POLICY FORUM

WHAT ROLE FOR COMMUNITY LIFELONG LEARNING CENTRES?

The potential of one-stop shops for preventing youth at risk from disconnecting

29 May 2019
Brussels

CONCLUSIONS

#earlyleaving
#VETtoolkit

www.cedefop.europa.eu

On 29 May 2019, Cedefop and the Lifelong Learning Platform (LLLP) co-organised the Policy Forum 'What role for community lifelong learning centres? The potential of on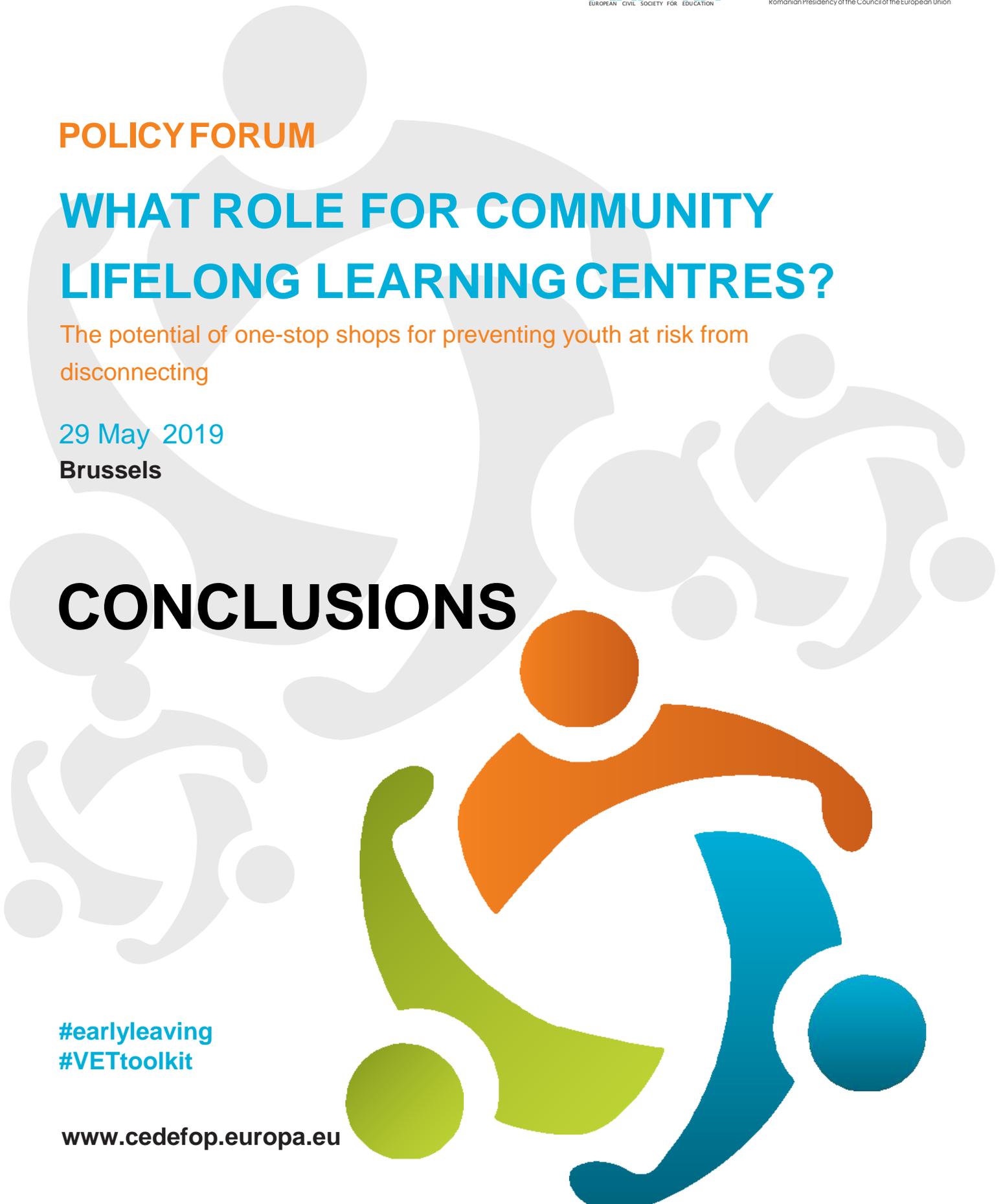e-stop shops for preventing youth at risk from disconnecting'. The event was hosted by the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in Brussels. It gathered above 90 participants from EU-level stakeholder organisations, representatives of permanent representations of MS to the EU, the European Commission, national policy makers, social partners and practitioners.

Participants explored the potential for community lifelong learning centres to serve as one-stop shops for preventing youth at risk from disconnecting. The agenda, concept paper and other background documents can be found in the [event website](#).

Key messages

1. The **new version of Cedefop's VET toolkit for tackling early leaving** launched in this event can assist different stakeholders: it is evidence-based, richer in information, user-friendly for non-experts, easy to navigate, flexible and enables policy monitoring and evaluation. From its first launch back in May 2017 to date, the toolkit counts with nearly 30 000 users having generated over 86 300 page views. Participants pointed the importance for translating the toolkit to all European languages to further increase its accessibility and relevance to national, regional and local stakeholders. The online community of practice "ambassadors" is a successful initiative to ensure its wide dissemination and continuous tailored-made development. Ambassadors who participated in this event shared their positive experience with the toolkit, explaining how this has supported national and regional developments and policies in their countries. They praised Cedefop's efforts to involve policy makers and VET providers across Europe to its development. This approach has ensured its high relevance to the users and user-friendliness.

2. **The importance of developing community lifelong learning centres (CLLCs) across Europe to tackle early leaving from education and training and support youth at risk**. CLLCs are a welcoming, non-threatening education environment centred around the learner's needs, typically focused on non-formal education. These to be effective should be located in the heart of the community and have flexible and extended opening hours to be widely accessible; they should collect and analyse the services the community wants and needs; and integrate **multidisciplinary teams** and services at the local level. CLLCs allows for a more efficient engagement with marginalized groups minimizing the current fragmentation of services provided by different agencies, professionals, and education and training providers.

3. The need to create an assertive outreach approach that is able to **attract the wider community to the CLLCs** where they can engage with others and also receive access to further specialized services and support.

4. The resurrection of **VET as a valid, first-choice pathway** (the excellence dimension of VET), with an emphasis on providing quality education is key to prevent and counteract early leaving. **To overcome the division between VET and general education** more work-place learning in general education is needed and elimination of the hierarchy between the two pathways. Quality apprenticeships may help smooth the transition between education and work.

5. **The importance of trans-sectoral cooperation** (e.g. between different ministries – education, culture, defence, employment and interior affairs, agencies, NGOs and

ECEC providers), **capacity building at the local level in impoverished areas**, and the need to ensure **quality transitions** (e.g. from education to work) **to avoid educational dead ends** and **decrease early leaving from education and training**. Early intervention to identify learners at risk and reach timely early leavers; highly qualified teachers; strong cooperation between schools and municipalities; as well as, the inclusion of students in curriculum design and development are some of the key ingredients to a successful strategy to tackle early leaving from education and training.

6. 30% of NEETs are short-term unemployed and that improving basic skills, decreasing early leaving, and providing apprenticeships could help remedy this problem. However, **apprenticeships should be fair and of high quality** to deliver on the promises.

7. The cost of non-education in the long-term is very high. Despite achieving the 2020 target of reducing the early leaving to below 10%, the problem still exists because the remaining 10% are the hardest to eliminate. Moreover, still one in two young people does not have a very good chance in life. **Tackling early leaving will remain a strategic priority in the post-2020 agenda**.

8. Cedefop and LLLP will continue work in this field. The **new Cedefop online resources on 'VET for social inclusion and labour market integration'** currently under development will offer to countries additional support in tackling early leaving, raising youth employment and implementing upskilling pathways. LLLP briefing paper on CLLCs will be revised and a collection of good practices will be brought to the attention of policy makers to help new initiatives across Europe.

Welcome from Cedefop and LLLP

Antonio Ranieri, Head of department for learning and employability at Cedefop, opened the event by praising the fruitful cooperation between Cedefop and LLLP and the excellent cooperation with the Romanian permanent representation hosting the event. He observed that the political focus in early leaving from education and training up to now has been on young people aged 18 to 24 who have not completed upper secondary education. As progress has been made on helping those young people gain qualifications, now attention has turned to lifelong learning as an approach that can help tackle the problem long-before and long-after it arises. He emphasised the importance of a multidisciplinary and whole-community approach to tackling early leaving from education and training and how well-placed community lifelong learning centres are to help tackle early leaving from education and training not just by providing services to young people at risk of leaving, but also by providing learning opportunities to people of all ages (e.g. parents of school-aged children, low-skilled adults).

Gina Ebner, President of Lifelong Learning Platform, underlined that from its very founding LLLP has recognized the need to work across sectors (e.g. education, community services, health care provision) at the local community level and in cooperation with different levels of government. She described the multitude of functions that community learning centres already have – from providing cultural offerings to helping upgrade skills to integrating migrants in the community – and called for creating more such centres and scaling up the work they do.

Augustin Mihalache, Education Attaché at the Permanent Representation of Romania to the European Union and Chair of the Education Committee during the Romanian Presidency of the Council, highlighted the political importance of education to the Romanian Presidency – from inclusive, high-quality early childhood education and care to the creation of the European Education Area. He emphasised the importance of placing early leaving from education and training in the context of structural changes that have led to the NEETs phenomenon and highlighted the need for adult learning and the continuous update of skills to help prepare for

career transitions. He thanked Cedefop for the successful collaboration and holistic partnership with the Romanian Presidency in various projects.

Moving youth at risk from a trampoline to a safety net

The policy forum began with the launch of the new enriched edition of Cedefop's online toolkit supporting a comprehensive strategy to tackle early leaving from education and training ([1]). **Irene Psifidou**, Cedefop expert who coordinates the agency's related research project and is in charge of the toolkit's development presented the background and context of the toolkit's creation. The toolkit is the outcome of extensive research work that Cedefop has undertaken over the last years and is inspired by successful VET practices aiming to prevent early leaving and reengage learners who have left the education and training systems.

Irene Psifidou, **Ioannis Katsikis** and **Lidia Salvatore,** Cedefop experts, as well as **Patricia Vale** and **Ralitsa Donkova** from ICF presented in an interactive approach how the toolkit can be used by regional and national policy makers as well as teachers, trainers and administrators in VET-providing institutions.

The toolkit contains resources such as best practices, publications, statistics, tools and quick wins to help policy makers and practitioners identify and monitor learners at risk of early leaving, intervene to keep them in or bring them back to education and training, and evaluate the existing measures in their country, region or institution. Newly developed Cedefop tools such as the evaluation plans and reflection tools are designed for government officers at national, regional or local level in charge of policies that tackle early leaving from VET, as well as for VET school heads and other staff responsible for coordinating actions to prevent early leaving in schools or companies providing work-based learning. These instruments promote reflection on the national, regional or local strategy to tackle early leaving from VET, and can be a starting point for institutional change. The reflection tool for VET providers proposes concrete steps to understand the current patterns of early leaving in a given VET provider (VET school or company providing work-based learning), analyse the actions to tackle this phenomenon, and develop an action plan to improve the institutional approach.

The toolkit also contains the first online community of practice developed by Cedefop 'ambassadors', currently from 18 countries actively contributing to online discussions, submitting new best practices and serving as a resource network for experts, policy makers and practitioners interested in the potential of VET to tackle early leaving. The composition of the community is progressively growing to cover all European and candidate countries.

Toolkit ambassadors from Germany, **Sabine Beck,** and Spain, **Francesca Salvà Mut** also presented their positive experiences with the toolkit explaining how this has supported national and regional developments and policies in their countries. It is impressive, as they said, how the toolkit and in particular the reflection tool for policy makers has facilitated discussion and reflection among different stakeholders, with different views and interests, towards a common goal: the development of a comprehensive strategy to tackle early leaving from VET. Ambassadors praised Cedefop's efforts to involve policy makers and VET providers across Europe to the toolkit's development. This approach has ensured its high relevance to the users and user-friendliness.

Irene Psifidou closed the session by inviting participants to join Cedefop in improving and enriching further the toolkit with their feedback and input. Participants may upload their good practice, apply to become an ambassador or send their feedback to Cedefop.

([1]) www.cedefop.europa.eu/TEL-toolkit

Multidisciplinary teams as agents of change

Brikena Xhomaqi (Director of the Lifelong Learning Platform) interviewed **Paul Downes** (Associate Professor of Education and Director of the Educational Disadvantage Centre, Institute of Education, Dublin City University) and **Shanti George** (Learning for Well-being Foundation, *LLLP Co-Chair of Working group on wider benefits of learning*) about the key messages from the recent LLLP briefing paper "[Implementing a holistic approach to lifelong learning – Community lifelong learning centres as a gateway to multidisciplinary support teams](#)."

Paul Downes (*Associate Professor of Education, Director, Educational Disadvantage Centre, Institute of Education, Dublin City University, Ireland)* spoke of the need to combine two well-established services (multidisciplinary teams and community lifelong learning centres) into a one-stop-shop and the concept of gateway to services common in healthcare provision. He highlighted the need for a more flexible, imaginative engagement with marginalized groups, to move away from a blame mentality and towards an inclusive approach, and to minimize the current fragmentation of services provided by different agencies, professionals, and education and training providers. The ultimate goal is to create an assertive outreach approach that is able to attract the wider community to the CLLCs where they can engage with others and also receive access to further specialized services and support.

He described CLLCs as spaces that can serve this purpose well because they are non-judgemental, social spaces of belonging, where people can just drop in to engage with others without any fear of failure or pressure to succeed. Such centres should be located on neutral territory that is easily accessible and the community already visits (e.g. shopping centres).

Paul Downes discussed the ways in which VET is already well-positioned in the strategic thinking on the topic

Shanti George recommended using the Learning for Well-being's holistic and systemic approach that encompasses the diverse realities of everyone in a community. She suggested working through nested systems that draw together people at the centre and the margins of any community. Tensions between the learner-centred and outcome-centred approaches could, she argued, be addressed as creative tensions. Shanti George called for services to maintain continuity despite policy changes and new approaches, listening to feedback from the community.

Through an interactive format which reserved two chairs on stage for audience members willing to participate in the discussion, the panel integrated the spontaneous contributions of participants in the forum. Some of the shared best practices emphasized the importance of CLLCs to:

- Engage in street work to find out what type of services the community wants and needs
- 'Be open': have flexible and extended opening hours (e.g. late in the evenings, on weekends)
- Be located in the heart of the community
- Recruit inspirational role models (e.g. ex-prisoners)
- Integrate services at the local level and share information between teams

The question of where CLLCs should be located sparked debate. Some participants argued for locating them in infrastructure that already exists such as kindergartens and schools. While others advocated for placing them in spaces not traditionally associated with the education system such as sports and shopping centres.

Another hotly debated issue was the need to overcome the division between VET and general education. Paul Downes argued for more work-place learning in general education, and for elimination of the hierarchy between the two pathways if we want students to stay in VET. A

representative from the Ministry of Education in Portugal added that VET can be a valid, first choice pathway if the focus is broadened out from employment to citizenship education.

Key policy messages from practitioners

Gina Ebner, President of Lifelong Learning Platform, discussed the best practices in setting up multidisciplinary teams in communities to tackle early leaving from education and training with representatives of community lifelong learning centres from Ireland, the UK, Sweden and Germany.

Siobhán O'Reilly talked about the potential for one-stop-shops to help prevent youth at risk from disconnecting and presented FamiliBase in Ireland as a successful example. FamiliBase provides a range of needs-led programmes children, young people (aged 0-25) and their families aiming to achieve equality of outcomes and underpinned by community development principles. One of the main challenges in creating and making such centres sustainable is the current funding model that requires centres to apply for and report on funding from and to multiples agencies and departments. The importance of recruiting staff with an appropriate skill set and from a range of disciplines was also emphasised.

Russell Hogarth presented the Creative Communities Group, UK's work on empowering people and communities through volunteering opportunities in the arts and promoting active citizenship in a variety of creativity activities such as film festivals, art exhibitions, dance marathons, creative writing groups, etc. The CCG is a Pan-European network connecting universities with communities, specialising in creative teaching as a pathway to inclusion and accessible education. Advising on, and delivering health and social care into the local and wider community. The CCG helps break down barriers to university and helps universities with student recruitment and retention. The Creative Communities Group UK is based at the University of Central Lancashire.

Carolina Gianola and **Therese Svedberg** presented UngKOMP – a practice of multi-skilled teams who support youth with complex needs in Sweden. UngKOMP was co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Swedish Public Employment Service (PES) to reduce and prevent long-term unemployment of young people. The practice grew out of the realization that even though youth unemployment is low in Sweden, this is not true for all groups and that no single agency could solve the problem alone. The multi-skilled teams work together to help young people face their needs across multiple areas of life such as housing, health, education. An impact evaluation shows that 70% of participants continue to employment or education.

Helga Summer-Juhnke spoke about BildungsLokale, low-threshold education and learning centres for disadvantaged people and a place to foster volunteering in the sense of integration, empowerment and responsibility within the neighbourhood in selected city districts of Munich. BildungsLokale provides also a platform for sharing responsibilities and enhancing collaboration among the local stakeholders of education. The aim is to create more educational equity in the sense of a community education approach and to promote local education landscapes in the sense of a local education governance approach.

Early leaver today, low-skilled adult tomorrow - Panel discussion with policy makers

Mara Brugia, Cedefop Acting Executive Director, chaired two panel discussions with national and European policy makers and social partners on the road travelled so far in tackling early leaving from education and training and youth unemployment, and on the way ahead towards the post-2020 EU agenda.

National focus

Serban Iosifescu, President of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-university Education (ARACIP), presented the results of the Romanian national strategy for reducing early leaving from education and training. The sharp decrease of early-school leaving is highly correlated with support from the European Union. While there is no gender differentiation, there are important territorial disparities (five times higher rates of early leaving in rural areas). The Romanian experience reveals the importance of trans-sectoral cooperation (e.g. between ministries, agencies, NGOs and ECEC providers), capacity building at the local level in impoverished areas, and the need to ensure quality transitions (e.g. from education to work). He commented on the previously discussed question about the appropriate location of CLLCs: schools can be the place where services are provided, not necessarily the provider.

João Costa, Secretary of State for Education of Portugal, discussed the lessons learnt from Portugal's success in bringing down the rate of early leaving from 23% in 2011 to 11.8% in 2018. Poverty is the main predictor of low school achievement in Portugal, and therefore early school leaving should not be considered personal failure. Three factors have helped Portugal decrease the rate of early leaving: 1) early intervention; 2) highly qualified teachers; 3) cooperation between schools and municipalities. Key to the strategy was the resurrection of VET as a valid, first-choice pathway, the emphasis on providing quality education (vs. short-term certificate courses that seek to move students off the statistics quickly), and the inclusion of students in curriculum design and development.

Johanna Koponen, Counsellor at the Permanent Representation of Finland to the European Union, discussed the Finnish case where early leaving is not a problem, but NEET is, and the cost of non-education in the long-term. She described the horizontal cooperation between different ministries – education, culture, defence, employment and interior affairs – to create an action plan to avoid educational dead ends. She called for policies that ensure that being NEET does not necessarily mean economic and social marginalization.

European focus

Kasia Jurczak, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Marianne Thyssen, outlined the European Commissions' work on tackling early leaving from education and training and importance of investment in skills. She focused on the potential of quality apprenticeships to help smooth the transition between education and work and the excellence dimension of VET.

Max Uebe, Head of Unit 'Employment Strategy' in the European Commission's Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion discussed the success of the *Youth Guarantee* and ways to take it further in the fight against youth unemployment. He emphasised that the massive decrease of youth unemployment and NEETs rates over the last years could not have been achieved without the improvement of the macro-economic situation. The future of work, green skills, career guidance and mutual assistance for MS are some of the important topics for the post-2020 EU agenda on youth employment.

Agnes Roman, from the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), discussed the role of unions in tackling early leaving. She pointed out that 30% of NEETs are short-term unemployed

and that improving basic skills, decreasing early leaving, and providing apprenticeships could help remedy this problem. However, apprenticeships should be fair and of high quality to deliver on the promises. Employee training and training in the workplace could also help upskilling and therefore prevent unemployment. She highlighted that young people who have left education or training early should catch-up in schools alongside other students, rather than in separate second-chance programmes.

Tatjana Babrauskiene, Member of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and Chairperson of Cedefop Management Board, called for VET toolkit ambassadors in more countries especially so that a 'two-speed Europe' within each Member State can be avoided. She welcomed the translation of Cedefop VET toolkit for tackling early leaving to all European languages to increase its accessibility and relevance to national, regional and local stakeholders; something the Committee can help with. She highlighted some rarely-discussed, but important reasons why some young people become NEET – for example, former professional sportsmen or ballet dancers who have very specific skills, also are good team players and extremely self-disciplined, but those skills and abilities are not recognized and not considered as sufficient in the world of work. However, these people do not belong to groups of disadvantaged or in risk and therefore do not get appropriate support.

Michael Teutsch, Head of the Unit 'Schools and multilingualism' in the European Commission's Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture said that despite achieving the 2020 target of reducing the early leaving to below 10%, the problem still exists because the remaining 10% are the hardest to eliminate. Moreover, still one in two young people does not have a very good chance in life. A key issue on the agenda is raising interest in education, beginning with ECEC. Tackling early leaving from education and training will remain a priority in the post-2020 agenda.

Concluding remarks and next steps

All national and European panellists supported the role of community lifelong learning centres in tackling early leaving from education and training and youth unemployment. The Lifelong learning platform in collaboration with Cedefop will revise and finalise the related LLLP briefing paper drawing on the conclusions of this event.

The event was closed by **Mara Brugia**, Cedefop Acting Executive Director, who thanked all participants for their active participation and lively contribution into the discussions. Cedefop will continue working in this field supporting youth at risk (early leavers, NEETs, etc.) and low-skilled adults. The new Cedefop online resources on 'VET for social inclusion and labour market integration' currently under development will offer to countries additional support in tackling early leaving, raising youth employment and implementing upskilling pathways.

Participants congratulated Cedefop and LLLP for the policy forum, they appreciated the interactive format and quality of information provided. They valued the awareness raised that early leaving is better addressed on wider contexts such as CLLCs that can provide proximity, multidisciplinary services but also intergenerational and intercultural learning environments. Also the Forum allowed them to better understand the role of VET for learners at risk, early leavers and their lifelong learning.

Related web links:

Cedefop press release

Event website

Cedefop Toolkit for tackling early leaving: www.cedefop.europa.eu/TEL-toolkit