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Supporting inter-sectoral networks in the integration of university drop-outs  
into vocational education and training

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## Integration of university drop-outs in VET system: transnational report



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The report on drop out and the integration of university dropouts in VET system is part of the project “Pro Networks (ProNet): Supporting inter-sectoral networks in the integration of university drop-outs into vocational education and training” and it is carried out in the IO1 framework. The main aim is to create an overview on the current situation in the partner countries based on national reports.

The report is structured into 4 parts: firstly, each country defined the concept of dropout in their own context based on national data and research reports. Secondly strategies and measures to counsel dropout were analysed in each country. The third part is dedicated to analyse national policies and initiatives to promote the integration of university students’ drop out into the VET system and finally networks and intersectoral initiatives are explored.

Finally based on the comparative analysis of the national context, conclusions and orientation for the next steps of the project are presented.

## 1. National understanding of university drop-out

As stated in prior studies, “the dropout rate is not a simple indicator to analyse and there is no consensus regarding its significance, so it tends to be limited to contextual interpretations” (Rodríguez-Gómez et al., 2015, p.692).

In the **Czech Republic** the term “university drop-outs” include students who have been enrolled for a certain HE study programme (they had the HE student statute), and due to any kind of problems<sup>1</sup> they left the HE study programme before graduation, and have not been formally enrolled to any other HE study programme for the next three years (Hraba, 2015).

In **France** the term “drop-out” (*décrochage scolaire*) is used mainly for the primary and secondary education. For the university dropout (or tertiary system dropouts), the term “failure rate” (*taux d’échec*) is more often used.

In **Germany**, university students identified as “drop-outs” are those who leave the university system permanently. The term “university drop-out” exclude those students who just change their courses. Complementary, the “attrition rate” include both university drop-out rate and the rate of students who decide to change their courses.

In **Poland** the dropout concept has not been clearly defined. In the 1970s the term “dropout” was related to two separate concepts. Firstly, it was related to the concept of leaving university without graduating due to adverse personal situations and not because of the academic difficulty, i.e. foregoing university (*eng.waste*). The second concept was temporary suspension or permanent resignation of attending university due to academic failure, i.e. expulsion from university (*eng. offal*) (Jopowicz, 1972). These terms were often considered to be negative and therefore were replaced by phrases such as: discontinuing, failure to complete, early leaving or drop-out, which were generally recognized as educational failure.

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<sup>1</sup> For example: dissatisfaction with the form of teaching, dissatisfaction with the study programme choice, mismatch between desire and reality, poor adaptation to HE learning style, lack of motivation to study, lack of skills etc.

Finally, in **Spain** university dropout refers to students who enrolled for one course and have not been formally enrolled for the next two years, without considering enrolment cancellations in this recount (meaning, students who never appeared as university students). Dropout rate corresponds to the percentage of a cohort of undergraduate students newly admitted that are not enrolled in the following two years.

Comparing dropout rates among the five countries analysed is not possible, since the operative concept of dropout and the reference cohort year are different in each country. However, it is interesting to see the figures available to build a clearer image of dropout in Higher Education. As we will see, one common point among all countries is the lack of public nationwide database about dropout in Higher Education.

In **France**, 36% of students that start a university education will leave the system without a university diploma (at least a bachelor degree). This is well above the OECD average of 30% and is caused by the fact, that there is practically no selection process at the university at the entrance (the baccalaureate gives every student a right to choose any university degree they choose). However, almost half from these 36% successfully reorient themselves into tertiary VET programs (*DUT – Diplôme universitaire de technologie*, *BTS – Brevet de technicien supérieur*), which is a unique case among OECD countries. For these drop-outs the year at the university serves as a way of finding an educational program more adapted to their competences, however, this fact is rather costly for the French universities (more than 10 000€ a year per student).

When taken the tertiary system as a whole, the global dropout rate is 21% in the tertiary education. In 2014, the structure of the dropouts from tertiary education was as follows: 59% of drop-outs were from pre-bachelor general studies, 34% from BTS and 7% DUT. Almost 75 000 drop out from tertiary education every year, of which 46 000 from the university.

The structure of the drop-outs from the point of view of their secondary education is very unequal: whereas only 11% of students with general baccalaureate drop out of the university, this proportion is 30% for technological baccalaureate and 61% for professional baccalaureate.

In the **Czech Republic**, the first-year dropout has been increased during the last 10 years in approximately 10 points (from just over 20% in 2003 to just over 30% in 2013) (Stiburek, 2015). High level of drop outs in the first year of study is caused by two factors. The first is the method of financing universities "per capita" set by "numerus clausus". Prior to every year, the Ministry sets a limit to funded study places for each institution in five categories - first year students in every type of study program (bachelor, "long" master, "short" master and doctoral) and all other students. Student numbers exceeding such limit are not to be taken into account in the HE budget calculation but many institutions overstep the limit in at least some of the categories. Starting from 2010/2011, the funding caps are reduced every year in order to compensate for the demographic decline and to keep the proportion of cohort entering higher education constant (Stiburek, 2015). The other factor is that most of the Czech HEIs are trying to recruit as many students as possible. In fact, numerous institutions and faculties decided to admit almost anyone who applies, developing or continuing "extended admission process policies" where admission criteria are replaced by first-year courses and exams.

Cumulative dropout rates in the 3rd year of the bachelor's and integrated master's programs from 2003 to 2011 is also increasing. The highest levels of HE drop-outs are from study programs in engineering, agriculture and veterinary, natural sciences, economics, and human medicine (from 62% to 45 %).

In **Germany**, there have previously been only a few empirical studies of the target group of university drop-outs. One reason for this is the lack of nationwide university flow statistics that can be used to trace university education. It has hitherto been the case that each student receives a new matriculation number each time they change their course of study, meaning that university drop-outs cannot be clearly distinguished from students changing their subject of study.

A study from **2014** found out that approximately 28% of students of one year leave university without a degree (Heublein et al., 2014). Some groups of subjects showed higher drop-out rates than others. For instance, in Mathematics/Science, 39% of a year drop out, in engineering 36%, in Agriculture, Forestry and Nutrition Sciences 30% and in Law, Business Administration and Social Sciences, 28% (Heublein et al., 2014).

In **Poland**, there is also a lack of national research and statistics on the subject of students dropping out of university. However, some universities have more detailed information on this subject. These data are collected rather only for internal purposes of the universities and are treated by most as "sensitive" data. Only a few universities make this type of information public and want to share it. The following are a few sample data:

- AGH University of Science and Technology: during 2015 year, 4147 students were found as university drop-out.<sup>2</sup>
- Warsaw University of Technology: after their first year of university, during the 2014/2015 academic year, 1,360 people dropped out of university. This represents 21% of the total number of students enrolled that year.
- Warsaw School of Economics: approximately 8% students dropped out of university in the 2014/2015 academic year.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, some data retrieved from international reports, allow us to know something more about dropout and common groups dropping-out in Poland:

- According to the data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2013), 38% of students do not graduated from tertiary education.<sup>4</sup>
- Experts from the National Centre for Research and Development calculated that 25% of all students discontinued their studies in 2012. Among those, 42% majored in mathematics-statistics and physics while 32 percent majored in engineering and technology.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, in **Spain**, although there are national statistics about students' performance university, microdata about students dropping-out from university is not publicly available. During the 2009-2010 academic year, a 26.9% of students decided to dropout (19% in the first year and 7.9% in the second year): the 24.5 of female students and the 30.3% of male students. The area of knowledge that accumulates a higher dropout rate is Arts with a 39.5% of university dropout.

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<sup>2</sup> Based on information from the Centre for Monitoring the Professional Careers Staff at AGH University of Science and Technology from April 2016

<sup>3</sup>

[http://metrocafe.pl/metrocafe/1,145523,17280362,Nawet\\_co\\_czwarty\\_student\\_wyleci\\_ze\\_studiow\\_po\\_pierwszym.html](http://metrocafe.pl/metrocafe/1,145523,17280362,Nawet_co_czwarty_student_wyleci_ze_studiow_po_pierwszym.html) (accessed 4 March 2016)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-at-a-glance-2013\\_eag-2013-en](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-at-a-glance-2013_eag-2013-en), Table A4.1. (accessed 1 March 2016)

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[http://metrocafe.pl/metrocafe/1,145523,17280362,Nawet\\_co\\_czwarty\\_student\\_wyleci\\_ze\\_studiow\\_po\\_pierwszym.html](http://metrocafe.pl/metrocafe/1,145523,17280362,Nawet_co_czwarty_student_wyleci_ze_studiow_po_pierwszym.html) (accessed 1 March 2016)

However, areas with lower dropout rates are Social Sciences and Law (24.9%) and Health Sciences (24.7%).

As regards some sociodemographic characteristics of the students, the results reveal that Spanish and older students (25 years and over) concentrate the bigger percentage of drop-out, with 97% and 35%, respectively. Finally, as most students drop-out during the first year, 76.1% of students dropping-out have earned 20% or less of their credit hours.

Although dropout and persistence rates in Higher Education are key indicators of the system quality and there is an increasing interest on encouraging students' retentions, there are still some countries where this phenomenon is not seen as a real problem.

Thus, for example, in the Czech Republic, higher education representatives consider dropout rates as a quality assurance measure to "keep the bar high". Low skills and motivation of students who cannot meet the high demands of tertiary education are believed to be at the heart of dropouts (Vlk, 2014). In Poland, was not and is still not the subject of public discourse and education policy. The issue of university dropouts is therefore not mentioned in any greater detail within the main Polish documents relating to the policies in the field of education. Currently there is no centralized institution feels responsible for this problem, as this issue is considered to be of marginal importance. This may be due to the fact that in both academia and government, dropping out of university is not treated as a problem. There even exists a prevalent belief that failure in education is unavoidable because of the selectivity of the system (Smużewska, Wasielewski, & Antonowicz, 2015).

## 2. Approaches and strategies to counsel university drop-out

In general, institutional strategies and initiatives to counsel university drop-out seem to be more frequent and thorough than the one developed at a national level, since just few countries have clear and public policies regarding dropout in Higher Education.

In **France**, the high drop-out rate shows that the system of career guidance and counselling between the secondary and tertiary education is insufficient in France. Many young people coming from technical secondary education (technological baccalaureate) choose the university as a second option, because they were not admitted to tertiary VET programs (IUT or DUT), where, contrary to the university, selection is made. Moreover, they often choose social sciences, which are often totally inadequate with their secondary diploma. 3 of 4 of these students drop out of the university within the first year.

In 2007, a 5-year plan was launched in order to reduce the university drop-out rate, with the budget of 730 million Euro. Within this plan the universities could create different projects to combat this phenomenon and help young people in the first year of their studies. These actions were oriented into five axes:

1. Strengthening the assistance and tutoring for students
2. Organization of welcoming procedures for new students
3. Measures for students in difficulties
4. Professionalization of the educational pathways (more connection with the real-life, labour market experiences, implementing elements of the dual system at the university)
5. Continuous evaluation of teaching methods

There are several approaches that either try to prevent the drop-out phenomenon, or help students that already dropped out of the university. Universities have a lot of autonomy in their

way of organizing preventive and curative measures. The usual measures implemented by the universities are the following: increasing the number of hours for tutoring, dedicating a referent teacher for every student, diversifying educational pathways for students in difficulty etc.

In the **Czech Republic** there is not a direct national policy addressing HE study success or dropout prevention. The long-term plans contain recommendations for HE institutions to monitor study progress and to implement dropout prevention measures. The New Strategic Framework for Higher Education (MŠMT 2014) includes among other measures a specific target regarding dropout – at least 60% of Bachelors started in 2015 should be completed within an “appropriate timeframe”.

Non-existence of the strict national measures does not mean that the individual HEIs do not care about dropouts. Nearly all of the HEIs adopted some measures in order to improve study success and there is also an Association of university guidance counsellors (<http://www.asociacevsp.cz>).

Most of the public HEI (approx. 62 %) are equipped with an “academic guidance and counselling centre” that is providing students with career guidance, educational counselling, psychological aid, and other support services.

Some of the more common measures developed from universities are, among others (Švec, 2015): developing student services and counselling; developing targeted support for special-needs (disabled) students; stimulating motivation of students by merit-based scholarships; introducing compensatory courses – both extra-curricular (subject to fees) and as part of the program (electives); offering educational resources (books, presentations, sometimes also lecture records) online for all students to reduce the barriers to learning; re-introducing obligatory attendance at seminars and some courses, namely for freshmen; distributing grading deadlines more evenly across the semester and academic year (midterm tests, seminar papers and presentations, etc.) as well as across the entire program (demanding theoretical courses should not be concentrated in the first year only).

In **Germany**, universities are trying to prevent university drop-out by identifying students with problems at an early stage and by counselling them. Elsewhere, strategies are being developed with which dual vocational training is to become more attractive for this group. Still other projects are occupying themselves with the question of the applicability of university credits to dual vocational training. Only in isolated federal states (for example, Bavaria and Hesse) are state-wide initiatives found. In other federal states, they are currently being developed (for example, Berlin and Hamburg).

From a national policy level, a strategy pursued by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF 2014a) has as its primary objective the prevention of university drop-out. To this end, measures aimed at improving study conditions were already implemented in the Higher Education Pact in 2010. Further vocational training policy objectives include the integration of university drop-outs into vocational training. Key starting points are:

1. Improving the information available to university drop-outs (ex., “Vocational Training Practically Unbeatable”: <http://www.praktisch-unschlagbar.de>).
2. Bringing university drop-outs and employers together, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (ex. “Jobstarter Plus”: <http://www.jobstarter.de> ).
3. Optimising the existing counselling available to university drop-outs.
4. Improving the subject-specific recognition of university credits.
5. Filling research gaps.



In **Poland**, no policies of programs concerning the counselling of dropouts have been formulated as of yet. One can only speak of advice and counselling in its general meaning. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy's department of labour market is developing national professional information as well as new methods of vocational guidance for adults and thoroughly. Vocational guidance for adults is implemented in Poland by universities (Academic Career Services), schools for adults, Continuing Education Centres (CKU), Practical Training Centres (CKP), Centres for Vocational Improvement (ZDZ), voluntary labour corps, regional and district labour offices, non-governmental organizations (associations and foundations) and training institutions as part of their EFS projects.

Focusing in Universities, advice is granted to candidates, students and graduates by student career offices and the student council. These universities have no institutionalised system of academic guidance, including counselling strategies for university dropouts.

Academic Career Services (ABK) provide vocational guidance within their universities for students and graduates, working or seeking employment. This advice is based primarily on providing job offers, giving vocational counselling, conducting training sessions and meetings with employers. According to information Rights Ombudsman Graduates in Poland, among the existing 340 Academic Career Services (as of June 2015), 88% provide vocational counselling, while 44.5% declare that they cooperate with centres for information and career planning (acting with regional labour offices) to develop, update and disseminate vocational information<sup>6</sup>. It is difficult to assess whether ABK would be willing to advise university dropouts, since this is not a task directly assigned to them.

In **Spain**, there are no specific national strategies to counsel university drop-out. However, the document University Strategy 2015 (Ministerio de Educación, 2010), which explicit some of the priority lines for the Spanish university between 2010 and 2015, highlights the need to create a monitoring and evaluation system which include, among other indicators, the university dropout rate and the university transfer-out rate. Also, this document establishes that one of the priority actions for the modernization of the Spanish university system should be promoting "actions that would significantly reduce the inefficiencies of the university system (dropout rate and excessive duration of studies and academic performance rate)" (Ministerio de Educación, 2010, p. 35).

At the institutional level each university develops its own initiatives, programs and strategies. For example, the European project "Guia" collects some of the practices and strategies for student retention developed by some Spanish and Latin American universities: <http://goo.gl/SmpQwK>

The study about students' dropout in the Catalan Higher Education System (Gairín et al, 2010), collects various strategies related to dropout students, both at the university system and institutional level. From all the strategies compiled, the most interesting for ProNET objectives are the psychopedagogical ones, which include counselling and guidance programs for specific degrees and schools, personal development plans and/or guidance and psychopedagogical counsel services.

Some strategies are carried out during the pre-admission and they include the provision of information and guidance on academic options, itineraries, knowledge areas, etc.

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.rgnisw.nauka.gov.pl/g2/oryginal/2015\\_10/12a0de2fd58b56d4befd7693dd1151be.pdf](http://www.rgnisw.nauka.gov.pl/g2/oryginal/2015_10/12a0de2fd58b56d4befd7693dd1151be.pdf) (accessed 4 March 2016)

During the pre-admission period, psychopedagogical diagnostic actions, the promotion of self-knowledge (focusing on the specific profile of the university degree) and the training of learning strategies are also intensified. Finally, students can take out complementary actions to develop specific skills (social, intellectual, methodological), strengthen study habits and promote cooperative work.

### 3. (Policies) and initiatives to promote the integration of university students' drop out into the VET system

The policies and the initiatives promoting the integration of university students' drop out into VET system are diverse in the countries analysed. They are countries with a wide trajectory with consolidated measures and policies as Germany and countries where the policies are still in an early stage of development as Czech Republic.

Some of the **policies promoted at national and local level** are:

**Czech Republic** there are no coherent policies dealing with integration of dropout in VET system. Moreover, in the Czech Republic the most significant is the policy document Strategic Framework for Higher Education (MŠMT, 2014) that contains measures related to success and dropout within the chapter of the Priority Goal 2: Diversity and Access: where it states: "Accreditation includes the requirements on guidance and counselling and the support of students' specific needs in the institutional accreditation standards: HEIs applying for institutional accreditation will have to demonstrate an established system of guidance and counselling and student services besides other quality assurance processes. The process of identifying and reducing both overt and hidden barriers in access, social as well as others, will be part of the required institutional quality assurance systems. HEIs will also be required to deal with the development and causes of student dropout".

**France** face a lack of a coherent national strategy for helping university drop-outs is that their proportion within the jobseekers was relatively low compared to drop-outs from secondary education. However, more attention is given today to this target group, because with the democratisation of access to the university they become much more numerous, the unemployment rate as well as the time they need for labour market insertion are rising in France. **Spain** experiment a similar situation.

In **Germany**, a study by the German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies (DZHW) from 2010 reveals that, up until now, approximately 20% of university drop-outs complete vocational training after leaving university. A new study by the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB), assumes that for 30% of university drop-outs dual vocational training constitutes an attractive alternative (BIBB 2016). The professional integration of university drop-outs is the focus of a study by Innovation Research and Consultancy (GIB) from 2010 on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi).

In **Poland** in accordance with the Act of 19<sup>th</sup> August 2011 amending the Act applied to the education system and certain other acts (Journal of Laws, No 205, item 1206) starting from 2012, actions are being taken to facilitate adults' return to education and the acquiring of professional skills. The Act gives the possibility to acquire or supplement one's professional qualifications in extra-curricular forms such as Vocational Qualification Courses financed with educational subsidies as smaller forms which constitute a component of the Vocational Qualification Course – Skill Courses. The reform also has the grounds for a system of



accumulation and transfer achievements (in accordance with the ECVET) by distinguishing qualifications in school competitions, description of qualifications by taking into account the effects of learning and enabling the transfer of achievements between jobs. There is also now a possibility of confirming knowledge and professional skills acquired with non-formal and informal learning methods through an external examination of a person's vocational qualifications in the field of the relevant qualification being assessed (Eurydice, Cedefop, 2011) but only in respect of qualifications from a vocational educational level and qualifications referred to in the program in accordance with MEN order of 7 February 2012. Movement between the level of higher education and vocational training could be an opportunity for university dropouts if the partial effects of learning obtained within the framework of the institution providing the higher education could be recognized in the vocational training sector and form the basis for further training in this sector. A system of validation could play an important role in this respect can play system validation. Plans are to introduce such a system (in accordance with the recommendation of the Council of Europe of 20<sup>th</sup> December 2012) in 2018. An act regarding an integrated system of qualifications entered into force on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2016. The system is to ensure the comparability of diplomas and certificates in Poland and the EU by specifying in particular the level of qualifications, the results of the teaching for the given qualification, the institutions validating and institutions certifying the conditions under which the confirmation of the teaching effects will take place. The register will contain, by law, qualifications from school and higher education, regulated qualifications (having a basis in other laws of which the minister responsible for the related field will decide) and entry level qualifications that are acquired outside the school and university; courses, training offered by training companies or employers or industries that will be reported to the register by interested parties such as representatives of industries. Describing the entry level qualifications, assigning them a qualification level and placing them in the register will result in clearing up the field of non-formal education.<sup>7</sup> The regulations introduced could substantially contribute to the improvement of the integration of university dropouts with the VET system. Polish legislation does not directly promote action related to the integration of university dropouts into the vocational training system.

#### Regarding the **measures and specific strategies for integration:**

Countries are implementing a variety of measures to facilitate integration. In **France** given the decentralized approach of the effort to reduce the university drop-out rate, universities implement measures for reorienting dropouts towards VET on four different levels:

- Elaboration of a guide for re-orientation within or outside of the university. This guide shows possible passages between different educational programs, including VET, as well as practical information about how to proceed in such cases.
- Organization of information sessions about reorientation possibilities since the first semester. These sessions are organized by guidance counsellors and can be followed by on demand individual interviews.
- Organization of special second semesters replacing the traditional educational path for the drop-outs at risk. During this semester the students work on their general skills, knowledge and methodological competences, and are put in contact with the world of work in order to find an alternative VET path.
- Organization of repeated semesters or partnerships with 18-month BTS. This allows the acceleration of the reorientation, where the drop-out doesn't have to wait until

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/pl/aktualnosci/1067-jak-bedzie-dzialal-zintegrowany-system-kwalifikacji> (accessed 10 March 2016)

next September, but can start a VET program directly after the first semester at the university. This requires a very strong cooperation with the VET providers, often allowing the student to keep his credits and notes from the first semester. However, the ECTS implementation in France doesn't allow for an easy transfer of credits between academic and VET programmes and thus the construction of individualized educational pathways.

In **Germany** a large proportion of university drop-outs go straight into permanent employment. These are mainly university drop-outs who already possess completed vocational education. Direct entry without formal professional qualifications is observable above all in the IT field (Becker, Grebe, Bleikertz 2010). On the other hand, career entry by means of vocational training comes into consideration above all for university drop-outs who discontinued their course of study at an early stage, that is, in the first two to three semesters, and who do not yet possess any formal professional qualification. This form of integration of university drop-outs is the one that is most frequently observed. However, so far, university credits that have already been achieved are, in most cases, not recognised and used and employment takes place on the same conditions as for school leavers. Here, potential is lost (Becker, Grebe, Bleikertz 2010). Many companies also make use of internships for integration. In most cases, the university drop-outs complete the internship as a pre-stage to regular vocational training. In contrast, side jobs and contracts for work and labour are rather little-used instruments (Becker, Grebe, Bleikertz 2010). In professional practice, university drop-outs are employed similarly to university graduates. In the IT field in particular, the differences in terms of content compared to employees with university or vocational training are small (Becker, Grebe, Bleikertz 2010). With regard to further education, it can be said that further qualification through university educational offerings is used to only a comparatively small degree (Becker, Grebe, Bleikertz 2010). Afterwards, the career development of university drop-outs is very similar to that of graduates. After three years, they reach an equivalent career level relatively frequently. However, there are differences in terms of salary. Here, a considerable gap can be observed, although the gap is less pronounced in the IT industry.

In **Spain** despite there is a wide range of literature analysing the drop-out phenomena at national and international level (European Union, 2015), only few references to initiative to promote the integration of drop-outs to other study levels are funded. A **pioneer experience** carried out by the Polytechnic University of Valencia (Camiña, Cotillas, Ballester & Villanova, sd) aim to prevent and to respond the high level of drop-outs promoting new teaching methods and new strategies in order to open the university to other educational initiatives. With this aim, it has been created an Integrated Centre which includes all the training possibilities for professional training: higher education professional studies, university and occupational training in the same professional field. The measures proposed by this initiative are:

- Changes in the teaching methods enhancing students' learning and their integration to the labour market
- Integrated Centre based on the idea to offer in the same place an educational itinerary able to enclose all the training possibilities. All these itineraries are carried out in the same knowledge field, are inter-related and connected to the environment and flexible (adapted to the student needs)
- Cyclical approach- creating connections between university and the labour market

Due to the peripheral importance given to the problem of university dropouts, there are only few references to research projects or studies currently carried out in the countries analysed. For example, in **Poland** the progress that is being made is rather related to the development of lifelong education, vocational training and life guidance, all from which university dropouts could benefit. Some examples of research projects indirectly related to the subjects on the situation and counsel of university dropouts:

- The RANHLE project was related to the policy on expansion of higher level education participation in European countries. The key issue for this policy is to provide equal and fair access to higher education and to assist students from underrepresented groups in higher education or the socially excluded in the completion of their education. The RANHLE project focused on the enhancing and limiting factors: availability, maintenance/retention in the system and the state of leaving university for personal or academic reasons among non-traditional university students.
- The project known as The Construction of the National Qualifications System – this was a pilot implementation of the national qualifications system and an information campaign on its function, implemented by the regional labour office in Krakow jointly with the Institute of Educational Research in Warsaw. Representatives of the institutions participating in Malopolska Partnership for Lifelong Learning also contributed to its implementation. Solutions concerning the procedures of the National Qualifications System, the functioning of the Integrated System of Qualifications and the validation process of the educational effects were tested within the framework of the project. These factors can help lead to improved integration of university dropouts in the VET system.

The topic of drop-out and the integration in VET system is in almost all the countries missing in the **public discourse and education policy**. An example in this sense is that none of the countries analysed mentioned relevant experiences in integration of dropout, which demonstrates that the subject has a relatively low level of priority at policy-making level.

However, the issue of students dropping out of university remains, for the moment, a topic of interest for individual universities and the corresponding ministries in the countries. An example of such experience is mentioned in Poland, where the effects of public debate on the topic of lifelong learning are forums, agreement and cooperation networks of regional or national scope. A case that is worth delving into further is the example of the Partnership for Lifelong Learning of the Malopolska Region (MPKU). MPKU is a group of institutions that was created in the framework of a system project initiated by the regional labour office in Krakow. MPKU operates from 2008 and now has 150 labour market institutions as well as educational and training institutions forming a network of cooperation for the development of lifelong learning and guidance in the region.

#### 4. Intersectoral networks in the field of drop out counselling

In the countries analysed there are some initiatives of collaboration between different agents in counselling dropout.

**France** is implementing different measures but none target them specifically. Two institutional networks are supposed to take care of the university drop-outs: the public employment service (*Pôle Emploi*) and a specialized regional youth points called *Mission Locale*. However, some

intersectorial initiatives exist, mainly on university- or regional level, where these two actors are involved in different projects with universities. The counselling for university drop-out in these cases usually contains one or several of the following aspects:

- Counselling centred towards shortage occupations

At the moment of dropping out and the following weeks, the drop-out is particularly receptive for a discussion and analysis of his current situation and his professional future. This is often used as a moment to give them information about the shortage occupation and make their vision of the labour market more realistic – to make them realize that some ideas are not realistic from the point of view of the labour market, and that some other possibilities, that were previously discarded, could be re-open or new perspectives developed.

- Career guidance and mentoring - elaboration and validation of a career project through mentoring with professionals from the targeted professional field

The tutoring often allows the young person to gain a more detailed, informal and nuanced view of different occupations, conditions of exercise etc. It can contribute to the change the stereotypes that are sometimes connected to the VET studies and resulting occupations.

- Signing of a contract of reciprocal engagement. During the counselling the young person signs a contract that explicitly states the rights and the obligations during the counselling by a specialist (regular meetings every 2-3 weeks, formalized “homeworks”/ obligations by the young person etc.), with a clearly stated possibility of breaching the contract in case of non-compliance.

In **Germany** there are hardly any cross-industry and cross-state projects, due in part to Germany’s federal structure and the associated responsibility of the federal states for education. However, there are already a variety of counselling structures in the individual federal states, although, so far, these are insufficiently networked. Therefore, as part of the BMBF strategy, four lighthouse projects were developed in four federal states. The model regions are the city states of Hamburg and Berlin and the territorial states of Hesse and North Rhine-Westphalia. As counselling platforms, they have the task of merging and optimising the regional counselling structures. They act as central service institutions in order to network the counselling offerings of the universities, employment agencies, chambers and educational institutions with companies. In this way, holistic, transparent counselling networks are to be created that develop common counselling standards and harness synergies. In the interests of good practice, the results are also to be transferable to other regions.

The promotion of the development and testing of transferable models for the subject-specific recognition and application of university pre-qualifications for and to vocational education and training on the basis of the Vocational Training Act (BbIG) and the Crafts Code (HwO) and under consideration of existing models is also a task of the lighthouse projects.

However, all these projects are still at relatively early stages of their work; hence, initial results can be anticipated only in the next few years.

However, within the “Jobstarter Plus” projects, too, there are approaches that work on a cross-industry basis and that, together with the partners, develop new models that are to highlight to the university drop-outs transitions into the dual education system. An example of an intersectoral network is the project “Switch? - So that Expertise Is Not Lost!”. This is a cooperation project of the Hochschule für Wirtschaft und Technik Berlin (University of applied

sciences) and Elektro-Innung Berlin, an employers' association. The project enables access to a dual education in the electrical trade for students who would like to change direction (<https://www.htw-berlin.de/karriere/berufsorientierung-berufseinstieg/studienausstieg/>).

In **Poland** mechanisms of cooperation in the area of career counselling are still in development. However, emerging networks of cooperation in the area of vocational guidance are not targeted at the counselling of university dropouts. Any action taken in this field is marginal, within the area of overall guidance, hence the lack of specialised institutions or networks.

Activities undertaken in the context of the network of cooperation in the field of professional counselling mainly involves creating online platforms, partnerships, aid programs for specific groups and conferences.

Some good practices in **Poland** could be mentioned especially in the field adult education. These could be transferred in higher education sector with some of the elaborate effects:

- The "Train Ride to Your Career" program (Pociąg do Kariery) - created as part of a project by a regional labour office in cooperation with the Malopolska Partnership for Lifelong. It is a social network dedicated to lifelong learning, developed within the project "Malopolska institutions labour market, education and training partnership" (June 2008 - March 2013). It shows the benefits of lifelong learning, informs about opportunities to acquire knowledge, increase skills and build a career in the Malopolska Region. It is intended for people interested in training, looking for work with the desire of gaining qualifications, but also for education and training institutions, offering the possibility to take advantage of the online educational and vocational counselling services.
- the program of public employment services- "Your Career - Your choice" (Twoja kariera – twój wybór) that involves the creation and testing of new tools with the purpose to increase participation in training for the unemployed under the age of 30. Participants took part in on the job training as well as classroom vocational training.

Inter-sectoral cooperation networks and projects have led to the development of tools useful for vocational counselling that are available to all:

- Multimedialny program Doradca 2000  
<https://doradca.praca.gov.pl/d2k5/zawody?action=listappz>
- Base of standards of competencies/professional qualifications and modular training programs - the Department of Labour Market MRPiPS  
29.04.2014 <http://psz.praca.gov.pl/rynek-pracy/bazy-danych/bazy-standardow-kompetencji-kwalifikacji-zawodowych-i-modulowych-programow-szkolen>
- KOWEZiU Portal of educational and vocational counselling  
<http://www.doradztwo.koweziu.edu.pl/index.php>
- Praca.enter portal – a tool, with the aim to provide a better understanding of one's own career potential, <http://praca-enter.pl/>

In **Spain**, despite measures have been taken at national and local level, many of them are oriented to the primary and secondary school level and only very few addressed the higher education dropout. Form that there are no evidences of measures taken addressing the transfer from university to VET.

Moreover we can mention some of the strategies applied which can be considered as reference in this field as follows:

- The adoption of a global strategy in order to prevent the early drop-out which contains a wide variety of policy measures covering 3 fields of intervention: prevention, intervention and compensation
- In addition, Spain created a coordination body which main purpose is to prevent the early drop-out.
- Finally Spain adopted recently the *Strategy for entrepreneurship and employment for young people (2013-2016)* (Estrategia de Emprendimiento y Empleo Joven 2013-2016). The measures proposed in this strategy promote the cooperation between the services of employment, the professional orientation providers, educational institutions and professional training services and the support services in order to guarantee all young people are well informed and all the support measures are available.

Another initiative, despite it is not implemented in Spain, but in Latin America, is the GUIA project (European project funded under Alfa programme) which propose an integrated approach to drop-out and promote the creation of a support network oriented to tutorial action and mentoring and knowledge management issues. The objective is to prevent dropout through the implication of a wide variety of agents. More details could be accessed at <http://www.alfaguia.org/www-alfa/index.php/es/red-iberoamericana-de-mentorias/objetivos-de-la-red.html>

In the **Czech Republic** there is not any formal intersectorial network and if there are some informal individual networks they were not mapped.

### 5. 1.2.5. Conclusions

The brief analysis carried out about national understanding of university drop-out has confirmed, once again, not only the lack consensus on its significance, but also the lack of a standardized system for the measurement of dropout and the scarce importance of dropout and retention policies in some university systems.

However, the national reports highlight a significance and, in some countries, increasing percentage of students dropping-out of universities studies: 36% in France, 30% in the Czech Republic, 28% in Germany, 38% in Poland (number of students did not graduate from tertiary education) and 26.9% in Spain. This available data, justify the importance of developing strategies and tools for identifying risk groups and designing intervention proposals suitable for different groups and contexts.

In this sense, approaches and strategies to counsel university drop-out are clearly a priority at the institutional level, but not always explicit enough in the national policies for Higher Education. In this regard, some of the more common strategies are related to: improving information available, facilitating students' transition from secondary to tertiary education, providing academic and vocational guidance and counselling and improving teaching and tutoring quality.

Although some studies have identified a student profile who reorient themselves to shorter VET studies after dropping out from the university, there are no specific strategies to promote and facilitate the effective incorporation of drop-out students into VET programmes.

Transnational analysis demonstrated that policies and strategies linking university dropout and VET system are under development in most all of cases. There are only few experiences addressing university dropout and inclusion to VET system. In almost all the countries the legislation reference dropout and possible strategies to prevent it. Actually, the public discourse



on the integration of university dropouts into dual vocational training is still recent in all the countries analysed, despite there are some interesting experiences and good practices, as in Germany.

The national reports demonstrate that there is an important number of university dropouts at national level and the interest in this topic is higher than ever. Moreover, there is little evidence on dropouts' professional or academic paths. For some of them the university dropout doesn't mean an obstacle for entering in the professional life, but there are no evidences on their trajectories on VET programmes. A future research questions derived from here is related to the reasons for what their first option is not VET alternatives.

In addition, national reports proved the co-existence of a range of **programmes** or actions implemented in order to council dropout, but only few are directly addressing the VET inclusion. Derived from this, a possible future research direction could be related to the mechanisms implemented at local level to recognize and transfer credits from university to VET system in order to stimulate and facilitate the inclusions of dropouts into vocational training.

Finally, national reports put in evidence that the development of **instruments** and approaches for the integration of university drop-outs are still in development. This conduct to the need to approach this subject in depth and to offer to the academic and professional community valid resources to address dropouts counselling and integration.

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