

The Transitions to VET for Young Refugees - Governance Structures and Local Cooperation

Bonn, September 10, 2018

Prof. Dr. Sybille Stöbe-Blossey

- Results of a research project concerning young refugees as a target group for preventive social policy (September 2016 until August 2018)
- Founded by:

Ministerium für Innovation,
Wissenschaft und Forschung
des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen



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- Key issue: Vocational orientation / career guidance for young refugees is a question of cooperation between different actors at the local level
- School system: federal state matter → example of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW)
- Interviews with teachers from vocational schools, labor market agencies, youth welfare, coordination units

- Young immigrants (16 to 18 years old) are required to attend school. They are initially supported in a one-year Introductory Class (“Internationale Förderklasse”, IFK) at a vocational school (“Berufskolleg”)
- Aims of the IFK: language acquisition, basic school leaving certificate, vocational orientation; career guidance / preparation of the transition to further training / education
- General program without differentiation according to language ability, literacy, educational level, vocational interests (but schools try to form different classes or exchange pupils)
- If necessary, the IFK can be repeated once (which in practice is more the rule than the exception)
- Young refugees over 18 years of age (regardless of their educational level) are neither obliged nor entitled to attend school (only if integrated in programs of labor market policy).

- After the IFK, young refugees can attend other vocational school courses (all of which, in NRW, are located at the “Berufskolleg”)
 - Preparation for VET (especially for young people without a school leaving certificate)
 - School-based courses as parts of dual VET
 - Full-time school-based VET
 - Courses for obtaining a school leaving certificate (ranging from a basic to an advanced school-leaving certificate), combined with vocational orientation or full-time school-based VET
- *"That's the charm of the vocational school that you can really start a career here and get all your school-leaving qualifications."*
- **But:** Local differences in educational opportunities; often no recognition of basic or intermediate school qualifications from the country of origin; long way to obtain advanced certificates

- Local Employment Agency: counselling and placement services for everybody on a voluntary basis (also for asylum seekers)
- Local Job Centre: case management for long-term unemployed; priority of job placement; compulsory participation
- Both agencies offer a wide range of qualification programs (central programs with local differences concerning the implementation)
- The Job Centre is responsible for recognized asylum seekers → transition of competences
- Labor market programs and company based VET: different access possibilities depending on residence status and perspective of stay → difficulties for career guidance at schools

- Local Youth Welfare Office (Municipality): responsible for the care of unaccompanied minors and the support of all young people (youth social work, individual assistance, vocational orientation especially for disadvantaged youngsters)
 - Important role of non-profit organizations (e.g. church, workers' welfare)
 - Different structures and allocation of tasks at the local level
- **School, Labor Market Policy, Youth Welfare:**
- Three different systems, different governance structures, professionals with different backgrounds, different logic of action
 - Lack of knowledge about each other (*"I do not know what youth welfare is doing."*)
 - Conflicts / lack of trust (*"They always send the young people into their own programs!"*)

- NRW: different networking programs and coordination units at the local level, founded by the state of NRW, for example Regional Education Offices and Municipal Integration Centre
- *"So we very often translate the system of one and explain it to the other. In other words, an employment agency [...] we first explain how schools work and how they are organized. Because they don't usually know that. We explain to the school, however, why an agency insists on the fact that the residence status plays a role. [...] And then, of course, you have a lot of incomprehension and a lot: 'But they should work differently!' But you will notice that after some time it becomes clear that everyone is working within his system and that you have to combine the efforts."*
- Work of networking institutions → transfer of knowledge → building of trust → basis for cooperation

- Case-by-case cooperation (*"I called X."*)
- Frequently good experiences on the local level:
 - Job Centres: *"School-leaving certificates are important for sustainable integration [instead of immediate job placement] - we always support this!"* ; *"It is helpful for us to cooperate with youth welfare associations."*
 - Youth welfare: *"So far we have always reached an agreement with the Employment Agency and the Job Centre, so I don't know any of our refugees who said that I got into something that I some-how didn't want to get into."* ; *"Teachers call us if there is a problem."*
 - Schools: *"It is good that the employment agency comes to school and advises the young people."*; *"Without social work at school we wouldn't be able to support the young refugees."*

- Preparation and documentation of individual transitions with the support of “*education supporters*” working at the schools, coordinated by the Job Centre (families are informed about the procedure by the municipal integration management and asked to sign an agreement, which facilitates the exchange of information between the actors involved)
- Integration of school social workers into further support for young refugees (“*The social workers will continue to accompany young people six months after they have left vocational school, regardless of their status.*”)
- “*Transition conferences*” at vocational schools (teachers, Youth Welfare Office, Employment Agency, Job Centre): Discussion of individual opportunities after the IFK

- Career guidance towards dual VET depends on the local labor market:
 - *“In our region, there is a lack of vacancies, and our refugees are not the first to be taken by the companies – so I rather tell them to choose a course at the vocational school.”* (City in the Ruhr Area with a high level of unemployment)
 - *“In our region, there is a lack of young people interested in dual vet. So refugees start their dual VET too early. Many will fail because of language.”* (Rural area with declining population)
- Successful transitions into dual VET are fostered by networks (*“Our school has good personal contacts.”*; *“The Chamber of Commerce and Industry has pilots to support us.”*)

- Most young refugees (and their families) are not familiar with the system:
 - *“They want to become a doctor or a lawyer!”*
 - *“They do not see why they should follow a three-years-training just for hairdressing!”*
 - *“Three years are too long for them!”*
 - *“The theoretical parts are too difficult.”*
 - *“They fail at school because of lacks of technical language.”*
- Young refugees would need shorter training units with different levels in order to start, to get a basic qualification and to be able continue later.
- This would require changes within the VET system that cannot be realized on the local level – and that are difficult to be accepted politically.

Thank you for your Attention!

Prof. Dr. Sybille Stöbe-Blossey
Forschungsabteilung Bildung und Erziehung im Strukturwandel (BEST)
Universität Duisburg-Essen, Institut Arbeit und Qualifikation,
Gebäude LE, 47048 Duisburg
Fon: +49-203-379-1805
sybille.stoebe-blossey@uni-due.de