



**LINKING THE AppInterN PROJECT METHODOLOGY TO OTHER
EU INITIATIVES FOR APPRENTICESHIP**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past years, Apprenticeship has been widely recognized as a relevant method for addressing youth unemployment both at European and international level. Apprenticeship and internationalization play a fundamental role in guaranteeing the development of Vocational Education and Training, leading to increased opportunities for achieving new qualifications and renewing VET systems both at national and international level.

Supporting the diffusion of international good practices at national level, incorporating them into national VET systems is a common objective. Having a clear and well anchored strategy on internationalisation will support and give direction to international activities, and ultimately have an impact on and added value for national organisations, their students, employees, surrounding region and the world of work, at large.

A significant number of research studies have clearly demonstrated that the alternation between school-based learning and work-based learning provides apprentices/trainees with enhanced knowledge, competences and skills, appropriately adapted to the needs of the labour market, thus facilitating their smooth transition to the labour market.

For this reason, there have been several important initiatives at EU level, aimed at further improving the quality of Apprenticeship schemes in various national contexts, reinforcing the co-operation between all Apprenticeship stakeholders, and, mainly, encouraging enterprises and employers to be more actively involved in the design and implementation of Apprenticeship schemes.

This research document, realized with the support of all AppInterN partner organizations, aims at studying and presenting some of the most interesting existing initiatives for Apprenticeship in the EU – such as the European Alliance for Apprenticeships, the European Network of Apprentices – highlighting their main features and guiding principles and identifying common points/similarities with the AppInterN project methodology. The study will also suggest ways of linking the AppInterN project methodology to the aforementioned initiatives and/or utilizing the principles and conclusions of these initiatives within the framework of the AppInterN project. For instance, the European Alliance for Apprenticeship, which aims at connecting enterprises, apprentices and Apprenticeship/VET schools at EU level, may offer a sound justification for the necessity and importance of implementing such projects as the Apprenticeship Inter-Network.

This transnational research study was undertaken as a state of the art 'needs analysis'. It is not just 'research' for its own sake – it was specifically aimed at informing the needs of the AppInterN project target group. Keeping in mind that the quality of guidance depends on the training and the competences of guidance professionals/counsellors, the focus was placed on the five main characters/roles involved in work-based learning/Apprenticeship schemes:

- (1) Employers
- (2) Business Ambassadors
- (3) Apprentices/VET Students and Apprenticeship/VET School Graduates
- (4) Social partners, employer/sectoral associations, Chambers
- (5) Apprenticeship/VET schools and other VET-related Institutions.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The whole research activity is divided into two areas, further detailed in the sections below:

- 1) A desk research, carried out by VET partners, focused mainly on the presentation of the most interesting European initiatives related to Apprenticeship, aimed at providing an overview of Apprenticeship's state of play at international level, providing general information on recent trends and main subjects involved.
- 2) A presentation of Apprenticeship regulatory frameworks in the countries involved, including a presentation of a number of interesting experiments.
- 3) A final conclusive review aimed at providing information on how the AppInterN proposal may provide benefit to involved stakeholders both at national and EU level.

The coordination of the research framework was executed by UNITELMA, responsible for coordinating the creation of the research framework, setting up the project methodology that will lead to the realization of the materials. UNITELMA was assisted by the following partner organizations in identifying relevant information related to the Apprenticeship schemes in their respective countries: PIMEC (ES); DYPA (EL); EVTA (EU).

3. THE EUROPEAN APPRENTICESHIP POLICY FRAMEWORK

Currently, there is undeniable need for more workers with practical skills and qualifications. Countries, enterprises and individuals all perceive skills development as a strategic measure and, consequently, seek to step up investments in skills. Since 2010, to reduce the high levels of unemployment among youth, many countries have looked into the experience of European partners, such as Germany, Netherlands and Austria, where a positive use of Apprenticeship (in particular the Dual System) has limited the growth of youth unemployment, while in other countries – such as the ones represented in the AppInterN consortium – there have been stronger issues.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines Apprenticeship as a form of “systematic long-term training for a recognised occupation that takes place substantially within an undertaking or under an independent craftsman and should be governed by a written contract ... and be subject to established standards”. (ILO, 1962)

It is commonly believed that Apprenticeship and other forms of work-based learning have particular advantages to offer. Supporting young individuals and adults in obtaining both specific and generic competences, Apprenticeship makes the transition from education to work smoother, also creating a stronger alignment between the needs of different stakeholders such as employers, employees, social partners, governments, VET providers and institutes.

The European Union recognises the great benefits of Apprenticeships for learners, since they obtain get valuable work experience, develop skills and acquire good contacts in the industry or sector that can help jump start a career. For this reason, it has taken multiple steps in promoting Apprenticeships and, indeed, a consistent series of initiatives has been implemented over the past years at EU level for supporting the development of relevant skills.

In the following pages, some of the most interesting initiatives/experiments, both at national and EU level, are presented, with the objective of highlighting the main principles and key features of such initiatives and identify common points/similarities with the AppInterN project methodology. Thus, the following key points will be illustrated:

- key drivers of change arising from the European Alliance for Apprenticeship (2013), ET2020, etc.;
- national economic development strategies and inclusive VET/ ALMPs;
- how these policies are actually, or potentially, shaping Apprenticeship.

European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA)

Reference: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1147>



Key features

- Reforming European Apprenticeship systems thanks to a stronger dialogue between all stakeholders
- Promoting the benefits of Apprenticeship
- Supporting a smarter use of funding and resources

Description

The European Alliance for Apprenticeships was launched in 2013, with the aim of facilitating transition from learning to work through work-based learning and notably Apprenticeships and other dual education models. To do so, the Commission pledged to develop new mechanisms and tools for examining challenges and the way forward for positive developments within the sector of Apprenticeships, by enhancing the quality, supply and the overall image of Apprenticeships. The Alliance unites governments and key stakeholders with the purpose of strengthening the quality, supply and overall image of Apprenticeships across Europe, while also promoting the mobility of apprentices.¹

EAfA mobilises local and regional authorities and supports the representation of apprentices in the Member States through pledges from stakeholders, in order to promote EU Vocational Education and Training programmes and initiatives. The most

¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1147&langId=en>

relevant actors are thus mobilized: governments, social partners, businesses, chambers, regions, youth organisations, VET providers and think tanks.

The EAFA is part of the Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020) programme, which provided the strategic framework for European co-operation in the field of education and vocational training until 2020.

EAFA welcomes pledges by stakeholders across Europe willing to contribute to strengthening the supply, quality and/or attractiveness of Apprenticeships as well as mobility of apprentices.

The three main fields of action of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships are:

- *reform of Apprenticeship systems;*
- *promoting the benefits of Apprenticeships;*
- *smart use of funding and resources.*

The Alliance aims at combating youth unemployment by improving the quality of Vocational Education and Training as well as the number of Apprenticeship placements throughout the EU, and by bringing about a change of attitude regarding Apprenticeships. In particular, the most successful Vocational Education and Training systems in the EU are identified and suitable solutions for each Member State are subsequently implemented.

The renewed EAFA published its Action Plan and planned activities for 2020/2021 addressing the following six priorities:

- 1) Encouraging commitment among Member States and companies to effective Apprenticeships, thanks to the development of national Apprenticeship coalitions;
- 2) Supporting Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in providing a stable supply of quality and effective Apprenticeships;
- 3) Turning regional and local authorities into catalysts for Apprenticeships;
- 4) Strengthening social dialogue by keeping in contact with social partners;
- 5) Engaging European sectoral social dialogue committees on Apprenticeship, in order to obtain agreement on joint sectoral pledges;

6) Supporting the representation of apprentices in Member States by relaunching the European Apprentices Network (EAN).

Apprenticeship Support Services

Reference:

<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1147&intPageId=5235&langId=en>



Key features

- Supporting knowledge sharing through a catalogue of tools, knowledge and information about Apprenticeship
- Improving the quality and efficiency of Apprenticeships through the establishment of excellency models, tools for self-assessment and peer support
- Networking activities (online networking, stakeholder events)

Description

EaFA members can benefit from Apprenticeship Support Services, which provide online resources and networking opportunities that enable like-minded individuals to connect, learn and act. Support Services are meant to be “Demand-driven” and relevant to the needs of stakeholders; deployed gradually and supported by the engagement and commitment of service users.

The services have 6 main purposes:

- 1) Improving the quality and effectiveness of Apprenticeships across the EU
- 2) Providing tailored support to stakeholders involved in delivering Apprenticeships
- 3) Further strengthening the European Apprenticeships community

- 4) Supporting Member States in reforming Apprenticeship schemes and implementing the European framework for quality and effective Apprenticeships (EFQEA)
- 5) Addressing common challenges related to the promotion and implementation of Apprenticeships
- 6) Increasing the base of knowledge on Apprenticeships

European Apprentices Network (EAN):

Reference: <https://apprenticesnetwork.eu/>



Key features

- Guaranteeing representativeness to young apprentices
- Fostering a quality culture in Apprenticeship

Description

The European Apprentices Network (EAN) is a network of apprentices at European level, established in 2017 to make sure that the voice of young apprentices is heard in discussions related to Vocational Education and Training, in particular Apprenticeships. EAN brings together apprentices and young people working for organisations representing the interests of apprentices. The members of the EAN come from twelve European countries (eleven EU Member States and one EU candidate country). The EAN meets in the framework of the meetings of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA).

The EAN aims to provide a space for apprentices – a group that, historically, has always been underrepresented –, to have their voice heard and provide their contribution to improve Apprenticeship systems in Europe. As a first step, the EAN has identified seven key priorities for the years to come and encourages all stakeholders, particularly policymakers at all levels, to shape Apprenticeship programmes on the basis of these priorities. From the need to ensure a much stronger focus on quality of work-based learning, as well as on the right to decent working conditions to be recognised in written contracts, to the need to advocate for more inclusive Apprenticeships, including by

demanding more accessible information and equal access to educational and training opportunities for all, the EAN calls for Apprenticeships to be considered more than a quick fix to youth unemployment, but rather learning opportunities to be tailored to the needs and rights of apprentices themselves.

As reported on the EAN website, the seven key priorities of the European Apprentices Network are:

1. Quality education and quality assurance
2. Rights, responsibilities and protection
3. Legally binding agreements
4. Representation
5. Promoting Apprenticeships
6. Anti-discrimination
7. Accessible information

European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships:

Reference: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32018H0502%2801%29>

Key features

- Measuring and monitoring quality and effectiveness of Apprenticeships
- Promoting the embedment of a quality criterion in national Apprenticeship schemes

Description

The recommendation encourages the development of a highly skilled and qualified workforce which is responsive to the needs of the labour market. By applying common criteria for the quality and effectiveness of Apprenticeships, member states will be better able to develop and promote their national Apprenticeship schemes.

The recommendation foresees different criteria for learning and working conditions, including the following:

- a written agreement should be concluded to define the rights and obligations of the apprentice, the employer and, where appropriate, the Vocational Education and Training institution within a clear and consistent regulatory framework;
- there should be clear results leading to recognised qualifications;
- apprentices should be paid or otherwise compensated;
- apprentices should be entitled to social protection;
- career guidance, mentoring and learner support should be provided to apprentices both before and during the Apprenticeship in order to ensure a successful outcome;
- pedagogical support should be provided to teachers, trainers and mentors, especially in micro-, small and medium-sized companies.

The Reinforced Youth Guarantee:

Reference: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1079&langId=en>



Key features:

- Supporting the employability of youth
- Tackling youth unemployment

Description: the reinforced Youth Guarantee is a commitment by all Member States to ensure that all young people under the age of 30 receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, Apprenticeship and traineeship within four months of leaving education or becoming unemployed.

The original Youth Guarantee initiative created opportunities for young people and acted as a powerful driver for structural reforms and innovation. As a result, the majority of Public Employment Services (PES) have improved and expanded their services for young people.

The reinforced Youth Guarantee – [Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020](#) on A Bridge to Jobs: Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on Establishing a Youth Guarantee – does all this through tailored, individualised approaches; providing young people with the appropriate levels of guidance and helping them find crash courses or boot camps if upskilling proves to be necessary.

Such approaches take into account local labour market intelligence shaped by COVID-19 ramifications, acknowledging also the opportunities provided by the accelerating digital and green transitions.

Your first EURES job

Reference: <https://www.yourfirsteuresjob.eu/>



Key features

- Supporting transnational labour mobility
- Increasing the relevance of Apprenticeship training

Description

EURES (the European jobseeker mobility network) is a co-operation network between the European Commission and the Public Employment Services (PES) of the European Economic Area (EEA) Member States (the EU Member States plus Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein) and other partner organisations. Switzerland also takes part in EURES co-operation. The EURES network is responsible for exchanging information and enabling co-operation among its stakeholders in order to help make free movement of workers a reality. EURES promotes mobility and reduces barriers to workers by contributing to the development of a European labour market that is open and accessible for all, ensuring the exchange of vacancies and job applications and transparency on labour market information.

YFEJ is an initiative that helps young people aged between 18 and 35 to get signed up for an Apprenticeship in another EU country. “Your first EURES job is a Community initiative aimed at labour mobility with the aim of helping young people in search of work, Apprenticeship or traineeship and support businesses to recruit workers aged 18 to 35 years, citizens of one of the 28 countries of EU + Norway and Iceland.

EUTALENT

Reference: <https://www.eutalent.org/>



Key features

- Improving the quality of Apprenticeship
- Contributing to policy dialogue

Description

EUTalent was a project run by CSR Europe and its national partners, till the end of August 2018, which engaged SMEs in quality Apprenticeships. Implemented in 12 European countries (CZ, DE, FR, EL, IT, LV, ML, PL, RS, ES, TR), the project involved a variety of companies and stakeholders with the aim of supporting SMEs to: (i) increase the quantity of their apprentices; (ii) improve the quality of their Apprenticeships; (iii) build their brand image as talent breeders; and (iv) contribute to policy dialogue. The EU Talent has the potential to be beneficial for the AppInterN project in terms of acquiring more information about best practices at a local level or utilizing the produced assessment tool as part of the Apprenticeship Inter-Network online platform.

4. NATIONAL REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS FOR APPRENTICESHIP

GREECE

In Greece, Law No. 1346/1983 (Official Government Gazette No. 46/A/14.04.1983) established the Apprenticeship Vocational Education Schools of DYPA (formerly, Manpower Employment Organization / OAED), the Greek Public Employment Service. The Law enabled DYPA to be actively involved in the decision-making concerning the type and duration of Apprenticeships, qualifications of students, duration of schooling, teaching hours per specialty, remuneration, method of recruiting students and professional rights of graduates. Apprenticeship Vocational Schools are classified as secondary education, while their diplomas are equivalent to those of the Technical Vocational Schools (Law 1566/1985).

According to Law No. 2009/1992, Apprenticeship took the form of intensive semesters during the Second Cycle Studies in order to deepen theoretical learning and learning in workshops. Technical Vocational Schools were replaced by the Vocational Lyceum (EPAL) and Vocational Schools (EPAS) pursuant to Law No. 3475/2006. Law No. 4186/2013 regulated, inter alia, non-formal vocational training and established the 'Apprenticeship year' at EPAL and the Vocational Training Schools (SEK).² The 'Apprenticeship year' at EPAL was not implemented from 2013 to 2016. Pursuant to Law No. 4386/2016 formal vocational non-compulsory Secondary Education is provided mainly in Vocational Lyceums (EPAL), which offer two-cycle courses of study:

- The (pre-existing) upper secondary cycle course of study in EPAL which concerns all three grades of lyceum (Classes A, B, and C) and
- The Post-Secondary 'Apprenticeship year' grade which lasts for about 9 months and is optional for upper-secondary EPAL graduates (originally foreseen in Law No. 4186/2013).

According to the Strategic Plan for VET and Apprenticeship of 2016 for the needs of the large-scale implementation of Apprenticeship, but also under Law No. 4386/2016, the EPAS Apprenticeship scheme continued to be provided by the DYPA (formerly OAED) Apprenticeship Vocational Schools, until the school year 2020-2021. Pursuant to Law No. 4763/2020, the EPAS provide vocational education to high-school graduates aged 15-23³ years and implement the Dual VET system, which combines 2-year theoretical and

² Pursuant to Law No. 4386/2016 (Official Government Gazette No. 83/A/11.05.2016), the operation of non-formal level Schools of Vocational Training (SEK) was abolished. The specialties / fields of study offered by SEK were incorporated into the Vocational Training Institutes (IEK). Under the same law, IEK should offer one semester of internship or apprenticeship (in a total period of a 3-5 semester training period).

³ Recently (2022) extended to 29 years of age.

laboratory education with on-the-job training. EPAS graduates acquire level-3 diploma of the National Qualifications Framework.

ITALY

In Italy, work-based learning may be divided into three broad categories: Apprenticeship, separated into three levels (to be analysed further below); internship, divided into curricular and extra-curricular; the VET system, as introduced by the Legislative Decree No. 81/2015, also enabled by the in-company traineeship regulated by Law 28 March 2003, No. 53 and by the following Legislative Decree, 15 April 2005, No. 77.

Legislative Decree No. 81 of 15 July 2015, the so-called “Jobs Act”, represents the main regulatory reference within the Italian legal framework. It is an attempt to establish a balance between the various forms of WBL active in Italy and support a process of “reform of the programmes for Vocational and Educational Training (VET), with the purpose of strengthening the ties between enterprises and training institutes” (Marcone, 2017).

The Decree separates Apprenticeship into three substantial typologies, on the basis of objectives, involved subjects and normative profiles: Apprenticeship for professional qualification and certification, the diploma of secondary superior education and technical specialization (I level); professionalizing Apprenticeship (II level); Apprenticeship of high formation and research (III level). The element of novelty introduced by the Decree is represented by the definition of new borders between the various typologies: Apprenticeship is now also related to Secondary superior school titles and technical specialization, while Apprenticeships of third level comprehend exclusively University education and research, and the Apprenticeship for access to closed professions (Balduini et al, 2016).

The learning phases have to be defined accordingly with the professional demands of the hosting institution, on the basis of the competencies provided by the trainee. A similar scheme responds to the specific need of giving new centrality to learning during Apprenticeship; creating cooperative relations between school and enterprise; increasing the educational role of small and medium enterprises (Marcone, 2016).

SPAIN

Royal Decree No. 1529/2012, of November 8, regarding Apprenticeships contracts and laying out the foundations of the dual vocational training system, established a framework for the development of projects of dual vocational training. Dual vocational training as such did not exist until that year, and it has been since then progressively introduced through projects developed by the Autonomous Communities (regions). In Spain, the term used for “Apprenticeship” is “dual Vocational Education and Training” (Formación Profesional Dual). It is defined in legislation as “training actions and

initiatives, combining employment and training, that aim at workers' professional qualification in a regime that alternates work activity in a company and Vocational Education and Training delivered by the education system or the employment system", i.e. respectively the Ministry of Education (central or regional departments) or the Ministry of Employment (central or regional departments).

The 2012 Royal Decree regulates key aspects of Dual vocational training such as (not a complete list): the basic content of the training programme: curriculum, training activities, their length, evaluation and grading criteria. The minimum number of hours to be spent in a company. The minimum information that needs to be included in the agreement between the training centre and the company (training programme, number of participants, allowance, number of hours and distribution of training hours between company and training centre, etc.). This Royal Decree also regulates the 'Apprenticeship contract' which can be used in dual vocational training.

A different regulation (Order ESS/2518/2013) regulates aspects only related to the school-based learning period that is mandatory for the apprentice in order to obtain the qualification. Autonomous Communities further regulate dual vocational training in their territory. The regulations mentioned above apply to all dual vocational training (CEDEFOP, 2019).

5. GOOD PRACTICES

DYPA and the EPAS System

In the field of VET, the Greek Public Employment Service DYPA (formerly, OAED) runs 50 Apprenticeship Vocational Schools (EPAS) and 30 Vocational Training Institutes (IEK).

The Dual Apprenticeship system has been implemented at the EPAS since 1952 and is considered to be reliable by social partners, Chambers and other VET stakeholders. It is especially supported by social partners, who actively participate in DYPA's Management Board.

It is estimated that approximately 7,500-8,000 students are annually enrolled in the two-year Apprenticeship Programmes implemented by the DYPA EPAS. Students must be at least high-school graduates, aged 15-29. The candidate admission procedure takes into account the following criteria: high-school diploma grades and social criteria, such as low family income, orphans, members of large families etc.

Almost 2,750 companies, mostly micro and very small ones, as well as 250 public and private sector large entities offer Apprenticeships to EPAS students. Over the last few years, DYPA launched a new e-platform where employers can offer Apprenticeships.

Thus far, EPAS fields of study / specialties have been selected from a total of 40 approved specialties, as follows:

- Mechanical Sector: 9
- Electrical sector: 3
- Applied - Traditional Arts: 10
- IT: 2
- Building Works: 2
- Health - Welfare: 3
- Aesthetics: 2
- Agriculture - Food: 3
- Economy - Administration - Tourism: 3

Over the last years, the EPAS have focused on specialties of the tourism sector, the agri-food sector, and transport. In the agri-food sector a specialty for the production and processing of dairy products in the Kilkis nad Mytilini EPAS was launched in co-operation with the Greek Agricultural Organization. In addition, the EPAS Larissa team won the 1st prize in the contest "INNOVATHENS" organized by the British Council in 2018 on the

subject «Life Skills: Developing social entrepreneurs» and concerned the processing and packaging of aromatic plants and herbs in mountain Olympus.

In transport a pilot project was implemented in Athens and Thessaloniki (EPAS Rendi and 1st EPAS Thessaloniki) in co-operation with Greek Railway Organization and other VET stakeholders in the specialties of Car Technicians, Mechatronics, computer-aided Automotive System Technicians. On-the-job training took place at the Greek Railway Rolling Stock Maintenance Company, which participated in the project. DYPA also enhanced its co-operation with the association of clothing manufacturers in the 2nd Thessaloniki EPAS (specialty of fashion-clothing).

In parallel, with a view to improving the quality of Apprenticeships and obtaining concrete learning outcomes, in each specialty, DYPA has developed in-company training contents for 32 specialties that have been implemented since the school year 2017-18.

I. DYPA has operated 30 Career Offices at its EPAS since 2014, which aim to strengthen the connection between initial vocational education and labour market stakeholders. To this end, they organise publicity events at the EPAS in order to raise the attractiveness of VET and Apprenticeship among youngsters and persuade more companies to be involved in Apprenticeship schemes and offer Apprenticeships. Career Offices also cooperate closely with the employment counsellors of the local PES (KPA2), who offer counselling in job search techniques and entrepreneurship to the EPAS students and graduates. Career Offices also monitor the EPAS apprentices' on-the-job training and cooperate with employers to increase the number of Apprenticeships and improve the quality of WBL.

II. Moreover, an annual deliberation with social partners, chambers and all VET stakeholders takes place in order to identify labour market needs at local level. Based on the results of the report and taking into account the existing infrastructure of the EPAS, the specialties that will be provided over the following school year are redefined (among the 40 approved specialties, according to the Joint Ministerial Decisions (JMD) of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance.

III. Last but not least, the recent legal framework for VET and Apprenticeship at national level (Law No. 4763/2020) provides for the operation of the SSPAE (Board for the Connection with the Industry and the Labour Market) at regional level for the selection of sectors and specialties in VET schemes. In these committees both state VET providers (Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, DYPA), social partners and Chambers are represented. According to the new law, each committee proposes to the

Central Board for VET the selection of the new specialties / fields of study, the curricula and activities for all VET providers (EPAL, EPAS, IEK) at regional level.

JUSTE GROUP

Juste Group, a Spanish equity group with more than **95 years of experience** in research, development, and distribution of proprietary medicines and active pharmaceutical ingredients, developed a **paid scholarship program** that expands knowledge and equips students with the necessary professional skills, as part of their **Corporate Social Responsibility Programmes**.

A tailor-made plan has been designed, depending on the duration of the **scholarship**, so that the students collaborate in several departments performing different tasks, under the supervision and guidance of a tutor. This altruistic goal of integrating students into the world of work has been very enriching both for the company and the students. The AppInterN project could eventually incorporate such initiatives in the Apprenticeship Inter-Network online platform.

6. CONCLUSIONS: IMPACT POTENTIAL OF APPINTERN AT EUROPEAN LEVEL

As explained above, a significant number of efforts have been implemented over the course of the previous decade, both at national and transnational level, to create tighter links between Apprenticeship and the world of employment, making it more attractive for employers at various levels to offer Apprenticeships and jobs to VET students and graduates.

Relatively high youth unemployment and falling youth participation in education and training opportunities have been a persistent trend across a number of OECD countries since the years of global financial crisis. This trend has a strong regional dimension, with youth unemployment rates over 40% in Southern European countries such as Greece, Spain and Italy, the countries involved in the AppInterN project.

However, as CEDEFOP underlines, “under certain conditions, Apprenticeship may be resilient (more than one would expect), and crises could be an opportunity to reinforce them” (CEDEFOP, 2021).

The success of Apprenticeship strongly depends on the solidity of its implementation at local level. Local authorities and governments have a fundamental role in supporting the development of such programmes at community level, promoting the introduction of a wider vision for training and skills. Apprenticeship programmes can be used as an economic development tool to improve the skills of the workforce and labour market outcomes, leading efforts to reach out to youth and employers to raise awareness of the benefits of participation and completion in a training programme, which is well linked to a quality job” (OECD, 2017).

The AppInterN project is fully in line with what was foreseen by the renewed EAFA programme: it aims at turning Apprenticeship into an effective way to enhance employability; it has at its core the promotion of national Apprenticeship coalitions, thanks to the participation of all relevant actors and stakeholders, involving public authorities; it encourages SMEs to set up stable and supportive spaces for apprentices; it creates a pan-European strategy for strengthening social dialogue. These objectives are pursued thanks to a wide and multifaceted action that will be shaped along 5 specific axes:

1) Supporting positive information-sharing that will support SMEs in becoming better spaces for Apprenticeships

The mismatch between supply and demand for Apprenticeship places is one of the most relevant issues of today’s Apprenticeship: there are too many young people applying for some or not enough Apprenticeships – or not enough with the appropriate basic maths, communication and social skills – or there are not enough companies willing to take on

apprentices. Either way, both employers and young people still await a positive response to their needs.

Moreover, a lack of places may create a situation where training providers do not have enough apprentices to provide with on-the-job training. This only underlines the importance of anticipating industry skills needs, creating appropriate and attractive pathways for young people into Apprenticeship programmes and proactively matching services.

AppInterN will foster a positive information-sharing about the national and international labour markets' state-of-play, current skill requirements and occupational/sectoral developments (including such key issues as reskilling and upskilling).

2) Introducing a number of Business Ambassadors in charge of disseminating a positive understanding of how to facilitate connections between employers, training providers and other stakeholders

As clarified by the OECD, to increase overall participation in Apprenticeship schemes, policymakers need to strengthen the involvement of employers in Vocational Education and Training systems. Engaging employers in the Apprenticeship system can also improve the alignment between the supply and demand of skills. In particular, employers can ensure that curricula and competences remain up to date and in line with the needs of the labour market, which can in turn improve the value and employment prospects associated with Apprenticeship programmes (Steedman, 2005). Improving the match between education and work is particularly important at the local level, where globalisation and technological changes create a polarised labour market of high and low paid jobs (OECD, 2017).

A particularly innovative aspect of the AppInterN project consists in the establishment of a new intermediary role: that of the “Business Ambassadors”, namely established professionals, employers or other business staff members who will inform/advise students and graduates on current labour market needs and trends, occupational “problem-solving”, business development prospects, etc. The Business Ambassadors will support the AppInterN Career Hubs as volunteers, thus demonstrating both their personal and their businesses' active interest in corporate social responsibility. Just as importantly, the project will greatly benefit disadvantaged groups of students and graduates, such as disabled young people and young people living in remote geographical areas etc., who currently have limited access to labour-market information and the labour

market itself. The AppInterN project can thus be said to constitute a genuinely inclusive form of networking and labour market integration.

3) Fostering the flexibility in Apprenticeship design, thanks to a stronger dialogue between sending and hosting institutions

It is important to point out how the correct implementation of WBL instruments at their full potential represents in the eyes of all stakeholders a fundamental passage to pursue stronger economic stability and boost economic growth, both at the micro- and macro-level. In fact, in all the countries considered in this research study, youth unemployment still represents a substantial problem, while skills mismatch strongly affects the labour market.

4) Improving the positive perception of Apprenticeship and VET at all levels

Apprenticeship programmes can help to improve the general level of skills in the local economy and can boost overall economic growth and productivity (Cappellari et al., 2012). Investing in Apprenticeship has ample benefits for the businesses, including increased skills development for employees as a result of interaction with training organisations, increased entrepreneurship and increased exposure to new technologies in the workplace.

5) Developing a Network-culture in Apprenticeship and VET

AppInterN is focused on the creation of an online platform titled "Apprenticeship Inter-Network" (AppInterN), which hosts three national Career Hubs (Greek, Italian, and Spanish). Each Career Hub (CH) facilitates the Apprenticeship/VET schools, students and graduates' search for Apprenticeships, internships or jobs through relevant databases, enhances their competences and skills by offering career guidance and organizing or announcing special events (seminars, information events, study visits, presentations, job fairs, etc.), supports their contact and collaboration with employers and other labour market stakeholders. Within the context of the project, VET-related institutions and associations, social partner institutes, Municipalities, and Chambers can contribute to the efficiency of Career Hubs by inviting local enterprises, employers and employer associations to join the CH databases in order to be directly connected to apprentices, graduates and future employees.

Ensuring close contact and collaboration between students, graduates and professionals in the selected occupational specialties, the three national Career Hubs are expected to enhance the efficiency of Apprenticeship and VET as learning pathways for securing and enhancing youth employment. They will establish business networks

effectively adjusted to the needs of new, future, and current professionals, which will not only facilitate the integration of students and graduates into the labour market (through Apprenticeships and job placements), but will also contribute to upgrading their skills and competences, and supporting their overall career.

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