



# Case Study Briefing

## “An Integrated Intervention for Connecting Vocational Schools Graduates with the Labour Market”



This project has received funding from the European Commission Horizon 2020 Programme Societal challenges: European societies after the crisis under grant agreement no. 649189

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## 1. Overview

Designing and deploying an integrated intervention for enhancing employability and connecting vocational and training education (VET) schools graduates with the labour market.

The programme aimed at providing a solid “corpus” of skills, motives and working experience to VET schools graduates and, also, being profitable for the participating enterprises through an integrated social investment initiative. The initiative as part of an EU active labour market policy (YEI) included: a) theoretical training in the form of horizontal (“soft”) “tools” so that beneficiaries are able to meet the requirements of labour market; b) vocational counselling oriented to the establishment of employability and adjustment; and c) acquisition of working experience (internship) in enterprises by matching the graduates’ specialties with the areas the enterprises trade in.

## 2. Key policy implications

The programme was carried out in the context of the EU *Youth Employment Initiative* (YEI) and addressed policy issues concerning unemployment, vocational training, internship and active labour market participation on (almost) national level.

Further policy implications include but are not limited to:

- Structure of labour market /Rigid labour markets;
- Strengthening of vocational /educational training and apprenticeship systems;
- Mismatch between education-VET and labour market;
- Systematic transition-to-work programs to help students gain initial work experience;
- Provision of counselling and vocational guidance;
- Inclusion of vulnerable social groups (Roma, immigrants etc.);
- Ageing of population and demographic issues.

## 3. Context

The programme was implemented in the context of *Youth Employment Initiative* (YEI). It intended to provide financial support to the Member States worst hit by youth unemployment; support was allocated to regions with unemployment rates (YUR) of more than 25% in 2012 and, for Member States where YUR has increased by more than 30% in 2012. On national level, in Greece, the programme was included in the Operational Programme (OP) *Education and Lifelong Learning*, one of the four OPs that were co-funded by the European Social Fund (ESF). The programme was designed and implemented in all eight (8) *Convergence Regions* (Eastern Macedonia & Thrace, Epirus, Western Greece, Thessaly, Peloponnesus, Ionian Islands & North Aegean, Crete).

For the design and implementation of the programme a consortium was assembled: INE/GSEE (Labour Institute of Greek General Confederation of Labour) was the coordinator of the programme, supplemented by the following social partners:

- Centre for the Development of Educational Policy (KANEP/GSEE);
- Hellenic Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen & Merchants (GSEVEE/IME & KEK);
- National Confederation of Hellenic Commerce (ESEE/KAELE & INEMY);
- Hellenic Management Association (EEDE).

The composition of the consortium reflected the will and ambition of the main social partners that are engaged in active employment practices and policies in Greece to join forces and bring about maximum effectiveness of this specialized intervention.

The programme was launched to provide theoretical education, vocational counselling support and working experience to 7.000 participants, i.e. young people aged up to 29 years that at the time of the programme resided in regions where youth unemployment was higher than 25% in 2012. In particular, it aimed to support young people who although they were VET graduates also were, in a broader sense, not in education, employment or training (NEETs), a group that includes both *short-* and *long-term* unemployed youngsters and /or those not registered as jobseekers. The needs of this social group relate to its integration to the new dynamic socio-economic structures with regards to two important parameters for the realisation of this transition; one with regards to the issue of early leaving education and the chances of NEETs being able to enter it again, and the other in relation to the process of integrating them in training and employment. Further to that, the prolonged recession Greece is going through since 2010 has had a tremendous effect on the reduction of job positions, on one hand, and on the skyrocketing of unemployment, especially in small age groups, on the other. Therefore, the programme's population needs were explored and incorporated on three basic perspectives: a) *employability and access to the labour market*, b) *physical and mental health*, and c) *social exclusion*.

The principle change the consortium aspired to attain was to establish and broaden the access of an extensive amount of VET graduates to the labour market and, moreover, to make them more knowledgeable, self-confident, self-realised and empowered. In this way they are expected to be more energetic throughout their personal and social life, as well as in their professional life. Yet, this objective should not "end" with the establishment of the programme but should be an inseparable trait throughout their life course.

## 4. Sources of evidence

The PUA Innosi team conducted a summative evaluation of the programme given that it had been established at the time it was assessed for the purposes of the InnoSI project.

First, a secondary analysis of existing data and information was made. This included: the call for proposals and its amendment; the technical fiche that was prepared and submitted by the coordinator and included the principles /objectives of the programme, its field of interest and regions of intervention, and the type /description of activities undertaken; the brief report on the methodology of the external evaluation; implementation and management guide; vocational counselling guide; education material; posts and announcements on the web portal “diaSINDESI” that was built for the publicity, administration and implementation programme’s purposes; the external evaluation report; the internal vocational counselling evaluation report.

Secondary analysis was paralleled /supplemented with a series of interviews that the PUA Innosi team conducted with: a) stakeholders’ members, b) members of project team (from both the programme coordinator and the participating social partners), c) educators, d) counselors, and e) beneficiaries. All interviews were digitally recorded for our analysis. Given that the programme was exclusively implemented in Greece’s convergence regions most interviews were conducted via Skype.

## 5. Main findings

Taking into account that the programme was actually implemented on a pilot-scale basis, as most of the stakeholders' staff and members of project teams asserted when interviewed, it could be argued that it was altogether well and competently implemented. It combined innovative elements and activities in terms of lifelong and adult learning processes, of introducing and applying vocational /career counselling to an extensive number of recipients, of establishing practices and mechanisms such as the quality control in the enterprises, and of actively enabling a complex system and variety of specialties (on the VET graduates' part) to become acquainted with the demands and conditions of the labour market. Based on numerous sources of evidence (see Section 4) main findings include the following:

- Via the provision of vocational counselling sessions and professional experience the programme empowered young people by creating favourable conditions for them to develop their skills and, also, to work and participate actively in society, which is an essential factor for sound and sustainable economic and social development. Being the first time most of the beneficiaries had ever worked in an enterprise this was something that had multiple effects:
  - Internship time actually took the form of a “simulation exercise”;
  - Familiarisation with the demands and the conditions of the labour market;
  - Socialising, meeting new people and developing inter-personal networks;
  - Feeling of being able to correspond to the needs and demands of the labour market;
  - Feeling of social inclusion and usefulness.
  
- The participating enterprises were given the opportunity to employ, as interns and not as regular employees, a large number of graduates, to extend their workforce and to see fresh, new emergent ideas articulated and occasionally applied. Apart from that they were able to further inform themselves on issues like employee's rights, legal support and social security. It was quite important for them to realise that they need to start behaving in a socially responsible manner by protecting human rights and actively complying with the spirit of the law, ethical standards and national policy norms, and that this should henceforth be done in practice. Sustainability in a volatile and competitive environment as is the one in Greece is ensured by the adoption of ethical attitudes and behaviors that promote the benefit of the society at large.
  
- The design and deployment of an innovative system for securing the internship's quality standards was successfully put in practice in initiatives like the one evaluated. Given that the acquisition of working experience was of uppermost concern among the consortium members actions for ongoing monitoring the “progress” of this part of the programme so as to detect potential problems or misconceptions and intervene properly were designed and applied.

## 6. Impact & Implications

Being implemented on an almost national level (see Section 3) the programme was quite a complex one; very limited time available (hardly one year) for the overall actions and subprojects; actions for communicating the programme, recruiting educators, counsellors and quality inspectors, and developing a wide network of enterprises for the beneficiaries' internship, had to be carried out under entirely insistent time frame and deadlines; the programme was organised, administered, managed and deployed not by a single organization (stakeholder) but by a consortium of social partners established for that purpose, which meant that a shared and accurate understanding of the pressing time schedule had to be established among all social partners; large number of beneficiaries in numerous regions of Greece. However, such complexities did not prevent the programme from being well-implemented. In general everything worked quite well and all parts involved met the requirements and the expectations really sufficiently.

In terms of assessing and reflecting on the impact of the programme it was evident that our findings and determinations could not actually be considered as *impact* in the strict sense of the term. As concluded mainly from the existing evaluations' findings as well as from the results of the qualitative research conducted, the programme did produce positive effects on various levels:

- The impact on the beneficiaries' social and psychological lives (motivation enhancement, increase of self-esteem, boost of self-confidence in relation to the beneficiaries' personal and social prospects) was decisive;
- The crucial role of vocational counselling in an individual's personal and professional competencies was particularly emphasized;
- There were several cases wherein the beneficiaries came to realise that the specialty acquired in the vocational school was in fact not to their liking and that they would have much preferred to follow utterly different career pathways;
- The participating enterprises had the opportunity to work and collaborate with young graduates who in quite a few cases brought new ideas in the work place.

However, the absence of a follow-up examination of the impact is preventive in that it does not allow us to have a clear picture of the present situation of the beneficiaries and the status of the enterprises affected, or not, through the programme. For instance, it would be really advantageous to have some measurable information on, e.g. how many of the overall participating beneficiaries actually remained as permanent employees in the enterprise they were placed as interns or, in other words, how many working positions were created after the establishment of the programme and for how long did they remain active.

Also, a qualitative survey on the current conditions of the beneficiaries' social, economic and professional status would be revealing of the programme's impact after its establishment. To this direction, during the interviews with the stakeholders' staff a major development came about. Specifically, a member of INE/GSEE's project team informed us that a follow-up intervention is intended to be implemented in the near future; yet, no specific or further information is available at the moment. Provided that this will include quantitative as well as qualitative indicators a more precise picture on the programme's impact will be portrayed. This also applies to the economic evaluation procedure, which could not be conducted due to lack of sufficient data.

## 7. Further information

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For further information on InnoSI: Innovation in Social Investment: approaches to social investment from the scientific perspective, visit our website at <http://innosi.eu/>.

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