self-confidence**

In this training session the participants:

- learn ways to introduce themselves and how to give and receive information about themselves and others
- look at the importance of self-esteem and self-confidence
- analyse their emotions, beliefs and models of behaviour

*Interactive game: Participants stand in front of a mirror and have to describe how they actually see themselves and what they would like to look like. "me-the-real" and "me-the-perfect" are discussed. They are then given a 'Johari Window', through which we can better understand ourselves and how those around us see us.*

*This tool works with the me-concept, which is a set of characteristics, abilities, attitudes and values that define us as me - a real image and gives us better self-belief.*

### Training 3 – Setting goals and decision making

In this training session the participants:

- learn the basic concept of goal setting and practise how to formulate goals – an overview of the process for identifying what you want to achieve and then focusing your efforts on making your goals a reality.
- understand the decision-making process and methods to improve decision-making.

*Practical exercise/game: participants become acquainted with Descartes square - a simple and very effective decision-making technique. Its essence is to address a problem or situation through the answers to 4 questions.*

*What would it be like if this happened? (What we get, pros from the desired result).*

*What would it be like if it didn't happen? (Everything will remain as it was, the pros of the unattainable result).*

*What wouldn't it be like if this happened? (Cons of getting the result).*

*What wouldn't it be like if it didn't happen? (Cons of not getting the desired result).*

<b>WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF THIS HAPPENS?</b>	<b>WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF THIS DOESN'T HAPPEN?</b>
<b>WHAT WON'T HAPPEN IF THIS HAPPENS?</b>	<b>WHAT WON'T HAPPEN IF THIS DOESN'T HAPPEN?</b>

*They are then given a problem or purpose. The pursuit of solving or achieving the goal teaches them that no hasty decision should be made, but to look around and consider all possibilities to reach a successful resolution.*

### Training 4 - Job search skills

In this training session the participants:

- analyse their own resources: knowledge, competencies, skills, experiences
- analyse their interests and project a list of desires
- look at the labour market trends and demands and identify possible opportunities
- understand the importance of networking and the use of social channels

*Practical exercise: participants are familiarised with different job search channels/sites, advertisements, labour offices, the methods of researching the place they want to apply to and the collection of information about the position advertised. They are then given the task of 'finding a position they currently want to work at' and are tracked, assisted and given comments on their efforts step by step. This gives them real first-hand experience of how to get into a 'Job Search' situation and one that is tied to their interests, preferences, opportunities and satisfaction.*

### Training 5 - Preparation of CV and cover letter

In this training session the participants:

- review the major job application documents: types, required information to be included and supporting documents
- receive guidance on how to write a successful CV and Cover Letter.

*Exercises include filling in a CV template, where the emphasis is on open-ended questions about how to present ourselves, in order to appear authentic and at the same time impress those who read it. With regard to the cover letter, a condition shall be made i.e., the applicant should actually write the letter for the exact job position he/she applies. The emphasis is on how to 'boast' without 'bragging' and how to convince the reader that we are the right candidate to get the job. A discussion of the CV and cover letter follows*

### Training 6 - Applying for a job and taking part in a job interview

In this training session the participants:

- learn where to find information about available positions
- review job interview types
- get practical advice and guidance on how to conduct successful interviews

*A practical game: a role play interview where candidates act out a scenario with either a group or an interviewer, to determine how suitable the candidate is for a particular position. The candidate's dress-code, body language, manners, intonation and power of speaking are discussed in advance. When the interview begins the interviewer uses the most frequently/commonly asked interview questions and questions specifically related to the position. After the exercise, the trainer and the group will give feedback in relation to the applicant's performance. Both applicant and interviewer share how they felt and what they could improve on in a real-life interview. Participants are introduced to how a job portfolio is prepared and are called upon to try and develop one for themselves.*

## Implementers

The training sessions could be implemented by training professionals with practical experience in leading soft skill training; HR professionals, experts from career centres, corporate trainers and psychologists, and experts with organisational and industrial psychology backgrounds.

## Resources

No specific tools and/or equipment is required for the implementation of the training. Each training session requires a suitable venue for the particular locality, standard technical equipment - flip chart, screen and multimedia options, presentations, an agenda, feedback forms and hand-outs. In cases where hybrid or on-line training is conducted a digital learning platform will be required- TEAMS, Zoom etc.

## Results achieved

Thus far, AYF has implemented 19 soft skill training sessions as the general feedback from participants is quite positive. The feedback provided by the participants during and after the training sessions shows that the training covers important themes and provides useful and applicable learning results. Participants gained specific knowledge and were trained to put various techniques into practice, test new approaches, and learn to communicate with self-confidence, clarity, and influence.

Through trainings 1, 2 and 3 participants gained skills to communicate effectively, improve teamwork, make friends, work with colleagues, set goals and make decisions that would help them adapt properly to the work, study and social environments.

Trainings 4, 5 and 6 gave the young participants the tools and skills required to prepare for their first job/internship. They became familiar with what employers are looking for, learned how to create an effective CV and cover letter and practised their interview style. Participants shared that they felt better prepared for their first job search. They also learned about the importance of pre-interview preparation as some found/acquired useful tricks to overcome shyness, self-underestimation and communication barriers.



# 2. CAREER ORIENTATION AND COMPLEX, PRACTICE-ORIENTED LABOUR-MARKET TRAINING

The secondary education system in most countries lacks career orientation or if implemented, occurs in the form of frontal lecturing and information sharing. Career orientation, i.e., activities that prepare young people to be able to choose their life paths and maintain their careers is still not integrated into the pedagogical work. For young people to be able to choose a career, firstly, they must get to know the career fields, then have some insight into existing professions within those particular fields, and finally, they have to be informed about all the abilities, knowledge and qualifications required for that particular job.

Career orientation and counselling helps students to better understand both their own personality and the world of work, build decision-making skills and make the transition between levels of education and from school to work. An early distinction between profession, specialty, work and career supports correct orientation and the choices of adolescents.



Career guidance is the process of choosing the most suitable future profession and relevant education path. To this end, students must have a real self-assessment, know their strengths and weaknesses, be aware and be able to exploit the advantages of soft skills that give them an advantage and a better start to their journey into the labour market.

## 2.1 INDIVIDUAL CONSULTATION AND CAREER ORIENTATION FOR STUDENTS IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

The methodology described was implemented by AYF and aimed to support secondary school students in their choice of profession which meets their capabilities/abilities and interests and also matches the demands of the labour market. The work focuses on the process of raising mentees' awareness of their strengths (skills, preferences, interests, values, competencies), on the development of self-reflection and self-awareness, as well as on improving their knowledge of professions and the requirements of the labour market. The problem mostly concerns students who have enrolled in vocational education and whose choice of education was not based on an independent, informed and conscious decision. Rather, most of them have entered secondary education through 'inertia', following the preferences/wishes of their parents or due to relatively poor academic results in primary school. As a consequence, their career prospects are unclear, especially since schools focus on academic development and a standardised curriculum and lack interventions directed towards the social and career development of students. This instrument targets the lack of soft skills and career mentoring (career counselling and career orientation) in the transition from secondary education to employment in response to the growing shortage of a skilled/qualified workforce in the labour market. The tool addresses a range of challenges that young vocational school students and school drop-outs face i.e., low motivation for education/training/employment, early school leaving, low social status or traditional norms in the community and a lack of access to information, opportunities and role models. It also aims to help the project participants realise the present-day work reality and their place in it, thus improving their suitability and chances for long-term and sustainable employment.

## Target Group

The target group/beneficiaries of the tool are students from vulnerable groups, studying in vocational schools, with different ethnicity, low motivation to study and a lack of vision for professional success.

## Activities/method

Presentations, discussions, and role-playing games are applied in the work with the mentees. Case studies and homework assignments are given to the participants too.

**Step 1: Building a relationship** - planning introductory activities to build trust. Creating an environment and conditions in which to develop the relationship between the students and mentor (career mentor). The role of the career mentor is to moderate discussions and improve self-awareness and curiosity about the educational environment and the labour market.

**Step 2: Identifying interests and attitudes** - this task aims to encourage students to explore their interests, skills, knowledge and preferences. As a result, they will gain real self-esteem. To identify interests and attitudes, research is done through a standardised tool, approved by the Ministry of Education and adapted for the Bulgarian [environment](#) and through games that develop the skills for self-analysis and self-knowledge.

*Practical Game: "Who am I?"*

- *My values (5 most important)*
- *My interests (5 most important)*
- *My successes and achievements (5 most important)*
- *My skills (5 most important)*
- *My strengths and weaknesses (5 most important)*

*Brainstorming: 'Successful person' - an analysis of the understanding of success in life*

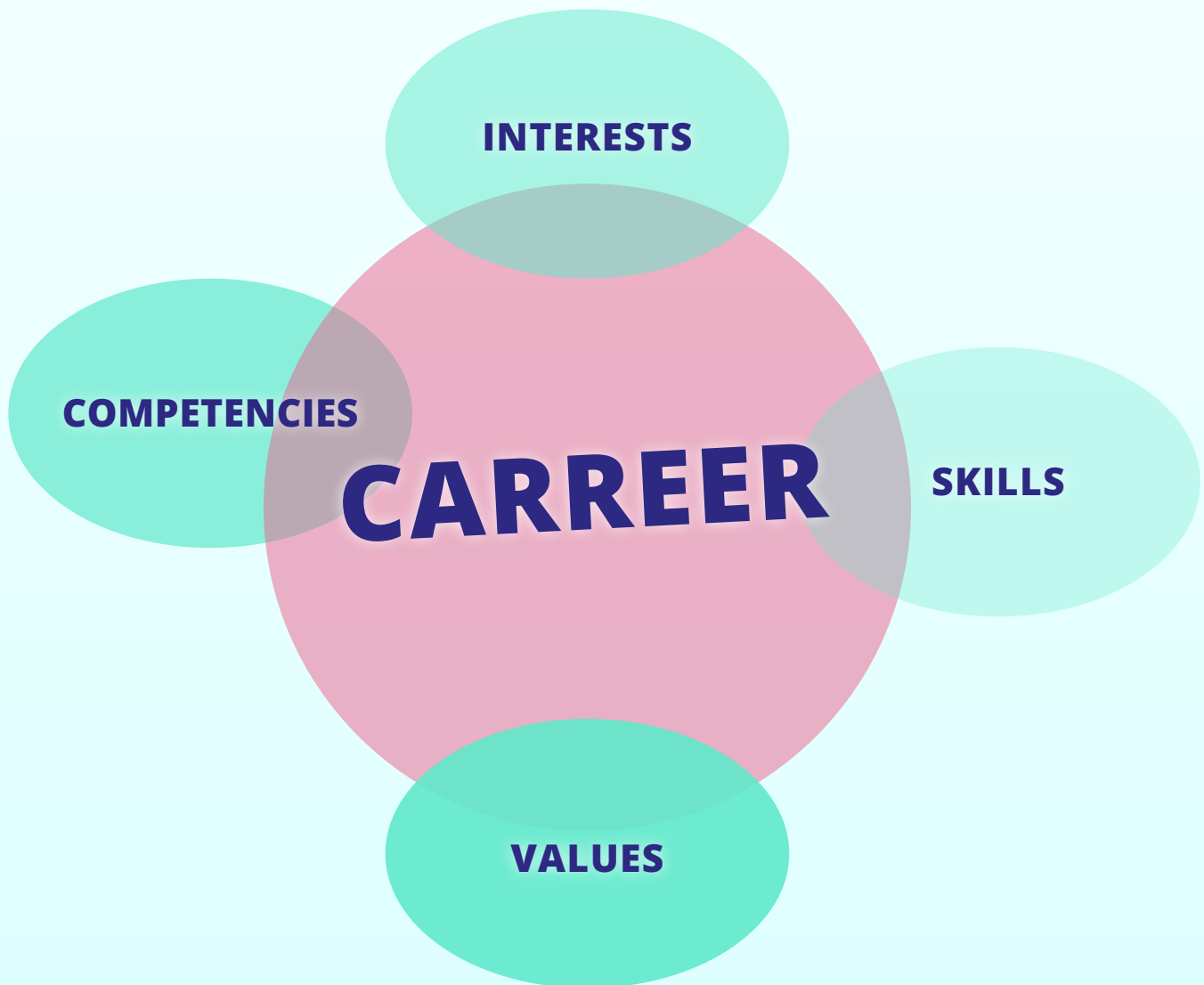
**Step 3: Research and identification of strengths and competencies.** - this goal-setting model uses the individual strengths of the young participants to promote the achievement of personal, academic and professional goals in the short and long term.

Career mentors develop individual work plans for young people who need individual counselling. For most students in the project, mentors fill in individual profiles/questionnaires to determine the individual profile of the student, which gives a 360-degree picture of education, vocational qualifications, competencies, interests and extracurricular activities, learning motivation, family environment and school support.

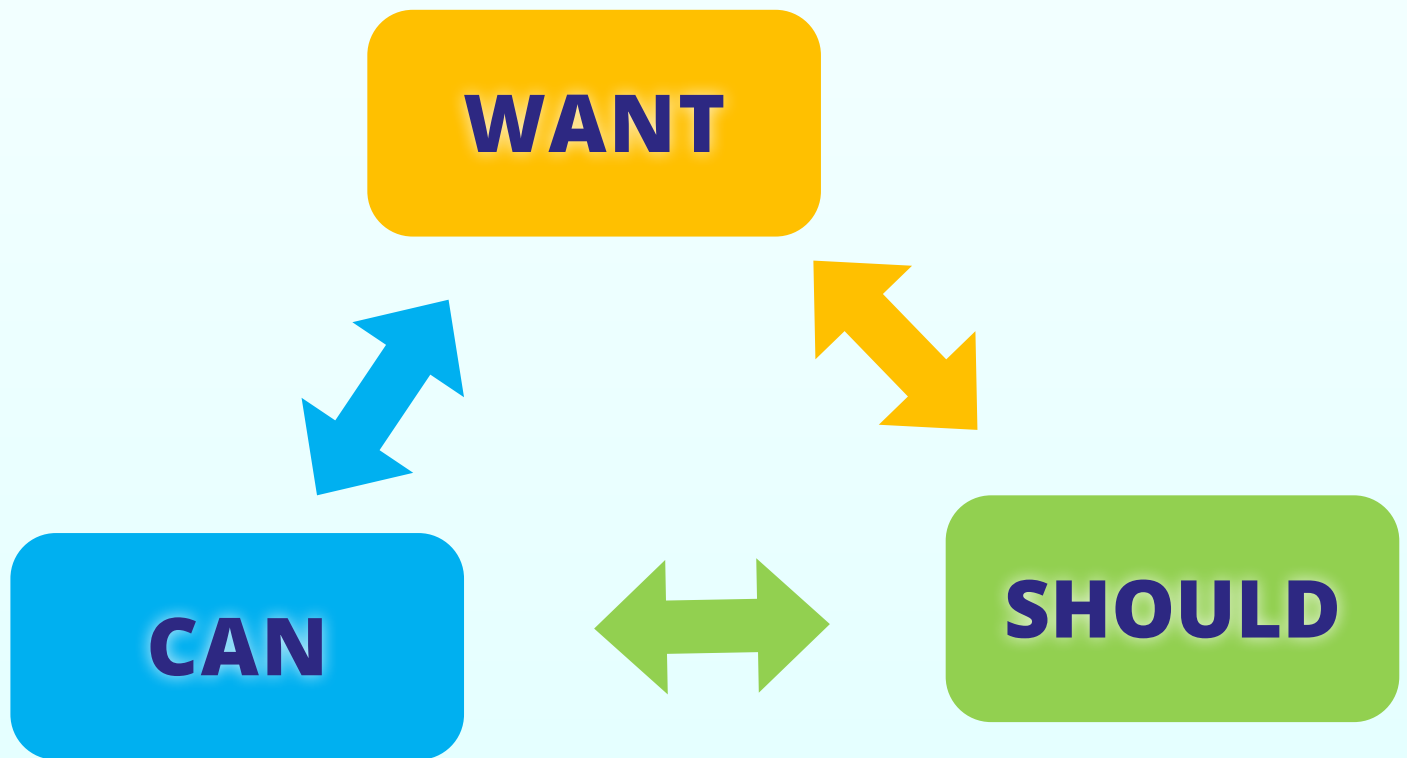
**Step 4: Planning the future** – a diagnostic and consultative activity is carried out with the participants regarding professional interests, attitudes and motivation for career choice, career planning skills, etc.

Author's approach:

Mentor 1: At the beginning of the meeting/session, the mentor (career mentor) initiates a brainstorming session "What is a career?". In Bulgarian, the word "career" has a twofold meaning: (1) professional realisation and (2) a mine (a system of holes in the ground where substances such as coal, metal, etc are removed). After the meaning of 'career' is defined the mentor asks: "How does a career happen and when does it start?". The conclusion that all participants reach is that a career is an aggregation of:



Then each participant has to choose a profession that she/he likes and for which she/he has sufficient knowledge and skills, such as “football player”. At this level of counselling, the facilitator/mentor can clarify the concepts of ‘profession’ and ‘position’. Often young people dream of positions such as ‘manager’, ‘supervisor’, ‘mayor’, etc. Once the participants choose a profession, they get divided into two teams. The young people participate in a role-playing game called ‘Shipwrecked’. The task is: “You are among the group that survived a shipwreck. You come to a lonely island with only your profession. You and your team must be able to survive through your profession. Every profession that helps survival gets one point. In the beginning, professions of doctor, builder, cook, tailor, etc. are sought after. At this level, participants update their expectations of the labour market. The facilitator/mentor explains that the career happens based on the triangle:



Finally, we conclude that that the labour market is a dynamic system to which we must constantly adapt through lifelong learning.

Mentoring approach 2:

*Practical Game: In the world of professions*

*Everyone chooses two professions. One that meets their competencies and one that they like because it is modern, up-to-date and influenced by side factors. They have to enter a role, and then share how they felt afterwards. Accordingly, the other observers also share their conclusions. The roles are played out. By naming the two chosen professions, two corners are separated in which the participant recreates a working process. For example, she/he can sing, but they want to be a doctor. In one corner one person is on a 'stage', in the other 'a hospital' and within about a minute performs typical actions for the profession. They then sit among the audience of peers and share how they felt, where they were more confident, less stressed, etc. The others then share their observations. This draws a conclusion as to which of the two professions would be more suitable for the player as a future choice.*

**Step 5 - Goals, action plan and 'homework'** - here we define the short-term tasks to achieve our long-term vision. The objectives for action are related to some specific steps that the participants/students must carry out before the next session. One can also do an 'experiment' here to change or simply gather information from the environment, etc. The next time they share their 'discoveries'. The mentor usually also invests time to 'plan' the obstacles.

**Step 6 - Feedback and reflection** - How did it go? What happened? Has anything changed? What else stayed the same? Why did / didn't it work?

### Implementers

Anyone who advises young people on issues related to vocational counselling and guidance can implement the tool - career counsellors, career mentors, teachers, pedagogical advisers, and educators. The methodology aims to achieve a different way of communication that motivates young people towards future success in both personal and professional terms. The mentor/ career counsellor/ facilitator should be someone who has mastered soft skills, is able to lead an audience and can establish an atmosphere of trust and sharing. Each step should be taken according to the internal structure of the group. This requires prior research and preparation.

### Resources

Essential resources: whiteboard / flip-chart, paper, coloured pencils/pens, markers, multimedia.

### Results achieved

Participants in our training sessions came out with updated expectations for professional achievement and increased motivation for continuous education and employment.

## 2.2 LIFE PATH SUPPORTING CAREER ORIENTATION

The 'life path supporting career orientation' implemented by Caritas includes the development of career-building skills, providing necessary information and career counselling. Starting to build a career is a positive step, as it means that one wants to achieve more through work than just securing income. For young people to find their careers and way of life, it is important to gather as many opportunities, experiences, knowledge and information as possible so that they can make decisions about their career choices. Young people's knowledge of career choices and relevant aspects – self-knowledge, professions, professional competencies, pay, and work environment - is often very limited. Teachers also have rather limited experience, knowledge and resources to facilitate this process. The "life path supporting career orientation" fills this gap in the lives of young people, taking the burden off the shoulders of the teachers, parents and families. It offers them a career-oriented guidance activity that supports the individual rational-emotional, decision-making process, contributing to the reduction of human resource loss, so that they might achieve skill-interest oriented professional work. The innovative aspect of the method is that besides developing the skills and abilities of mentees, it is also complemented by two other areas which introduce the young person to the representatives of their chosen profession as well as to the workplace. The tool is comprised of three parts: firstly, activities aimed at developing personal work orientation; and secondly - information provided by professionals practising the given profession and thirdly - company visits to get to know the place, structure and working conditions of the profession. The aim is to identify the mentees' skills, discover typical patterns for choosing professions in their families, develop their career vision, and get to know professionals from whom they receive authentic information and a realistic picture of the profession so that they can make proper decisions about their career paths.

### Target group

The tool is applicable for participants above the age of 14, for those in search of work or wanting to change their workplace or profession.

### Activities/method

The life path supporting career orientation consists of 3 development modules:

**FIRST MODULE:** Activity aimed at developing personal work orientation

#### First meeting

**Topic:** I am like that, and this is how I think and relate to work



Objectives of the activity:

- learning the skills required for given professions
- mapping the field of interest, creating a general picture
- identifying personal skills and skills that contribute to work in general

**Introduction, getting to know each other**, e.g., 'Relationship to my name' a structured plenary exercise. The game is a personal and unusual introduction. Participants talk about their names, their attitudes toward their names and their relationship to them. Questions can be used to inspire diverse approaches, for example: Do they have an interesting story/anecdote about their name? Do they know from who, how and why they got their name? Is there a tradition in the family when it comes to giving this name? What do and what don't they like to be called and, do they know the origin of the name and its meaning? Do they relate to it, and would they pass it on to their children? This less 'ritualistic' form of introduction initiates personal involvement, thus enabling teamwork full of experiences, feelings, and attitudes.

**Investigation** - The aim of the exercise is to get to know each other more thoroughly, and to assess prior knowledge in the field of career orientation. It is a mingling activity; participants look for somebody in the group who ...

... wanted to be a veterinarian when they were a child

... likes to study at night

... has been on TV

... practises an extreme sport

... knows websites with official, reliable job advertisements

... likes to work outdoors

... plays an instrument

... draws/paints

... goes to bed by 9pm

... knows workplaces that value and pay the worker fairly

... has done voluntary work.

### **Becoming attuned to the topic - defining skills**

Participants work in small groups. Every group gets an envelope in which the definition of a skill is divided into parts, and they have to reassemble the sentence parts in the right order.

Types of skills:

- **LANGUAGE EXPRESSION SKILLS:** Language skills - are skills - that allow someone - to express themselves - easily and quickly
- **DEXTERITY:** Dexterity - is a skill - that allows someone- to put together-, alter - and shape -objects.

- **NUMERACY SKILLS:** Numeracy skills allow someone, - with the help of numbers, -to do thinking operations, - to recognise and use - basic mathematical equations and formulas.
- **PHYSICAL SKILLS:** Physical skills, - are skills that - allow us to exert force, - to be able to maintain a certain body position and - to withstand adversities.
- **SPATIAL THINKING:** Spatial thinking, - allows us - to orient - ourselves and objects - in space, within our minds.
- **CONNECTION SKILLS:** Connection skills - allow us - to talk easily with others, - to integrate well in communities, - and to turn towards and listen to others.
- **INVENTIVENESS:** Inventiveness - is a skill - that allow us - to solve - tasks that come up in unfamiliar situations - in multiple and unique ways.

Processing the topic – My skills. Discussing the previous exercise, where the small groups share what they experienced

## Second meeting

### Topic: My family and me–My environment and me

The goal of the exercise is to understand and recognise typical patterns for choosing professions in a family.

*Introduction:* Favourite superhero/fairy-tale hero during my childhood

Goal: Bringing to the surface the idealised abilities, personality traits, and behavioural traits valued by the participants.

Method: individual task, group discussion

Instructions: Everyone should think back to their childhood fairytales and cartoons and they should draw their favourite hero.

Find answers to the following questions:

- What are the traits that made them your favourite?
- What is the easy-to-grasp element that you like in their behaviour?
- What can they do well?
- In what ways would you like to be like them?

*Getting attuned to the topic:*

Feedback from family - what did they say? what is the truth?

Goal: Paralleling the subjective and the mirrored self-image.

Method: individual task with a plenary discussion.

Our self-esteem, our self-confidence in certain areas and our motivations in life are greatly influenced by the messages we receive from our environment. During our childhood, the feedback our family gives us about our skills is especially important.

Instruction: Think about what statements were made in your childhood related to the following skills. In the first column write what was said and who said it. In the second column write what you actually think is/was true.

### The things said

### The truth

Your musical skills:

Your dexterity:

Your maths and logic skills:

Your language skills:

Your physical abilities:

Your appearance:

Your connection skills:

Other:

Processing: discussion in small groups.

*Processing the subject: Making a family tree* - preferably at least up to the level of great-grandparents.

Making the family tree requires 'research' at home. Spontaneous conversations can develop with family members, hidden values and interesting details can be revealed. The 'presentation' to the class provides an experience of self-presentation, strengthens the future-consciousness, sense of reality, self-knowledge, self-esteem and the reality of desires and ideas. A joint discussion on occupational family trees; Is there a common element on the paternal/maternal branches and if so, what is it? What could be the commonalities behind these? Do I fit in too? Is there a common element in my ancestors' career choices and in my vision? If so, what is it? If not, what will I innovate? What 'tasks' (possibly difficulties) does this involve? If I am going to keep with the tradition, what exactly and where does this come from?

### Third meeting

#### Topic: Field of interest

Whether a career or job suits an individual depends on many factors, such as what stage of life they are currently in. Jobs can help people start building their careers in many ways; they can gain experience, knowledge, get to know themselves, what they like and what they don't.

## Getting attuned to the topic – job search

Search for 3 job offers you are interested in, on the internet. Write down the ADVANTAGES-DISADVANTAGES and also what skills may be required for the given job (refer to the skills used in the first meeting).

Method: Small groups or individually

## Processing the topic - career development

The trainer asks the group members to describe as many jobs as possible in 10 minutes. Then in small groups make selections from the set of jobs and identify which skills can be assigned to each. Discuss in plenary.

## Fourth meeting

**Topic: Career interview**

**Processing the topic: Train cabin**

Tools: 8 chairs pulled to the centre, small pieces of paper on which we write jobs (around 12-16 pieces).

The trainer asks 6-8 volunteers from the group to draw a card, each having a name of a job/profession. They should keep it secret from each other.

Players are tasked with portraying a journey on a train where passengers try to find out what occupation/jobs the other passengers have by talking to them. The person whose job was guessed can 'get off the train'. In the end, there will be only two passengers left.

The other group members observe the players based on given criteria (question culture, communication skills, style, etc.).

Discussion: Who was the most skilful 'passenger', what could have been asked about each profession/job, who else could add something to what the participants said.

## Fifth Meeting

**Topic: What does the future hold?**

Goal: Raising awareness of the mentees' vision for the future

Getting attuned to the topic, brainstorming: Do you think about the future? Why is it useful to think about it? How does it help us?

Processing the topic: The tale of a day – 10 years later  
(desires, ideals, goals)

Tools: watercolours, large paint board.

Discussion: Do you want to change in any aspect?, What do you need to do now to reach your goals?

Closing, summarising: evaluating the process, from the first meeting to the last, written feedback by completing these unfinished sentences:

- I realised that...
- It was new to me that...
- I was surprised that...
- I want to continue...
- I plan to...

## SECOND MODULE:

### Information about jobs and professions from practising professionals

Method: Structured group discussion

The mentor presents the guest(s) and their profession to the group. And asks the young participants what they know about this profession and invites the professional(s) to talk about themselves and how and why they chose this profession.

- Talking about what motivated you until you reached your goal.
- What qualifications does your profession require?
- What is your working day like, what is your relationship with the clients?
- How diverse are your activities, what are your most important tasks?
- Why would you recommend this profession to young people?
- Presentation of training opportunities.
- Give opportunity for the young people to ask their questions.
- After closing the discussion with the guest, allow a group discussion, without the presence of a specialist to share experiences and opinions.

The mentor's tasks related to the organisation of the meeting:

- It is necessary to assess what professions the majority of young people find interesting and what interests them - based on their experiences and discoveries in the first module.
- When choosing the guests, aim for people who are youthful, dynamic, outstanding in their profession, authentic and direct.
- The structure of the presentation is important in terms of effectiveness. In this regard, the mentor will be the coordinator of the conversation.

## THIRD MODULE:

### Company visit - getting to know the place, structure and working conditions of the profession.

Mentoring tasks related to the organisation of company visits:

- Build contacts with employers or with associations of small and medium-sized entrepreneurs that represent local companies
- Organise the visit with the employer representatives or delegate the tasks to the association of entrepreneurs
- The mentors announce the dates of the company visits, present the profile and activities of the companies to the participants at least two weeks before the company visit
- Career-seeking young people can apply for any company visit that interests them, based on their interests
- Mentors prepare the participants for a company visit. They hold an orientation conversation to discuss issues such as:

Practical questions: What is necessary to do this job? What theoretical/practical training do you need, where can you get it? Steps and criteria for applying for this job. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the profession/work, what does the professional like about it and what does he/she not? What are the working hours, working conditions, safety, transportation, is there overtime or weekend work? How satisfied are employees with the salary, what is the staff community like? Why would you recommend this job and to whom or why not?

At the end of the company visit, the mentors hold an evaluation with the young participants, where they can talk about their experiences, feelings, and impressions.

### Implementers

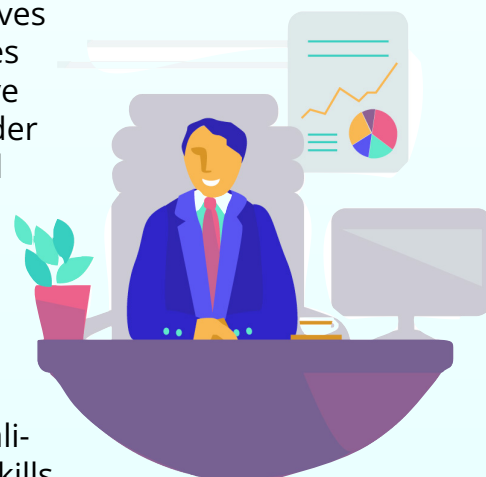
A minimum of 2 mentors per groups, with professional experience and qualifications in career guidance. Additional skills: very good organisational skills, interpersonal skills, communication and cooperation skills.

### Results achieved

Three participants decided to complete professional courses after completing this career guidance process. All of them successfully completed their hard skill training to become masseurs or hairdressers. Another participant, who was already doing his professional training had some good ideas on how to get started, how to earn money, how to recruit, what to look out for, and when he could expect to attain his profession. He received tips on how to start practising the profession and how to further develop in that area. One participant was hired by a company after the career guidance course.

## 2.3 PRACTICE - ORIENTED LABOUR MARKET TRAINING FOR JOB-SEEKING YOUTH

Finding suitable jobs is a challenge which is even more difficult for disadvantaged or Roma youth and those with a relatively lower level of education. Their difficulties include social networks with very little contact with employers at prestigious workplaces or peers employed in quality positions. They also might have repeatedly experienced discrimination as well as failures and negative feedback. Often their communication skills are weaker too. Disadvantaged youth usually have less information about a wide range of job opportunities, they have less experience in how to pitch their skills, have lower self-esteem and often do not believe in themselves as being potentially successful and satisfied employees at quality workplaces. Having received lots of negative feedback from their environment, they often consider themselves unsuccessful and have poorer skills and a low level of motivation for work. They might also generally perceive potential employers and workplaces negatively, and not having hope for rewarding and enjoyable jobs. Their CVs are usually poor and they are not prepared for conscious job searches and job interviews. They are often objectively less competitive than their mainstream peers, having a lower qualification level, weaker competencies, communication skills, self-esteem, motivation and career plan.



The current instrument implemented by Autonomia is a practice-oriented training course for young disadvantaged people who seek good employment and consists of multiple goals:

- Involving participants in partnership-based, positive communication situations, where they can develop their communication skills, and give and receive feedback in a safe environment
- Developing their self-esteem and self-knowledge by identifying their strengths regarding competencies, which are relevant for employers
- Supporting effective job searches by identifying several aspects that should be considered when choosing positions, so they are aware of various advantages and disadvantages of a given position in addition to remuneration
- Raising awareness of the tools and stages of job seeking so they are more efficient in deciding which positions to apply for and how they can be successful in these processes



- Making them aware of the aims of a job interview and the aspects the other party (the employer or HR) is interested in, building a partnership approach and preparing them in theory and practice for the interview situation
- Developing their CVs with an awareness of the HR personnel angle, providing information about the process, tools and tricks related to the job search, developing their competencies, self-esteem and self-knowledge and orienting them to perceive the job search as a potential win-win situation in which they are not passive subjects but have the capacity to influence

### Target Group

The primary target group of the training are young people who are either close to finishing their vocational education or have recently completed their studies and are looking for a job. The training is ideally for young people who have already taken part in a mentoring process and are receiving other services in the project. They could also be students of partner schools, who are close to finishing their studies. The training can also serve as a recruitment tool for the project – participants join the training as the first step and later might receive additional services, such as mentoring while job seeking, opportunities to meet potential employers and visit workplaces, personalised development of their CVs, preparation for job interviews, additional hard or soft-skill training, etc. Many of the participants are Roma or young people with disadvantaged social-economic backgrounds. We put emphasise on recruiting disadvantaged young women, having a more disadvantaged labour market situation.

### Activities/method

The training is strongly based on non-formal learning methods and on learning-by-doing. The agenda of the training is the following; it starts with a very brief presentation on the topics and aims of the training course. It is followed by creating common rules and a framework for the training with the participants in order to model the partnership of the job search procedure and the employer-employee relationship.

Introductions round – participants share their names and some of the following: Qualification/career perspective/superpower/something the others wouldn't think about them. – This part ensures everyone speaks and shares something about themselves, which is also important information for the trainers later on.

Warm up – focusing on good vibes and preferences related to work. Participants sit in a circle and one of them stands in the middle. There is one less chair than the number of participants. The person in the middle reveals one

thing they like, and the others who have the same preference must change their seats. After each round, there is a new person standing in the middle. In the beginning, the participants can share anything they like (hobby, food etc.) and after a while, we shift to the topic of employment: What do you (or would you) like in a job or a workplace? They can share many things, if the person in the middle has no further idea the trainer can help with questions (What does this place look like? How is the boss? What do you get for your job?). After a few rounds, when many viewpoints have been collected, the game is over.

The collected factors can then be categorised into three groups:

1. The characteristics of the work itself - e.g., related to my studies or not, working with people or machines, repetitive or varied, a high level of creativity and responsibility or not. etc.
2. The conditions - e.g., distance from home, fixed or flexible shifts, the environment, relationship with colleagues and manager, etc.
3. What do I get for my work - e.g., salary, bonuses, travel and accommodation support, tools, education/training, recognition, respect, etc.

We discuss that the ideal work(place) is different for all of us, but it's good to have preliminary expectations related to the different aspects before we start the job search. We probably won't find a place where all aspects are perfect, but it's important to be conscious of what the most important factors are for each person.

## Job ads

After discussing our priorities, we examine how employers communicate their priorities. Where can you find job opportunities? - In ads. Where can you find ads? - On the internet, employers' websites, different thematic job pages, newspapers etc. What parts do job ads consist of?

1. Name of position (sometimes names of positions are not clear so it's important to also read the other parts).
2. Description of the employer and the responsibilities (here you can get some information related to your priorities; if something is not clear, don't drop the ad immediately - If most of the tasks are suitable, it might be worth applying).
3. Expectations (what qualifications, work experience, language knowledge, IT skills, driving license, and other competencies employers expect. Besides expectations sometimes there are advantages mentioned too - which are not so strict expectations. Essentially, if you meet 70% of the expectations/advantages you can apply for the job, since there is a possibility that no one with a 100% match will apply).
4. What is the offer? (salary, other benefits)

**The Job Ads market** - numerous printed job ads which are more or less relevant to the participants' profiles are put into a pile. Participants are instructed to select some that are acceptable or attractive to them within a very short, limited time – a maximum of 5 minutes. They then describe the reasons why they chose the particular ads, which parts were attractive and which parts were not. Which criteria they met and which not. By using job ads, we can direct their attention to the topic and also bring up additional topics and questions related to the job ads in general. It is also empowering for the participants that they can find attractive ads, or at least they can see that they are potentially suitable applicants.

**Job searching platforms and tools** - we present platforms where one can look for job opportunities - large job sites, social media pages and groups, and career pages of actual companies. We show that on some sites they can create their CV/profile, which is entered into the company's database and that they might be called if their profile matches on open position. This is a method that can complement their job search, and in addition, provide opportunities for employers to target them. We emphasise the difference between positions one might find on recruitment sites and those on career pages of actual companies.

**CV** - after participants have identified their preferences and have had an overview of job opportunities and expectations, the next step is to prepare their CVs.

We present the main points of a good CV:

- Use correct phone number and an official email
- Use an appropriate photo, if required
- Keep your CV no more than 2-pages long, well-edited, with a simple and easy to read style, where employers can easily find keywords they are looking for
- Start with personal data – name, address, email, phone number
- Studies – starting from the most recent, going backwards in time, including any awards received during the studies
- Work experience – start with the present or most recent and go back in time. Include student work, temporary work and volunteering if you do not have an extensive work history
- Language skills – Indicate the level of your oral and written language skills
- IT and other hard skills, such as driving license or any other relevant qualification and knowledge
- Competences – mention some of the competencies you feel you are

strong at and which could be relevant for the types of jobs you apply for

- Hobbies and other information – include only those which are relevant or positive for your employer.

A few anonymised CVs are given to the participants to assess according to what they learnt about the ideal CV, to internalise the aspects and see in practice what a poorly written CV says about an applicant. After the training, we also ensure that the participants receive personal support and consultations with HR experts, who help the participants to develop their own CVs.

**Competences** - soft skills and competences become more and more important in the labour market and being aware of one's strong skill set is essential. Participants are given a list of the most typical competencies in employment and they are asked to choose at least three in which they are strong. After doing this, they have to gather stories from their lives that prove the existence of these skills. The participants often don't want to share these stories, as highlighting their positive aspects is embarrassing, but step-by step they understand that when you apply for a job, you have to highlight your strengths and it is important to be aware of your values. By opening up, and finding and sharing such stories they become braver and also receive positive feedback from the other participants.

The **development of self-esteem** and communicating our values when applying for a job is a key issue. To this end, we also do speed dating games, where random couples share their strengths and their biggest success in life. It's important to talk about such topics with disadvantaged youngsters since it hardly ever comes up spontaneously in their lives and the positive feedback of their peers also develops their self-esteem and awareness of their values.

**Situation games** - to be successful in a job interview situation it's important to practise speaking about your job orientation and also highlight your values which make you a good applicant for the given position. During the training we practise this in a range of situations, starting with a very informal setting. First, they do a quick, 1-2-minute exercise: you want to apply for a job and you discuss the following with a friend of yours: tell this person, which job you want to apply for, what your motivation is, your skill set and relevant successes. The listener should only help with questions if the speaker stops before the time is over. After the exercise, the participants give each other feedback on their performance, the content and the way they communicated.

**Communication**, raising awareness and practising basic aspects of communication - In this session, we compile a list with the participants on the different aspects of body language and non-verbal communication. After summarising all the viewpoints, they can self-evaluate – what are three things I'm already good at and what are three things I need to improve on? In role plays and discussions, participants observe each other and give feedback on these aspects.

**Job interview practice** - the majority of disadvantaged young people have a negative attitude towards job interviews and some have already experienced failure. They usually find these situations stressful, similar to an exam situation. It is important to highlight that the job interview situation is not like an exam, but there are two equal partners, as in a business situation, and the situation is important for both of them. Participants also learn about aspects the HR person is interested in, such as the motivation of the applicant, his actual interest in the given company, what to expect in terms of loyalty, the match between the job profile and that of the applicant, their competences, etc. Typical interview questions are reviewed and the reason employers ask them. Participants should consider their values, aims and successes, things that motivate them and which are impressive for future employers. Participants put this knowledge into practice in mock interview situations. First, both roles are played by the participants while a third participant plays the role of an external examiner, who gives feedback on the applicant's performance. In this exercise, the participants can practise interviewing in a safe environment as well as experience the role of the hiring person. Finally, mock interviews are conducted by our staff or volunteer HR personnel. The interviewer gives feedback directly after each one.

**Informal encounters with employers** - participants and potential employers meet in an informal setting, usually in the framework of a dinner. Employer representatives are invited from companies where job profiles match those of the participants. Both parties can form an impression of each other beyond stereotypical expectations. They can collect important information about employment opportunities and the candidates as well.

**Workplace visits** have been also organised to companies relevant to the participants so they can have a better and broader picture of their potential career perspectives. These visits usually boost their motivation as well, seeing real, functioning and potentially attractive workplaces.

**Personal mentoring and follow-up** - our cooperation with participants does not finish after the training. With each participant, we identify potential companies and positions they want to apply for and research job opportunities there together. Their mentors work with them throughout the job search, application and interview preparation process. They can provide support after a successful selection process, assisting with contracts and the first phase of their new employment. They are available for the young participants and also for the employers in order to manage problems together.

## Implementers

A high quality of training is ensured through the involvement of specific experts with practical experience. HR experts are involved in the development of skills for the selection and interview process and for the mock interviews as well. Trainers with experience in the development of com-

munication skills designed the exercises and often conducted the relevant parts of the training. Youth workers and mentors have to have experience working with disadvantaged young people. The different fields of expertise and professional approaches can ensure the holistic development of the young participants. As the intervention also targets employers, it's also important to include them in the process and to build close relationships with the representatives of employers who are potentially relevant for the participants' profiles.

### Resources

Upon request we can make related training materials available (e.g., description of exercises, list of competences, list of communication skills, list of interview questions).

### Results achieved

In recent years we have involved over 300 disadvantaged young people in similar 1-5 day long training courses and subsequent mentoring. The majority of them found a position that is adequate for their education and interest, within 6-10 months after their training. We also worked with over 25 companies, who were involved in informal dinners and/or company visits. We contributed to numerous successful employee-employer relationships among the young participants and our partner companies.

## 2.4 MOCK ENTERPRISES AND THE MARKET

Many disadvantaged young people lack work experience and do not have realistic self-knowledge regarding their competencies which are relevant to the labour market. They often also have very little knowledge regarding enterprises. Most of the work experience young people have does not include diverse tasks and therefore does not develop a diverse skill set . They also rarely experience success and do not see the holistic process of production, from planning through creation and reaching-out to clients/customers, but only see a small phase of the process, therefore missing the context of their work. The aims of the current tool, implemented by Autonomia, include:

- to plan mock enterprises, produce products and services that reach the clients/customers in the frame of a cooperative project
- to develop competencies and related self-knowledge of the young people and their working culture

- to ensure enjoyable work experience and common success for the young people - to model such situations, which can lead to conflicts, compromises etc. similar to real-life work situations.

### Target Group

Disadvantaged young people aged 15-22, who are about to start their career and have little work experience and poor awareness of their strengths. Most of them are still studying in vocational schools, have just finished their studies and are looking for jobs, or are working in positions with limited opportunities as regard planning, holistic realisation of projects, and encountering the clients' needs.

### Activities/method

#### Selecting profiles of pilot enterprises and related trainers

In one of our summer camps, we decided to do pilot mock enterprises and also create a market for the products and services of the enterprises. Firstly, we brainstormed the potential profiles of enterprises, which had to meet the following criteria:

- be connected to the interests of the mentees – the profile of the enterprise should be attractive to the young people
- be related to their competencies – the enterprises should be built on tasks which can be done by the participants
- materials, tools and human resource needs should be fairly basic
- the products and/or services produced should be relatively cheap but attractive for the potential clients/customers
- be related to the expertise of the trainers we work with.

We came up with several potential profiles for the mock enterprises such as:

- hospitality
- fashion design, accessories
- home-made food products
- experience-based pedagogical service (games for groups)
- body-painting, henna, tattoo
- photography

The mentees voted on a shortlist of potential enterprise profiles and selected:

- fashion design – 're-art' (made of reused materials)



- body painting
- photography

For the selection of trainers, we had the following preferences:

- they are professionals in the given field and also sell their products and services (they have information about market needs)
- they have experience working with disadvantaged young people and also facilitating project work
- they have good communication and facilitation skills and can act as leaders of the mock enterprises.

The summer camp participants picked one of the groups/enterprises they wanted to participate in.

### Setting up the mock enterprises

The 3 small pilot enterprises had 3-4 members and 4 days/approx. 15 working hours to do the following in the framework of a summer camp:

- Branding: creating a name and logo for the company. Members worked in a cooperative way which ensured their involvement in the common initiative and ensured a unique identity for each group. The painter group created T-shirts with logos for their members, and the photography groups ordered badges from the ReArt group, which also developed their branding
- Communication – the enterprises set up a profile on social media. Some of the members were more active and successful in the communication activity than in the core activity of the given enterprise, as a result the activity gave them good feedback on which fields they have strong competencies and what they like doing. [One of the social media platforms created.](#)
- Learning the techniques of the given profession – trainers taught the basic techniques to enable participants to create products. It was important to start the creation process on the first day to ensure an experience of success, which strengthened engagement
- Analysis of the needs of customers and planning cost-efficient production – to create attractive and affordable products
- Market-focused production – while in the first 1-2 days the work focused on general planning of the enterprise and basic skills related to its profile, in the final days the groups produced products for the market
- Preparation for the market – on the last day the enterprises had to design their outlets for the market, plan various roles for members, prepare their 'staff' in communication with the customers/clients and how to handle potential conflict situations



- Finances – we didn't use real money, but an imaginary currency. The participants of the camp 'earned' some money in the previous days. The price of the products and services had to be decided before the market opened.

### At the market

We implemented the summer camp in a small village with a strong community. The market was advertised through informal connections and by a local social media group. The market was visited by over 30 external guests, who received an initial amount of the imaginary currency. The products and services were very attractive, but the 'financial' resources were limited, so some guests played cards to win money from others.

### Behind the stalls

The enterprises provided different products and services. The ReArt group sold jewellery, accessories, belts, and offered the opportunity for guests to create some smaller goods with the help of one of the team members. The painters sold pictures and offered body painting to their clients. The photography group projected a slideshow of the best photos, and the customers were able to buy them and also offered portrait photo services to the guests.

### Experiences and follow-up

The income generated by the three enterprises varied but they were all successful. They also received positive feedback from visitors. Some of the young people were very active in their enterprises during the market, so they experienced how a busy day at work is, and how it feels to get positive feedback. The experience was very empowering for them, but it also created some challenges they had to deal with. For example, a girl from the painter group mentioned that it was a bit frustrating when a client changed her mind several times about what kind of figure she wanted to get, and when she started to paint it, the client made her hurry.



### Reference

After the market day, we jointly evaluated the action to raise awareness of the participants' experiences, activities and development processes. They voted on different skill sets which they thought were crucial for their enterprise and justified why they thought these competencies were relevant. They also evaluated themselves concerning the selected competencies.

### Implementers

To implement similar mock enterprises and market projects it is important to involve trainers who have some experience in setting up and managing small enterprises related to the profile of the activity and also have experience working with disadvantaged young people. The involvement of the mentors helps in the recruitment and engagement of participants. The involvement

of partners from local communities, NGOs, grass root initiatives or informal groups facilitates communication about the event and the involvement of customers for the market.

### Resources

The main resource needed is the venue(s) for the 'production' and a market space which is visible and accessible for people and external participants but which is also a safe place. Some raw materials are needed for production.

### Results achieved

The 12 participants had a successful project/work experience, they became more aware of their competences which have developed throughout the process.

# 3. TRAINING FOR TEACHERS AND HUMAN RESOURCE PROFESSIONALS

The project put strong emphasis on capacity-building for various stakeholders of mainstream society which have a significant role in facilitating the inclusion of vulnerable youth. Two target groups are essential in this process: teachers and employers. One of the main aims in this field was to build cooperation with employers, facilitating their competencies to foster diversity in the workplace as well as to motivate them to broaden their workforce with Roma and disadvantaged youth. Training courses, mutual learning events to acquire diversity tools as well as networking and sensitising activities for company HR staff were planned for this purpose. The other major goal was to improve the educational environment of marginalised youth and to support teachers in their efforts to prevent early school drop-out and strengthen the motivation of their students.

# EMBRACING DIVERSITY TRAINING FOR TEACHERS OR HR EXPERTS

Two training sessions are described here, both of them implemented by the Trust for Social Achievement in Bulgaria within the framework of the project - Embracing Diversity training for Human Resource experts and Embracing Diversity training for teachers. The Embracing Diversity Training was developed by the International Step by Step Association, drawing on more than a decade of extensive work with diverse communities. Intended for a wide array of professionals, the training guides participants through a process of personal transformation, which helps them become agents of change, working together to create equitable societies that honour and protect diversity. The training for the project was developed and implemented in Bulgaria by the Trust for Social Achievement. It offers a uniquely holistic and sustainable entry point into the topic of addressing diversity. The training strengthens the understanding of concepts such as culture, social/cultural differences, mechanisms of dealing with diversity, and social justice concepts. At the same time, it helps participants deconstruct stereotypes and prejudices, develop intercultural sensitivity and communication, and make a commitment to the process of building capacity for personal, professional and institutional transformation. The whole training course and each session builds upon the existing knowledge and expertise.

Improving diversity in the workplace has become an essential business practice in recent decades, especially in the US and in Western Europe. The workplace is increasingly adapted not only to welcome, but also to leverage the benefits of diversity to achieve a competitive business advantage. Naturally, diversity goes hand in hand with inclusion. A collaborative, supportive, and respectful work environment increases the participation and contribution of all employees and helps individuals and businesses to thrive. Companies that create diverse and inclusive work environments are seen as more adaptable and creative, making them magnets for top talent. The Embracing Diversity tool is therefore key for creating a more tolerant and flexible corporate culture on the one hand, and a useful instrument for more effective and better-performing businesses on the other.

Diversity in the educational sector is an issue which has been debated for decades. The Embracing Diversity training in this field aims at educators who need to go beyond the traditional role of the teacher and wish to develop a deep understanding, take personal responsibility, and play specific roles in the process of changing the existing systems, which are related to a manifestation of activity and attracting allies.

During the Embracing Diversity training course the participants are guided to increase their level of sensitivity toward issues of (often involuntary) dis-

criminary practices and their effects on the organisational culture. Another goal is to increase their motivation to achieve a positive change in their own work and the culture of the institutions and services sectors they work in. And last but not least, through the trained experts the entire organisation is empowered to take a proactive stance, actively address challenges, and become more inclusive and supportive of their employees/students.

### Target Group

Embracing Diversity training courses for workplace diversity are offered to Human Resource experts for employer partners from the private sector, as it is a valuable tool to assist the placement of youth from disadvantaged backgrounds into jobs offered by respective businesses.

In the educational sector the tool is targeted towards teachers at the partnering schools, but the sessions can also be attended by parents, as well as by representatives and professionals from local municipal administrations and social institutions (educational mediators, psychologists, and counsellors).

### Activities/method

The Embracing Diversity training course usually takes 1.5 days (it can be organised as 3 half-days) and covers all or selected topics from the following sessions:

#### Session 1 & 2: Introduction & Identity

In these sessions participants work to:

- understand the structure and purpose of the workshop, and get to know each other
- share their expectations of the workshop and of themselves
- understand what complex identities and multiple identities are
- review the dynamic relationships between personal and group identities
- explore the relationship between identity and oppression as a power issue
- understand the importance of the development of multiple identities in multicultural societies

#### Session 3: Development of stereotypes & prejudices

In this session, participants work to:

- look at the importance of context and thinking 'outside the box' when it comes to interpreting reality
- explore the difficulties in interpretations based on insufficient information

- learn more about the mechanism and development of stereotypes and prejudices

#### Session 4: Labels - effects of stereotypes & prejudices

In this session participants work to:

- establish the connections between what is expected from us and our behaviour
- track the effects that our behaviour has on others and the effects that others' behaviour has on us
- experience the power of labels

#### Session 5: Needs of the minority and vulnerable groups

In this session participants will:

- understand minority-majority dynamics, including the risks in the process of integration and interculturalism
- understand the different needs that are connected with the process of integration and interculturalism
- become aware of the risk factors associated with intercultural learning and be encouraged to think about the possibilities of harmonisation of different needs for minority and majority groups

#### Session 6: Privileges

In this session participants work to:

- better understand what privileges are
- look at the relationship between privileges and power
- establish the connections between oppression and privileges

#### Session 7: Blame the victim

In this session participants gain:

- increased awareness of the effects of being in a privileged group, as compared to a disadvantaged group
- a greater understanding of power and power relationships
- a greater understanding of the blame the victim mechanism and its consequences



## Session 8: The DIE model (Description, Interpretation, Evaluation)

In this session participants work to:

- become aware of value judgments and gain a deeper understanding of the structure of stereotypes
- learn the difference between description, interpretation, and evaluation
- understand the personal and cultural relativity of interpretations and evaluations
- learn strategies for deconstructing stereotypical thinking

## Session 9: Building allies

In this session participants work to:

- become aware of what makes them good allies, what strengths they already have and what needs to be developed
- become aware of different strategies of how to become a good ally
- make a commitment to working towards a more inclusive environment

## Implementers

Since the ED training has been developed by the International Step by Step Association, it can only be executed by trainers who are specially qualified and certified for the role.

## Resources

The training does not require any specific resources.

Basic consumables for offline execution: badges with the participants' names, presentation equipment, handouts, markers, flipchart sheets, adhesive tape, scissors, etc. Basic consumables for online execution: PC equipment, internet connection, pens and paper for the participants (provided by the participants themselves).

## Results achieved

In the scope of the project the training was offered to teachers in a vocational school, involving 23 people. The feedback generated was very positive: the participants found it practical and necessary and are interested in extending it in their work with the parents. The training was also a reminder for them to communicate more often with students, listen more carefully and discuss the problems which are of interest to them, while always aiming to 'hear' all sides of the story.

10 training sessions were conducted for HR experts in this project and the feedback generated was very positive. What the participants appreciate the most, is the very idea of tackling the subject of diversity, the different points of view at various life situations, the dialogues created, the activities that lead to comprehension of our own limitations and stereotypes. They became acutely aware that biases are a frame that we place upon people and situations, and that we need to monitor and rethink our own decision-making processes.

