

IMPRESSUM

Author: Nikola Buković

Translation: Jezični atelier

Proof-reading: Anamarija Sočo

Design and print: ACT Printlab

ISBN: 978-953-7805-11-1

CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the National and University Library in Zagreb under 820737.

Opinions expressed in this publication are of the author and they do not necessarily reflect opinions of the Croatian Youth Network

**WHO'S AFRAID
OF THE BIG
BAD CRISIS?**

**THE STRUCTURED
DIALOGUE
ON YOUTH
UNEMPLOYMENT**

PROCESS, METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

CONTENTS:

1. Foreword	7
2. Acknowledgements	13
3. Summary of the study	16
4. Introduction and context	25
4.1. The structured dialogue on youth employment in Croatia	25
4.2. The state of the Croatian labour market and the role of the structured dialogue	26
4.3. Description of the methodology	28
4.3.1. Discussion about the methodology – advantages and disadvantages ..	30
4.4. Realized sample	32
4.4.1 Online questionnaire	32
4.4.2. Focus groups	33
5. Summary of the results of online consultations	39
6. Youth unemployment – a view from within	43
6.1. Sketching a portrait – supporting pillars of a phenomenon	44
6.2. The state of education or of weak foundations	46
6.2.1 Transfer of competencies for the labour market	47
6.2.2. (Un)adjusted enrolment quotas	48
6.3. Young people as a social group: (un)fit for challenges of time	50
6.3.1. Mentality of (unemployed) young people	51
6.3.2. The influence of the starting point on available opportunities..	53
6.3.3. (Ir)relevance of job-searching skills	55
6.4. Croatian economic conditions: a pessimistic diagnosis	57
6.4.1. The general state of economy	57
6.4.2. (Unjust) practices of Croatian employers	60
6.5. Institutional practices: a gap between the reality and the needs	62
6.5.1. The state: support or obstacle?	63
6.5.2. Work of the Croatian Employment Service	64
6.6. The state of society: a race to the bottom?	67
6.6.1. The generation gap: “children of socialism” vs. “children of transition” ..	67

6.6.2. The influence of social climate	69
7. Consequences of youth unemployment: problems of today, an image of tomorrow?	75
7.1. Psycho-physical problems	76
7.2. Negative perception of life chances	78
7.3. The spread of social discontent	80
7.4. The loss of social potential	81
8. Obstacles to youth employment	85
8.1. Obstacles to using active employment policy measures	85
8.2. Young people not perceived as potential employees	88
8.3. Obstacles to youth entrepreneurship	94
9. Support to unemployed young people	94
9.1. Ambivalent support	94
9.2. Inadequate support	97
9.3. Empowering support	98
10. Participants take charge – recommendations and ideas developed during the process.....	101
10.1. Recommendations for social change	101
10.2. Recommendations for changes in the education system	103
10.3. Recommendations for improving the position of young people on the labour market	106
10.4. Recommendations for improving support to unemployed young people	108
11. Instead of a conclusion	113
12. Bibliography	117
Annex 1: List of members of the National Working Group for the Implementation of the Structured Dialogue	120
Annex 2: Focus group participants' recruitment protocol	121
Annex 3: Results of online consultations	125
Annex 4: Protocol on preparation and implementation of focus groups and consultations	134
Annex 5: List of stakeholders represented in the structured dialogue consultations	139

1

1. FOREWORD

Today's young people, born in the period between 1983 and 1997, find themselves in a particularly adverse position, considering the times they live in. Contemporary European societies have indisputably reached the highest level of socio-economic development and offer to young people the greatest amount of resources. However, this is precisely why young people who are not able to fulfil their role as economically active citizens find themselves in a precarious situation. Young people in Croatia and other European countries which are facing growing economic, social and political problems are finding it increasingly difficult to become independent from their families and to actively get involved in social and economic processes. The difficult social conditions young people live in today call for youth policies which will recognize the need for participation of young people in the form of a structured dialogue, in all areas related to their self-actualization. The EU Youth Strategy (2010-2018), entitled "Youth - Investing and Empowering", defines several fields of action which mandate more and better financing, youth empowerment and the promotion of the potential of young people for building societies and contributing to European goals and values. These fields of action are: 1. Education and Training, 2. Employment & Entrepreneurship, 3. Health & Well-being, 4. Participation, 5. Voluntary Activities, 6. Social Inclusion, 7. Youth & the World, 8. Creativity & Culture.

7

The structured dialogue, conducted with the purpose of solving problems and coordinating action, is mentioned for the first time in a resolution adopted by the Council of Ministers in 2005. The resolution addresses the European Commission and member states and calls for the development of a structured dialogue with young people, youth organizations, researchers and decision-makers. The need for a structured dialogue with youth is further underlined in the Communication from the European Commission on "Promoting young people's full participation in education, employment and society" from 2007, and in a Council resolution from 2006. *The Council Resolution on a Renewed Framework for European Cooperation in the Youth Field (2010-2018)* adopted in 2009 states that the structured dialogue at the European level is conducted with the European Commission, member states, national youth councils and the European Youth Forum, during the European Youth Week, EU Presidency youth conferences and unofficial fora organized at the margins of Council meetings. At the national level, member states are invited to form national working groups made up of representatives of ministries relevant

for youth issues, national youth councils, local and regional youth councils, youth organizations, youth workers, young people and researchers in the field of youth. It is strongly recommended, whenever possible, that member states assign to national youth councils the leading role in working groups whose task is to organise consultations on previously agreed topics of the structured dialogue.

In the process of the structured dialogue, the European Commission officially announces the beginning of a new cycle of the structured dialogue, reports on its results and ensures findings and feedback. In charge of the coordination of the structured dialogue at the European level is the European Steering Committee for the Structured Dialogue made up of representatives of the European Commission, European Youth Forum, ministries for Youth Affairs of EU Presidency trio countries, national youth councils and national agencies for the Youth in Action programme. The European Youth Forum, the chair of the Steering Committee, is the biggest youth platform in Europe representing young people at informal fora taking place at the margins of conferences organized by the EU Presidency, Commission, Parliament and youth representatives. National youth councils (in Croatia it is the Croatian Youth Network) implement the structured dialogue among youth organizations by organizing local, regional and national consultations. National agencies for the Youth in Action programme (in Croatia it is the Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes) support the process by monitoring the implementation of the structured dialogue and disseminating results, and by implementing the 5.1 sub-action of the *Youth in Action* programme.

8

The structured dialogue on youth employment was implemented in three phases. The first phase lasted from January to April 2010, with national consultations on the topic of employment. Following that, the Spanish Presidency organized a youth conference in April 2010 which served to set priorities for the next phase. The second phase was focused on implementing national consultations on priorities in youth employment which were presented at a conference in Belgium in October 2010. The last phase of the structured dialogue was finalized at a youth conference in Hungary in May 2011 which set priorities for the next structured dialogue cycle. The following EU Presidency trio – Poland, Denmark and Cyprus – have set youth participation as the new topic of the structured dialogue. Each Presidency will organize a youth conference – Poland in September 2011, Denmark in April 2012 and Cyprus in September of the same year. Croatia initiated the process of the structured dialogue on the topic of youth employment in September 2011. The process was coordinated by the Croatian Youth Network, with the support of the Ministry of Social Policy and Youth and the Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes.

The detailed priorities of the structured dialogue of the current EU Presidency trio are:

1. Poland: a) youth cooperation between the EU and the countries of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, particularly in the field of youth mobility; b) promotion and recognition of non-formal education, in the context of the European Year of Volunteering; c) promotion of active citizenship and the results of the mid-term evaluation of the Youth in Action programme.
2. Denmark: a) creativity and innovation for active citizenship and youth employment; b) follow-up on the initiatives which started during the European Year of Creativity and Innovation 2008; c) exchange of good practices in the field of youth participation in decision-making processes.
3. Cyprus: a) participation of youth organizations and young people in decision-making processes; b) encouraging youth participation on the local level.

The implementation of the structured dialogue across Europe has been relying mainly on three consultation techniques:

1. Organizing meetings with young people which open spaces for direct dialogue and consultations with young people on the set priorities;
2. Compiling existing information and knowledge on good practices of creating and implementing youth policies;
3. Gathering information via questionnaires and other surveys. The most frequently used questionnaires are the ones created by the European Commission for the purpose of the structured dialogue¹.

A good and effective cooperation between young people and decision-makers at local, regional and national levels is one of the main preconditions for a successful structured dialogue. Taking this into account, and with the purpose of developing a strategy for the structured dialogue in Croatia, the Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes (AMPEU) funded in 2011 a research on the current state of play of youth participation in Croatia and the existence of different forms of structured dialogue at local, regional and national levels (*Structured Dialogue with Young People in Croatia*, 2011). In order to analyze the scope and the quality of dialogue with young people in Croatia, two complementary questionnaires

¹ The questionnaire may be accessed at http://ec.europa.eu/youth/pdf/doc1113_en.pdf.

were created – one for representatives of youth organizations (30 organizations), and the other for 32 representatives of decision-making bodies (members of parliament, civil servants in ministries which deal with youth issues and representatives of regional governments).

Summarizing the results of the study of the cooperation between decision-makers and youth organizations, and of the existence of structured dialogue in Croatia, the first set of questions offered an insight into cooperation of youth and decision-makers on financing youth organizations, consultations with youth carried out for the purpose of developing new strategies and legislative acts relevant for young people, and participation in different activities (culture, sport, etc.). Respondents from both sub-samples declared an equal level of initiating communication on both sides. However, young people see themselves taking initiative more often than decision-makers. In addition, representatives of youth organizations report more instances of negative reception of their proposals by decision-makers than vice-versa. Most youth organizations participating in the study established cooperation with ministries in charge of youth affairs and with county prefects and their deputies, less so with members of county governments, while most of them never cooperated with members of parliament, ministers and mayors.

10

Estimating their level of satisfaction with the cooperation with the aforementioned decision-makers, young people report highest degrees of satisfaction in the case of members of town and municipality governments, members of county governments, and to a lesser degree of county prefects and their deputies. However, most declare that their needs were only partially met in the course of the cooperation. It is highly indicative that 23 out of 30 representatives of youth organizations reported overall dissatisfaction with the cooperation, while 23 out of 32 decision-makers are satisfied with the cooperation with youth organizations. When questioned about areas of cooperation that they are most and least satisfied with, representatives of youth organizations consider the cooperation in the field of education and informatisation most successful, while the areas of employment, entrepreneurship and social policy remain at the bottom of the list. The study also collected examples of good practice reported both by young people and decision-makers. The areas where cooperation was reported satisfactory matched in both samples and referred to success in changing legislation, forming youth advisory boards, training young people in youth rights, funding youth projects, opening youth clubs, organizing volunteering activities for youth and cultural and sporting events.

AMPEU launched the survey on the structured dialogue at a training course organized for representatives of youth organizations and county governments about the basics of the structured dialogue in Europe and the necessary preconditions for its implementation in Croatia. The study was based on the hypothesis that young people and decision-makers are insufficiently informed about the structured dialogue and this was confirmed by the results of the research. Additionally, there are several elements which were highlighted by young people and decision-makers in their interpretation of what a structured dialogue is. Namely, decision-makers tend to shift the responsibility for the process to young people and expect their stronger engagement and initiative, while representatives of youth organizations emphasize the need for creating organizational and technical conditions for the implementation of the structured dialogue. Soon after the completion of the study coordinated and funded by AMPEU, Croatia saw the beginning of its first cycle of the structured dialogue with young people on the topic of youth employment. Its prominent consultative nature and the qualitative and quantitative data-collection methodology will give plenty of insight into different elements of the position of young people on the labour market, from the perspective of young people themselves. This valuable contribution to the structured dialogue made by the Croatian Youth Network is also a test of the preconditions listed by young people and decision-makers in the AMPEU research – youth initiative and organizational and technical preconditions for the implementation of the structured dialogue with young people. This will lay firm foundations for a successful finalization of this cycle of the structured dialogue in Croatia, and the beginning of a new cycle on the topic of youth participation.

2

2. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The implementation of the project **“Who’s Afraid of the Big Bad Crisis? The Structured Dialogue on Youth Unemployment”** started in July 2011. However, it has a much longer history in the Croatian Youth Network (MMH).

Identifying the need for a project like this at a moment like this was not at all difficult. Regardless of the fact that the topic of youth unemployment has found its place as a relevant issue in the public sphere, all of us who are engaged, either professionally or voluntarily, in the activities of MMH, in spite of all our differences, share a common feature: we are all young people or have just ceased to be “officially” young. We also belong to the generation carrying the weight of the crisis which has hit Croatian and European economies in 2008. Faced with staggering rates of unemployment, poverty and resignation among our peers, we have been more than willing to do something about it.

Like anyone else embarking upon a quest for positive social change, we too have encountered a number of challenges which, at the end of the day, come down to two simple questions:

1. Which methods will most effectively contribute to the solution of this problem?
2. How to make sure that our ideas become actions?

MMH has been preparing for this process for a long time. This short publication summarizes the work and efforts of previous generations of activists in this organization and of our partners at home and abroad who have shared over the years their knowledge and experiences and prepared us for this moment. A list of all the persons and organizations that, over the years, have empowered MMH to the level necessary for it to take on the leading role in implementing the first national structured dialogue in Croatia would be as long as this humble publication. We wish to give to all of them, here and now, a big thank-you, and we hope we have not let them down. Important pieces of the puzzle have been the institutional actors which have recognized the importance of this process and decided to support it financially. The Ministry of Family, War Veterans’ Affairs and Intergenerational Solidarity, and its successor, the Ministry of Social Policy and Youth, have strongly supported the implementation of the structured dialogue since its very beginning. The support of the Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes, within the framework of the Youth in Action programme, has also been extremely important. We are grateful to both for their vote of confidence and we are looking forward to our future cooperation.

Furthermore, an absolutely crucial role in this process has been played by several MMH member organizations which have been involved in it as project partners. They deserve to be listed in this short introduction, in no particular order, because their individual contributions are equally valuable: **Domaći** from Karlovac, **PRONI – Centre for Social Education** from Osijek, **Info zona** from Split, **Delta** from Rijeka, **Krik** from Slatina, **ZUM** from Pula, and **HUK** from Knin. The kind of cooperation we have with these and other member organizations which have been involved in the implementation and promotion of this project, always remind us how purposeful our work really is. Big thanks go to all the members of the National Working Group for the Implementation of the Structured Dialogue, and to their institutions which have recognized the value of their involvement in this process. Their suggestions, backed up by their rich expertise, and their willingness to come eye to eye with some unpleasant findings we encountered together on our journey, give hope for a better future of cross-sector cooperation in Croatia. A list of members of the Working Group can be found at the end of this publication in **Annex 1**. We would also like to thank our associates whose contribution has been invaluable in different stages in the making of this report, Natalija Lukić and Teo Matković, as well as our volunteer Karko Kralj who has done a tremendous job in transcribing the content of our focus groups.

At the end, we give our thanks to those who deserve it the most: **all** the young people who have been involved, in one way or another, in the first national structured dialogue. We are truly indebted to you for your honesty, initiative and the trust you placed in us. We readily accept this burden of responsibility and we hope that we will all manage to fully use the potential of this advocacy process and continue our journey towards our shared vision... the journey that will once lead us to a society with young people in focus.

On behalf of MMH,

Mirela Travar, Secretary General

Nikola Buković, Author

3

3. SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

Research approach/
methodology
(Chapter 4)

16

The study you are holding in your hands is a result of the project entitled **“Who’s afraid of the Big Bad Crisis? The Structured Dialogue on Youth Unemployment”** which was carried out in 2011 and 2012 by the Croatian Youth Network and its seven partners, its member organizations. The study gives an overview of the first **national structured dialogue** in Croatia which focused on the topic of youth unemployment. In cooperation with the partners and the National Working Group for the Implementation of the Structured Dialogue, the MMH research team developed an approach which combined qualitative and quantitative research methods. This approach to methodology was a necessary compromise between the need for openness and the quality of the structured dialogue. The first instrument was an online questionnaire targeting young people aged 15 to 30, which was available at the project website www.mladi-rade.net. The second instrument encompasses focus groups carried out in 8 Croatian towns: 4 macro-regional centres (Osijek, Split, Rijeka and Zagreb) and 4 smaller towns (Karlovac, Knin, Pula and Slatina). In each town, one focus group with unemployed and inactive young people was organized, as well as another focus group with employed young people and students. Each focus group had 5 to 10 participants selected according to a previously defined sample, which was consulted in the research team and the Working Group. Whereas the online consultations aimed at collecting basic information about the problem of youth unemployment from a wide base of young people, the research team principally relied on the focus groups as the dominant source of relevant information in order to understand the perspective of young people. The main findings presented in this study were developed according to the information collected in the focus groups.

Results of the consultation process (Chapters 6-10)	The analysis of the collected information yielded 5 thematic units which are described in detail. They refer to: 1) participants' basic discourses on the problem of youth unemployment; 2) consequences of youth unemployment; 3) obstacles to youth employment; 4) support to unemployed young people; 5) recommendations for improvement.
Unemployment discourse (Chapter 6)	The understanding of the term "basic discourse" interwoven in this study matches the definition of American post-structuralism philosopher Judith Butler who says that discourse is "...the limit of acceptable speech or truth" (Butler, 1997). In this sense, the basic discourses described in this study refer to the scope in which in the focus groups participants think about youth unemployment. Each basic discourse contains several important narratives. They are stories of a sort but they are characterized by a substantially lower level of abstraction and their focus on mechanism and processes. The narratives frame the picture of individual discourses in the same way the discourses make up together a complete image of the youth unemployment phenomenon, seen through the eyes of the participants. The detected discourses and narratives frame the scope in which the participants position the problem of youth unemployment in Croatia, thus contributing to the understanding of its complexity. The analysis of transcriptions of the focus groups helped detect 5 basic discourses connected to: 1) state of education; 2) young people as a social group; 3) economic conditions; 4) institutional practices; 5) state of society.

Dominant
discourse
(Section 6.4)

Each basic discourse contains two or three narratives. The most prominent discourse, regardless of the focus group composition² and the town size, was the one referring to the **economic conditions**. It encompasses two narratives: the first is connected to the **general state of economy**, and the second to the **unjust practices of Croatian employers**. Additionally, in this discourse the participants recognized the problem of “extinction” of the Croatian industrial production and they noted the ambivalent nature of actions which offer a short-term remedy and a long-term development perspective. The lack of jobs on offer for young people shed the light on phenomena detected in the second narrative: the unjust practices of Croatian employers. According to our participants, Croatian employers commonly recruit new workers in a non-transparent manner based on favouritism, they do not respect contractual obligations towards their employees and they often abuse temporary employment contracts and other types of flexible employment arrangements, they lack professionalism and business culture and they are not aware of what young employees have to offer.

² The term “composition of focus groups” refers to the relation between focus groups with students and employed young people and the ones with unemployed and inactive young people.

Consequences of unemployment (Chapter 7)

The consequences of unemployment are grouped in a **typology** presented in Table 3 on page (74). In the consequences narrative the participants differentiated between two dimensions. The **first dimension** recognizes consequences on individual and social levels. The **second dimension** is temporal: when speaking about consequences, the participants often differentiated between those linked to their present situation or immediate future and those which will be manifested in distant future. Through the eyes of an individual young person, youth unemployment corresponds to the theoretical concept of “existential affliction” which is manifested in short-term by different types of **psycho-physical problems**, and in the long-term it has a negative impact on **life chances of a young person**. On the other hand, youth unemployment, according to our participants, contributes to a society which encourages a “race to the bottom”. In the short-term, this is manifested by a boiling **social discontent**, which can become public in case that there are no concrete possibilities for positive social change. In the long-term, it is manifested by the **loss of development potential** in the society.

Obstacles
to youth
employment
(Chapter 8)

The obstacles to youth employment were seen by the participants through three distinct perspectives which served as a basis for the development of a classification within this topic. This set of categories, unlike the one about the discourse, is founded on concrete obstacles experienced by the participants, and not on their perception or “secondary” sources of information. The **first category**, which stems from the perspective of a **young beneficiary** of active employment policy measures, gives an overview of the problems in using three types of measures: on-the-job training without employment, different types of vocational and occupational training offered the Croatian Employment Service and incentives for employment of different categories of young people. Besides the perceived problems with individual elements of the aforementioned active employment policy measures, this category also encompasses the participants’ dissatisfaction with the implementation capacities of the Croatian Employment Service (CES). The **second category**, which stems from the perspective of a **young job-seeker**, is mostly built around the hypothesis that young people are not recognized as potential employees. According to the focus groups, this occurs most often because employers insist on relevant work experience and due to the gap between acquired qualifications and available jobs. The perspective (and the dissatisfaction) of highly-qualified unemployed participants predominated in this category. Finally, the **third category** stems from the perspective of a **potential entrepreneur** and it highlights financial barriers to starting a business and obstacles during the first years of doing business. The participants also brought forth the lack of access to verified and relevant information and the lack of the entrepreneurial spirit in Croatia.

The participants talked about the support in the period of unemployment through the lens of the level of fulfilment of their expectations. In this sense, it is possible to differentiate between ambivalent, unsatisfactory and empowering support. The **ambivalent support** is connected to the **family** and the **peer group**. A great majority of participants said that family can, at the same time, provide emotional and financial support, as well as exert psychological pressure on a young unemployed person, insisting on quickly finding a job while disregarding current economic trends. On the other hand, the participants saw peer support much more in “black and white”. They perceive peers either as a source of encouragement and valuable information or merely as an additional weight pulling them away from the “normal life”. The participants evaluate the **support they get from CES** as **unsatisfactory**, primarily due to their perception that it does not provide its clients with “real support” but it merely “gets them through the system”. They also identified several additional problems: unmotivated employees, irregular communication with clients, some unadjusted procedures and the existence of favouritism and corruption in work. Although some participants take into consideration the limited capacities of the institution, it appears that most of them do not have a clear picture of what the purpose and the aims of CES really are. Projects and programmes of **civil society organizations** are seen as the **empowering support**, and the participants point out a number of free time opportunities they offer in the period of unemployment. Some recognize volunteering as a valuable mechanism for finding employment. However, the relevance of this category should not be taken unreservedly due to a possible bias of the sample which was dominantly recruited by civil society organizations. It should also be mentioned that most focus groups took place on the premises of our partner organizations.

About the chapter on recommendations and guidelines (Chapter 10)

The focus groups yielded a number of diverse **recommendations**. Some of them are really concrete, whereas others serve as global guidelines in which direction to go towards solving a problem. This affected the structure of the final chapter of this publication. Unlike the usual presentation of recommendations in clear and neat bullets, this chapter is similar to the rest of the publication, linking the recommendations and guidelines in a coherent whole. Consequently, the recommendations and guidelines are directed towards:

Key recommendations (Chapter 10)

1) social change:

- more young people involved in programmes and projects of civil society organizations, with a special emphasis on volunteering;
- introduction of civic education in the formal education system;
- affirmation of the position of young people as a distinct social group and creating better conditions for their development;
- social orientation towards industrial production as a driving force of economic prosperity.

2) changes in the education system:

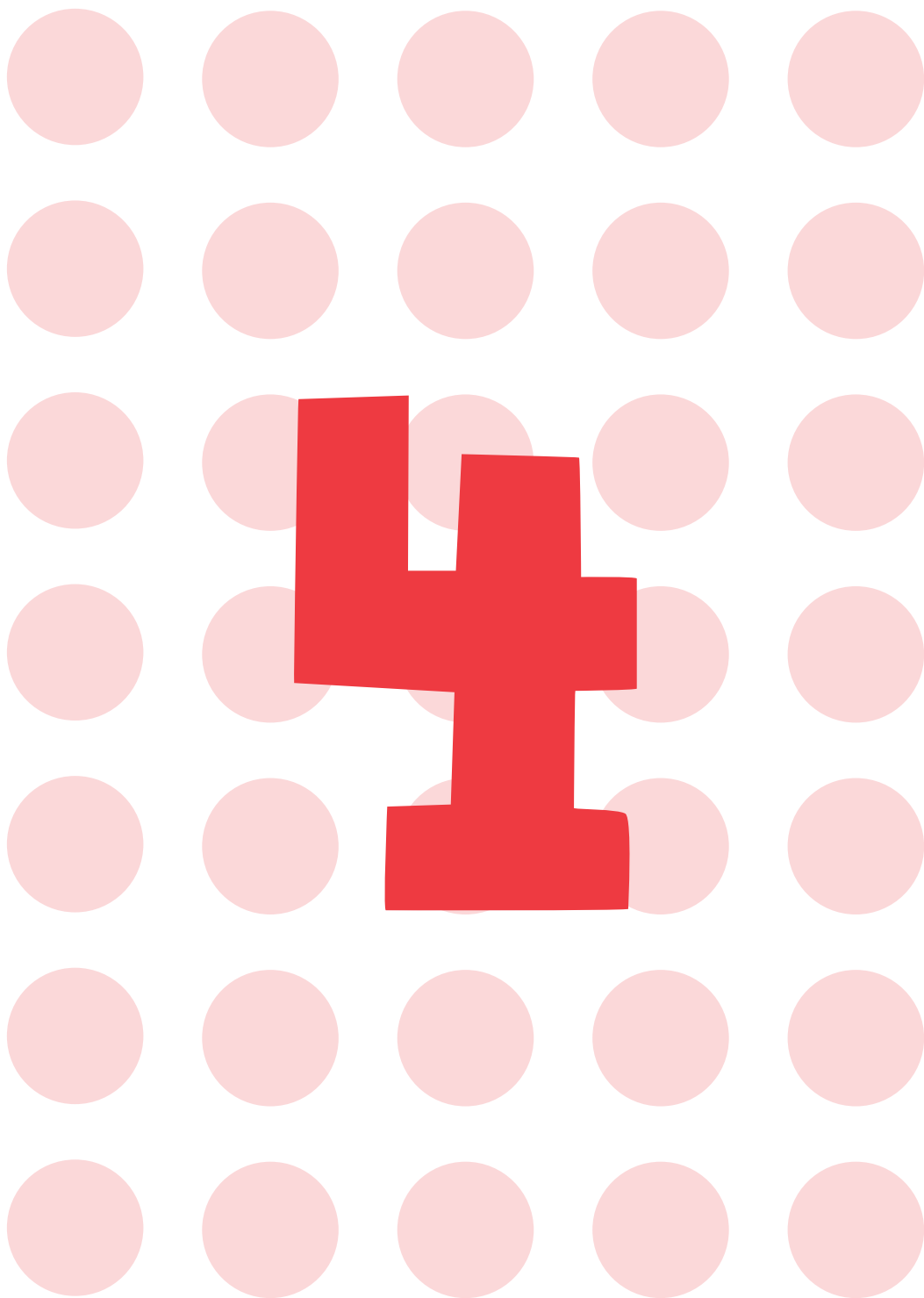
- systematic and analytical approach to analysing outcomes in the labour market and informing young people when enrolling into schools and universities;
- pro-active involvement of employers in the education system;
- introduction of basic training on business skills;
- educational institutions offer better support to their students in the process of finding employment.

3) improving the position of young people in the labour market:

- promotion of volunteering and its clear distinction from other forms of unpaid work and internships;
- employers recognize competences acquired through volunteering and different types of temporary work;
- improving the quality of protection of young workers' rights;
- affirming a correct business culture among employers (professional communication with potential employees during selection procedure);
- adjusting active employment policy measures to the real needs of young people;
- eliminating the provision of necessary work experience as a precondition for eligibility for unemployment benefits;
- encouraging entrepreneurship among young people and removing barriers to starting a business.

4) improving support to unemployed young people:

- comprehensive informing about opportunities offered by public, private and civil sectors (*one stop shop* approach);
 - using the full potential of the Internet for distributing information about opportunities available to young people;
 - setting up agencies specializing in offering support to young people in the process of finding employment;
 - encouraging cooperation and networking of young entrepreneurs;
 - transforming services of CES from support in finding employment to support in the period of unemployment.
-



4. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

4.1. The structured dialogue on youth employment in Croatia

Youth employment was the topic of the second 18-month cycle of the structured dialogue at the European level in the period from January 2010 to June 2011. The cycle was implemented under the EU presidencies of Spain, Belgium and Hungary. According to the key described in the Foreword, the process was divided in three integral parts. In the first six months, under the Spanish presidency, the priorities of the structured dialogue on youth employment were identified and later agreed at a youth conference held in Spain in April 2010. Under the Belgian presidency, national consultations following the set priorities were implemented. Based on the results of the national consultations, key fields of action were identified for all stakeholders involved in the structured dialogue and were presented at a conference held in Belgium in October 2010. The final phase saw the creation of recommendations for the next structured dialogue which were agreed at a conference in Hungary in April 2011 (Potočnik, 2011: 9-10). The fact that the topic of this structured dialogue is “in the news” due to a devastating effect the economic crisis of 2008 had on the position of young people at the labour market, only added to its importance and political weight.

The structured dialogue at the national level in Croatia entered “through the back door”. This means that it was not a result of a wide consensus among stakeholders nor was it synchronized with the process that was going on at the European level. Its implementation was a result of *ad hoc* advocacy efforts of youth organizations, primarily of MMH, which made the structured dialogue on youth employment one of the measures in the National Employment Promotion Plan 2011-2012 (NEPP). The second important factor which made this process happen was the fact that the sub-action 5.1 of the Youth in Action programme became fully available to Croatian beneficiaries, and it is precisely this type of activities that it supports. MMH secured additional funding from the Youth in Action programme, without which this process, due to limited resources allocated in NEPP, could not have been so comprehensive and methodologically elaborated.

Besides the temporal incongruity with the European process, another specific feature of the Croatian structured dialogue was its relatively short period of implementation. Namely, it was carried out for the duration of the Youth in Action financial support, from **July 2011** till the end of **June 2012**. This posed before MMH a demanding challenge of implementing one of the most complex activities since its foundation in merely eleven, instead of the foreseen eighteen, months.

4.2. The state of the Croatian labour market and the role of the structured dialogue

It seems, nevertheless, that the topic of the structured dialogue could not have been more relevant and up-to-date, taking into consideration the specific Croatian context. Already in early 2011 MMH tried to raise awareness about this growing problem by organizing a conference in Croatian Parliament entitled “Youth unemployment: a priority on the margins”. MMH warned that the situation only worsens due to an insufficiently developed and porous social protection network and a significant gap between education and labour market. The following data from 2011 clearly demonstrate the severity of the problem:

26

1. In the period between 2003 and 2010 the average annual unemployment rate among young people aged 15-24 in EU-27 ranged between the lowest **15.7%** in 2007 and the highest **21.1%** in 2010. In the same period Croatia came close to the European numbers from 2008, when the average annual unemployment rate amounted to **21.9%**. However, the next year saw the rate of **25.1%**, and in 2010 it amounted to a staggering **32.6%** (Eurostat, 2011).
2. This data clearly shows that Croatia, compared to EU-27, finds itself at the infamous top of the countries with the highest youth unemployment rates. According to Eurostat, in the first quarter of 2011, in comparison to the EU-27, Croatia had the **second highest unemployment rate** among young people aged 15-24. Spain was the only country with a higher rate (around 43%), Croatia and Greece held second place with around 38%, while Latvia lagged behind with a rate of 35%. For reference, the country with the lowest youth unemployment rate in Eu-

rope in the same period was the Netherlands with about 7% (Eurostat, 2011).

3. The economic crisis hit the population aged 15-30 in Croatia much harder than other age groups. This claim can be substantiated by the data from the Croatian Employment Service which indicate that in the period between 2008 and 2010 the number of registered employed persons aged 15-19 decreased by **45.8%**, aged 20-24 by **26.9%**, and aged 25-29 by **11.2%**. By comparison, the only age group which has a two-digit rate of decline in the number of registered employed persons is the one exiting the labour market, aged 60-64. In this group the rate is 23.8% (Oračić, 2011).

Logically, these disturbing trends raised awareness of the public about the position of young people at the labour market. It appears that a number of political decision-makers and experts began to comprehend potential detrimental effects, should these trends continue. However, the stakeholders which are most affected by this issue, young people themselves, are largely excluded from the debate. The media brings from time to time sad stories of young people who, already in their early 20s, experience long-term unemployment, and some showing willingness to permanently leave the country³. Such examples, although useful as mechanisms for raising awareness of the public, assign young people primarily a role of “silent witnesses” or, worse, of powerless victims of the profound socio-economic crisis they live in. Apart from this, such media representations almost never offer solutions to current problems, thus giving very little hope to a huge proportion of the youth population.

27

This structured dialogue, partly because of its purpose, and partly because of the aforementioned specific circumstances, had an extremely demanding challenge to overcome: how to turn young people into active agents in the process of solving the acute unemployment problem through creating relevant and sustainable solutions and recommendations.

In order to resolve this issue, we decided to prioritize a method which is context-sensitive and allows for a deeper understanding of the problem, while at the same time encourages discussion with all interested stakeholders and contributes to the development of a democratic dialogue. The following paragraphs give account of the methodology used in the implementation of the structured dialogue with young people at the national level.

³ One of the most memorable stories comes from the town of Prelog, where a young Croatian teacher decided to share in public her painful path towards the decision to leave Croatia permanently and find a life elsewhere. The article is available at <http://www.emedjimurje.hr/obrazovanje/zasto-sam-odlucila-reci-zbogom-hrvatskoj>; 14.05.2012

4.3 Description of the methodology

With the purpose of encouraging the initiative of young people⁴ in solving the problem of unemployment and including them in the process of creating sustainable solutions and recommendations together with decision-makers, both qualitative and quantitative approaches were employed (*multi-methods design*). However, the two research methods were not integrated in one “result”, but both have different purposes and contributions to the project. The combined research methodology is used in order to obtain a clearer picture of the perspectives of unemployment which young people have in the Croatian social context.

Besides this, the combination of qualitative and quantitative methodology is based on a logic that is pertinent to all research – it is important to use a method which “best suits the objectives”. Things get more challenging when the process is not oriented towards a single goal and when goals are not exclusively research-related, as was the case here. The process attempted to open a channel which can bring the “youth voice” to the public and, at the same time, deepen the insights into potential paths towards a better social and political integration of unemployed young people. To realize these complex and, some would even say, contradictory goals, we estimated that it is necessary to:

- deepen the understanding of the ways young people perceive the problem of unemployment in the Croatian context,
- recognize the obstacles which young people encounter in the process of finding employment,
- describe the experience of unemployment and its social/individual consequences.

Questions which directed the research were oriented towards the basic discourses about youth unemployment among the participants, the experience and consequences of unemployment at the individual and social levels, expectations linked to the system of support in the period of unemployment, and recommendations how to solve the problem of youth unemployment or, at least, how to mitigate its consequences.

⁴ The youth population in this report refers to the 15-30 age group, according to the provisions of the National Programme for Youth 2009-2013.

The research process ran simultaneously in three phases:

Online consultations were made up of a battery of questions which were used to collect information about:

- problems young people face at the labour market,
- perception of the consequences of unemployment,
- perception of the effects of the near EU accession on youth employment,
- perception of the actors responsible for the high unemployment rate in Croatia.

Data was collected through a questionnaire which was accessible to all visitors of the project website www.mladi-rade.net. The questionnaire was advertised via mailing lists and social networks, Facebook in particular, where it targeted specifically the population aged 15-30. The questionnaire was available for three and a half months. The online consultations aimed at examining the perception of young people about youth unemployment and at involving as many young people as possible in the process of consultations. For a deeper understanding of youth perspectives, we relied on focus groups as a primary source of relevant information.

29

Consultations with employed/unemployed young people (focus groups) had two goals. One was to deepen the understanding of the problem of unemployment in the Croatian social context, starting from the perspective of young people. The other goal of the focus groups was to give voice to young people, assuming that by studying their specific perspective it is possible to gain valuable insights into potential mechanisms for a better social and political integration of unemployed young people. Focus groups were chosen as a particularly suitable method for this type of research which requires public participation. Bloor and his colleagues list three main reasons for this. **Firstly**, focus groups are “social events” in the course of which respondents become participants in the event (this diminishes the feeling of intrusion in their privacy and makes their participation more acceptable (a/n). **Secondly**, they are defined by a limited duration, which makes them logically more acceptable in terms of time and other resources. **Thirdly**, they do not normally require from participants specific skills (Bloor et al., 2001: 12-13). Additionally, same authors recognize a substantial democratic potential of focus groups which is manifested in four main points. **Firstly**, they are considered the ideal social medium through which the “community voice” can question the dominant expert opinions. **Secondly**, focus groups not only represent spaces for voicing opinions and group values, but also cre-

ate an interactive process which allows for them to change, reform and even to be created. **Thirdly**, focus groups often have a role which surpasses (re)defining groups norms and values and can be real platforms for collective action. **Finally**, focus groups are a medium which can give research a participatory character, either in the preparation phase or in the course of implementation or evaluation (Bloor et al., 2001: 93).

Consultations of participants with relevant stakeholders represent the third phase of the research process. The consultations were held after the focus groups and they involved a short conversation with representatives of relevant local stakeholders. Starting points for discussion were the recommendations created in the focus groups, and local experts had the task to provide feedback to the participants. Recommendations could then be revised, if necessary.

4.3.1. Discussion about the methodology - advantages and disadvantages

The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods seemed a logical choice for eliminating the aforementioned tension between the two main expectations from the structured dialogue: to be open and structured at the same time. Although a few subsequent chapters will be dedicated to the reflection about the degree to which the research plan was realized, it is already the time to speak about several basic limitations of this study:

1. It is necessary to mention the relation between the data collected through the quantitative method (the online questionnaire) and the qualitative method (the focus groups). The fact that the questionnaire was available to all who visited the project website led to the inability to control the sample and to validate it correctly. This influenced the external validity of the questionnaire results and it is not possible to claim that they are representative of the population which had the possibility to take part in the research. On the other hand, much effort was invested in designing and realizing an adequate sample for the focus groups and in the standardization of their implementation.
2. Focus groups, as well as any other research method, exhibit weaknesses in their recruitment phase, implementation and analysis (Bloor et al., 2001: 15). However, if well implemented, focus groups can offer a profound and relevant cross-section of group thinking connected to a certain social phenomenon, and open up

a way to new research and socio-political processes. Outcomes of focus groups, regardless of the quality of their design and implementation, do not represent opinions of a population/social group within which they were implemented. Therefore, the aforementioned “youth voice” should be taken as a metaphor. But this does not mean that the results do not portray, to a significant degree, the spectrum of opinions of the youth population about the problem of unemployment.

3. The partnership of the Croatian Youth Network and its member organizations turned out to be extremely successful, particularly in the recruitment of the targeted participants and the overall organization of the focus groups. Clear instructions in the form of the Focus group participants’ recruitment protocol (**Annex 2**), which the partners received in a timely fashion, may have contributed to that as well. Although the Protocol minimized the effects of the recruitment process being carried out by civil society organizations, it should be noted that this kind of selection may have impacted descriptions of several categories, particularly the ones which included discussions about the work of civil society organizations. The possibility of such impact was detailed in a concrete example in Chapter 9 wherein the support to unemployed young people is discussed.
4. It is important to point out that a small number of consultations with local stakeholders fulfilled their defined purpose. This is especially true for groups with unemployed and inactive young people. In this case the conversations often would boil down to informing the participants about active employment policy measures targeting youth, in spite of facilitators’ interventions, especially in cases when the invited guests came from the Croatian Employment Service. Besides this, guests often took ample time to explain in detail the scope of work of CES and its purpose. Although the meetings with local stakeholders proved very useful for observing the process of interaction and they provided valuable insight into the ways institutional stakeholders (particularly CES) communicate with young people, it should be noted that very few recommendations were created or revised through this additional consultative process. Therefore, the research team decided not to separate these recommendations because they are almost entirely identical to the ones created in the focus groups, and several conclusions which are based on observing the conversations between the stakeholders and participants are listed among the conclusions of the study.

5. Finally, we would like to point out two important remarks regarding the chapter on recommendations. Some recommendations were really concrete, whereas others only point in the general direction towards solving the problem. This inconsistency was partly caused by a substantial heterogeneity of the groups and their relatively short duration. This brings us to another reason why the final chapter is structured the way it is. That part of the study was not written in clear and neat bullets, as it is customary in most papers. Here too we chose the “story” over comprehensiveness, attempting to link the recommendations in a sensible coherent whole, and taking care that the “linking logic” does not influence meanings of ideas brought forth by our participants.

4.4. Realized sample

4.4.1. Online questionnaire

32

The questionnaire was filled out by 1041 respondents, and it was available since early December till the end of March. The majority of respondents were aged 20-24 (52.93%), while 32.8% respondents were aged 25-30. The least proportion of respondents, 14.99%, belonged to the 15-19 age group. The sample was dominated by women (72.33%) in relation to men (27.67%).

Table 1: Sample of the online consultations respondents

SEX/ GENDER	PLACE OF RESIDENCE	POSITION AT THE LABOUR MARKET
Male 27.67%	rural area: 13.54%	secondary-school student: 8.17%
Female 72.33%	small urban area (population less than 30.000): 19.31%	university-level student: 53.51%
	big urban area (population more than 30.000): 15.18%	unemployed: 21.90%

macro-regional centre (Osijek, Rijeka, Split or Zagreb): 51.74%	employed: 16.43%
---	------------------

Integral results obtained by the questionnaire, and the questionnaire itself, are presented in the publication in **Annex 3**. We would like to point out that some results were used in the introduction to the discussion of focus groups' results. The questionnaire was developed through consultations with the National Working Groups and pre-tested.

4.4.2. Focus groups

Young people are a very heterogeneous social group stratified by their socio-economic status, education, social network, etc; and they have very different starting positions when entering the labour market. However, despite the heterogeneity, Ilišin argues that "...young people are a social group which originated in the industrial society encompassing the population aged 15-30, to which the society...ascribes common social characteristics on the basis of which it defines its distinct social role and places it under a special social treatment..." (Ilišin, 1999: 69). Taking into consideration the heterogeneity of the youth population and the fact that this study does not aspire to speak about young people as a monolith group, this research principally tends to give answers to research questions posed from the perspectives of eight types of young people profiled in Table 2.

How was the sample profiled in Table 2 constructed? Based on the analysis of relevant factors which influence the position of young people at the labour market, the sample was defined and consulted with the Working Group. Concretely, we considered that the perspective of a young person who completed primary or secondary education and has no work experience, should be different from the one of a young person who has university education, since previous research show that the level of education tends to have a positive correlation with the prospects of young people at the labour market (Matković, 2009: 17-21). Similarly, we believed that the focus groups could provide to inactive persons a space for sharing the reasons which let them to their status. We also thought that, within groups with employed persons and students, the perspective of a young student who is making his or her first steps towards the labour market might differ from the one of a "veteran" who, after a prolonged period of unemployment, managed to find a job (type 7).

When defining the criteria we made sure that they separated different types clearly enough, as well as created an adequate relation between group diversity and the possibility allowing the participants to have a constructive discussion. When designing the sample it was important to make the groups heterogeneous enough for creating a discussion-inducing atmosphere, and to allow for the participants to find connections with others so they could dare to fully participate (more on the issue of homogeneity/heterogeneity of focus groups in Finch/Lewis, 2003: 190). The research team, thus, had to meet the challenge of securing a sufficient level of homogeneity in the focus groups in order for an encouraging group dynamics to develop. This goal was achieved by separating employed persons and students in one group and unemployed and inactive persons in another, assuming that the position at the labour market should function as a cohesive factor. Besides this, the process of selection of the participants strived for gender-balanced groups⁵, which was achieved to a great extent. The summary of the realized sample is presented in Scheme 1.

Table 2: Description of the realized sample and focus groups distribution

34

PARTICIPANT TYPE	DESCRIPTION	FOCUS GROUP
TYPE 1 – participants with low qualifications and no work experience, actively looking for employment	m/f, aged 15-30, completed primary or secondary education, unemployed, actively looking for employment, no work experience (officially recorded)	Unemployed and inactive

⁵ Although it is often stated that unemployment is not a sex/gender sensitive topic, there are significant differences in the factors which define positions of women and men on the labour market (for instance, parenting and child-care). In this respect, constructing gender-balanced focus groups attempted to eliminate the dominance of one of the gender's perspective on the topic.

TYPE 2 – participants with high qualifications and no work experience, actively looking for employment	m/f, aged 15-30, completed higher education, unemployed, actively looking for employment, no work experience (officially recorded)	Unemployed and inactive
TYPE 3 – victims of the economic crisis	m/f, aged 15-30, has work experience, lost employment due to the economic crisis, education level irrelevant	Unemployed and inactive
TYPE 4 – participants with fewer opportunities at the labour market	m/f, aged 15-30, unemployed, belongs to a group with fewer opportunities (Roma, disabled persons, persons leaving care, persons with criminal record...)	Unemployed and inactive
TYPE 5 – participants in education	student, m/f, aged under 25, desirably has some work experience (part-time, student job)	Employed and students
TYPE 6 – participants found employment after a short search	m/f, aged 15-30, found employment soon after (in up to 3 months) completion of education, education level irrelevant	Employed and students
TYPE 7 – participants found employment after a long search	m/f, aged 15-30, found employment after a long search (more than a year), education level irrelevant	Employed and students
TYPE 8 – participants inactive at the labour market	m/f, aged 15-30, inactive at the labour market	Unemployed and inactive

The towns where the focus groups took place were selected according to three main principles. First of all, the research design anticipated the possibility of examining differences in perceptions/experiences of young people residing in smaller or bigger areas, so the selection of the towns reflected this orientation. The research team also paid attention to the

territorial dimension so that the selected smaller towns are not situated in the same county. Finally, it was also necessary to take into consideration capacities of local partners to implement complicated activities which involved recruiting the participants and organizing the focus groups.

FOCUS GROUP LOCATION

Macro-regional centres

Zagreb
Rijeka
Split
Osijek

Smaller towns

Pula
Karlovac
Slatina
Knin

36

Focus group 1 – unemployed and inactive (types 1, 2, 3, 4 and 8)

Focus group 2 – employed and students (types 5, 6 and 7)

The planned size and structure of the focus groups with employed persons and students was 6 participants, 3 male and 3 female. On the other hand, the size and structure of the focus groups with unemployed and inactive persons was 9 participants with a desired male-female ratio 5:4 (or vice versa), which is in line with the recommended focus group size between 6 and 8 participants (Bloor et al., 2001: 26).

Out of 16 planned groups, 13 were realized in the first attempt, while three focus groups with unemployed and inactive persons had to be organized anew due to the fact that in the first attempt they did not meet the demands related to the number of participants.

The duration of the focus groups was one and a half hours. They were facilitated by a member of the MMH team, while the local partner provided assistance in logistics and note-taking. Structurally, the focus groups had four stages:

1. discussion about factors which contribute to the high youth unemployment rate in the Croatian context,
2. discussion about obstacles which young people face in the process of finding employment,
3. discussion about experiences/consequences of youth unemployment on individual/social level,
4. creating recommendations.

The protocol which describes in detail the course of implementation of the consultations (focus groups and additional conversations) is presented in Annex 4, while all the stakeholders in different towns are listed in **Annex 5**⁶.

⁶ The organizers are committed to confidentiality in relation to all the participants of this consultation process. Therefore, the annex lists only the names of the institutions and not the names of persons who represented them in the consultations.

5

5. SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS OF ONLINE CONSULTATIONS

The online consultations were carried out via a questionnaire which was available to all visitors aged 15-30 of the project website www.mladi-rade.net. This was a way they could voice their opinions about the position of young people at the Croatian labour market. The questionnaire was completed by 1041 respondents, and it was available from December till mid March. The sample realized in the online consultations was already described in the introduction. However, it is important to point out once again that the majority of respondents were students (53.51%), followed by unemployed persons (21%) and employed young people (16.43%). The online consultations focused on collecting general information about how young people perceive their and the position of their peers at the Croatian labour market. The complete questionnaire can be found in Annex 3, and this section brings a summary of the most interesting findings. In the process of online consultations, the participants had the opportunity to give their opinion on:

39

1. the position of young people at the labour market in relation to other age groups

Regardless of the high youth unemployment rates, according to 45.3% of participants in the online consultations, young people aged 18-30 still find employment relatively easier than persons aged 40-50, whereas 38.81% of respondents think that it is harder for young people to find employment than for the 30-40 age group. 59.9% think that young people find employment easier than those aged over 50. This perspective could be characterised as moderately optimistic, but it is necessary to take into account the fact that most participants were students and did not experience challenges of the labour market.

2. the perception of causes of youth unemployment

Although it is possible to list numerous factors which contribute to youth unemployment, the participants were offered a choice of the most frequently cited arguments in the unemployment debate: quality of the Croatian education system, practice of under-estimating young experts, lack of entry-level and trainee positions,

quality of the Croatian labour legislation, unwillingness of employers to invest in young people, unrealistically high expectations of young people, and the lack of skills necessary for the labour market.

A whopping **70%** of young participants singled out the “unwillingness of employers to hire young people with no work experience and to invest in their development” as the main cause of the high youth unemployment rate. 34.77% think that there are no jobs available for holders of a bachelor’s degree, while 34.68% pointed out that the “Croatian education system is of low quality and does not equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary for successfully performing job-related tasks”. This distribution of answers indicates that young people perceive **employers and the education system** as relevant factors for the problem of unemployment. Therefore it is not surprising that **55.04%** of participants think that more job-related training in the course of education would help young people find employment more easily, as well as incentives to employers for hiring young people (**53.51%**). It is disconcerting that **56.48%** of participants see **favouritism** as an important factor in landing a job in Croatia, while relevant work experience follows at 37.85%, as well as skills and competences necessary for performing job-related tasks (34.87%).

40

3. the perception of actors responsible for the high unemployment rate in Croatia

As the most responsible actors for the high unemployment rate in Croatia, young people identify the **national government** (73.10%), **employers** (34.68%) and **local governments** (31.99%).

4. the perception of the influence of the near EU accession on youth employment

The participants have **relatively optimistic** views about the influence of the EU accession on their prospects for employment. Namely, 44% of participants think that their situation at the labour market will improve, 33.24% think that the EU accession will not affect their employment prospects, while 22.74% voice their concern that it will bear negative impact on their chances for employment. On the other hand, 43.13% of participants assess their knowledge on EU opportunities as average, 36.79% assess it as unsatisfactory, and only 20.08% as satisfactory. Furthermore, the participants estimate positively the opportunity to travel and work abroad, and they think that the acquired expertise will con-

tribute to the development of Croatia (52.7%). It is interesting that exactly the same percentage of participants recognize as threat a potential mass emigration of educated young people from Croatia to more developed EU countries (52.7%). This distribution of answers points to an **ambivalent opinion about opportunities to work abroad**.

The presented data offer only an indicative insight into the opinions and attitudes of a very heterogeneous social group which in this study we call “youth”. Following chapters will bring findings based on the data collected in the focus groups, which provide better foundations for a more profound understanding of the way young people in Croatia think about unemployment.

6

6. YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT – A VIEW FROM WITHIN

Unemployment is so widely spread and its consequences indisputably greatly affect the opinions and the worldview of today's young generation. A great many people today are out of work. A great many people experienced long-term unemployment and had the opportunity to get to know well the system of state intervention directed at people who find themselves in such a position. Many of them are affected by the working status of their parents or guardians, who themselves often fail to avoid devastating consequences of unemployment and/or precariousness, which have spread their tentacles over the entire (Croatian) economy. Some young people finish their education and, after observing the current situation at the labour market, intensely explore different strategies which could lead them to their desired outcomes, and the economic context unavoidably influences them to (re)define their expectations. If they have a job, there is a big probability that have temporary employment contracts or some other type of flexible employment arrangement. The uncertainty of employment, frequently combined with jobs outside one's profession or below the acquired qualification level, and the use of active employment policy measures greatly correspond to the description of the concept of "intermediary zone". The United Nation's World Youth Report from 2003 points out that young people who find themselves in this zone get stranded "...between the worlds of employment and unemployment", and warns that the rise of the number of young people in this ever-growing zone is becoming a global trend (2003: 55). We believe that this study reflects to a great extent the influence of this trend on young people in Croatia, and that it highlights specific features of the "Croatian case".

43

It would certainly be too harsh to claim that no other generation ever has been under such economic strain like the one which is currently entering the labour market or is at the very start of their professional life. However, it is certainly safe to say that today's young people live in challenging, if not difficult times. It is also safe to presume that the influence which unemployment has on their lives has yielded an extremely rich array of experiences, opinions and social patterns which we will try to present in this study. This presentation, which we will attempt to make as systematic and readable as possible, is mainly built around quotations from the focus groups' participants. So in order to fully understand this study, it is important to understand the participants of the focus groups. We invite you to

examine their profiles once more and to think about the specific perspectives which were their starting points for discussion. Try to get inside their skin and see the reality we are about to enter through their eyes. You will be encouraged to do so also by the manner in which this part of the study is written. It mostly takes participants' positions as starting points and tries to eliminate potential "pollution" in the form of author's experiences, subjective perceptions and emotions. The goal of this part of the study is to contribute to a better understanding of the framework in which the participants position the problem of youth unemployment.

6.1. Sketching a portrait – supporting pillars of a phenomenon



Although this reference may be applicable to a certain degree to the entire study, this chapter, more than others, owes its origins to an interpretative analytical approach to public policies, characteristic to Dvora Yanow, for instance. She says that one of its strong characteristics is the focus on clarifying any vague issues which may arise in the course of interpretation of the same phenomena, structures and processes in different policy arenas. This mission is especially important in cases when differences in interpretation are not explained in everyday discourse (Yanow, 2007: 408). Our task is to examine thoroughly the meanings which young people assign to some of the structures and processes linked to the issue of youth unemployment, while trying to comprehend why discrepancies among participants arise (if they arise). We can then, on the basis of our conclusions, think about implications for creating public policies which have the capacity to adequately meet the challenges posed by the problem of youth unemployment. Our focus here is on the participants' general opinions about unemployment, whereas their concrete experiences occupy later chapters.

The analysis of the focus groups detected five dominant meta-stories which are used by the participants to explain how different actors, structures and processes affect the problem of youth unemployment. The meta-stories developed due to the fact that the participants looked at the problem from several different points of view which make up the entire picture. Each meta-story is connected to specific social constructs which link individual meta-stories into a whole. On the other hand, the meta-

stories combine different facets of the unemployment phenomenon into a unique and relatively coherent picture.

For the purpose of this study, we decided to call these meta-stories basic discourses. In this study, a discourse denotes a loosely defined context in which a discussion is positioned. This understanding comes close to the definition of American post-structuralism philosopher Judith Butler who says that discourse is "...the limit of acceptable speech or possible truth" (Butler, 1997). In this sense, the basic discourses described in this text refer to the scope of meaning which the participants use when talking about youth unemployment. It is possible that a single discourse harbours conflicting meanings which different sub-groups assign to the same aspect of unemployment. The goal of the analysis is to identify areas where interpretations of the same phenomenon match or conflict.

A discourse is shaped by its narratives. Narratives are also stories but they are marked by a lower level of abstraction and their focus on mechanisms and processes (real or imagined) which lead to the current image of a phenomenon. Regardless of the complexity of the term (see for instance: Bell, 2002), in this study a narrative is a **concrete story which tells a bigger story** (in this case, a basic discourse).

It is interesting to note that a single basic discourse can be made of more "different" narratives. In this case the discrepancy is not content-related, since it is precisely the content which serves as the main criterion for (sub-)categorisation. However, it happens that in some instances one narrative may be fluid and quite general, whereas another narrative inside the same basic discourse is much more concretely linked to a phenomenon or an institution. Some appear to be closely linked to unemployment, while others probably would never find their place in this process had the structured dialogue been more structured. Despite all our efforts, it was not possible to approach our analysis in any other manner. Ways in which young people think about many problems, and this includes unemployment, are not always susceptible to neat analytical formats, which will be visible throughout this study. Nevertheless, we think that this is precisely where the strength of this study lies, particularly of the part summarized in this chapter. We tried to be consistent in our understanding of the logic behind young peoples' opinions about different topics, and we gave our best not to predetermine topics through our facilitation plan, as well as in the accompanying analysis.

We will try to present participants' perceptions of unemployment through the position of a young person entering the labour market. He or she notices that his/her position is shaped by many influences which make up different systems. These systems are categorized as our basic discourses-

es. Narratives should be understood as descriptions of how these systems function, which, in turn, give a complete picture of the phenomenon of unemployment. It is interesting that our participants point out that the problem does not appear (only) at the moment when a young person enters the labour market. Which forces determine the fate of young people even before this crucial moment?

6.2. The state of education or of weak foundations⁷

TYPE 2: With my 5 years of studying law... I come to the office and it's like I've never even heard of law. Because the practice is totally different from the theory. Actually, to me... Everybody's telling me the same. After a year or so you're still learning the ropes. You have to start from scratch. So what causes this problem? How this came to be? It's this low-quality education system which is totally unadjusted. Rijeka, unemployed and inactive

46

The conclusion brought to us by our university-educated unemployed participant from Rijeka sets the foundation for our first basic discourse which is connected to education. Until they enter the labour market, young people are primarily marked by education. Besides teaching them how to behave and function in society, education should also equip young people with a set of tools necessary for the “world out there”. So how successful is it in doing so? If we judge by what our participant in Rijeka said, education does not necessarily give young people a good starting position.

The state of the education system is definitely recognized as one of the basic discourses which participants connect to the problem of unemployment. But what are its key determinants and how do the participants understand its inherent logic?

⁷ The quotations in this study underwent minimal content-related interventions. Most alterations refer to shortening and eliminating unnecessary parts, like sighs or buzzwords. The quotations are not proof-read. We wanted to retain their authenticity and bring closer to the reader the youth perspective, which is greatly influenced by the language used by this social group.

6.2.1. Transfer of competencies for the labour market

TYPE 6: The education system probably has its fair share in it. I mean, people graduating from universities, most universities, aren't qualified. They are not ready for work.

TYPE 7: Why aren't they qualified? If they finished university.

TYPE 6: Because the university doesn't offer them any sort of practical work.

FACILITATOR: Ok.

TYPE 7: You mean they're not motivated enough... The entire education system is...

TYPE 6: No, no... I mean they're not educated well enough.

*TYPE 5: Sure. All they offer is theoretical approach. They don't have a single day of practical work, which... A guy who graduated in economics, especially in economics... this doesn't mean that you know how to do your job. Anybody can graduate in economics nowadays. It's all about cramming. When you graduate, you're not required to know how to do anything. And you'll know absolutely nothing about business. And I finished university with seven top grades. **Karlovac, employed and students***

47

Like in Karlovac, participants from different focus groups, especially in bigger towns, share the opinion that a significant proportion of young people finish their education without the required skills, attitudes, knowledge and other personal characteristics needed for successfully performing job-related tasks in the modern economy. In brief, the participants warn that our education system does not necessarily transfer the required competences. They link this to a series of characteristics of the education system. They warn about the “lowering standards”, which some relate to the primary education “which everybody must complete”, whereas for others (particularly students) the problem of the lowering standards is linked to the “Bologna”⁸ which, in their opinion, merely “produces” graduates, not unlike the way described by a student from Rijeka:

⁸ The term refers to the process of harmonisation of the Croatian higher-education system with the requirements of the Bologna declaration, which the Croatian government adopted in 2001 and started implementing in the academic year 2005/2006.

TYPE 5: *They lowered the bar a lot. I, for one, started studying in the old..., actually not in the old system, but the first Bologna, which was a kind of a mix of the old system and the Bologna. I will finish under the new Bologna, and I had these two courses and it was... Everything actually depends on the teacher. And the department, of course. But, all in all, too many experts are produced with too little knowledge. Rijeka, employed and students*

The “Bologna” also has not lived up to its promises about employability of holders of a bachelor’s degree, whose prospects at the labour market are painted rather grimly by our participants. They are dissatisfied because the educational institutions they attend, or attended, do very little to secure practical job-related training, and when they do its quality is described as questionable, at best, because it does not provide real opportunities for acquiring relevant expert knowledge.

It is also possible to detect dissatisfaction with the quality of teaching staff. The participants often relate this to the fact that this profession is underestimated in Croatia. Moreover, according to the participants, the education system is not void of corruption and favouritism, which leads to the fact that many students get a diploma without acquiring real competences.

48

However, the participants acknowledge that the problem does not lie entirely in the education process. They notice that many of their peers who have qualifications in certain areas find it difficult to get employment, regardless of the level of their competences, which is discussed in the following paragraphs.

6.2.2. (Un)adjusted enrolment quotas

The choice of a profession, our participants claim, will greatly determine the fate of a young person at the labour market:

TYPE 7: *Regarding the education system, it’s safe to say that enrolment quotas are really high. ‘Cause, they keep saying there’re no jobs. But, if Croatian teachers are having a hard time finding a job in Slavonija and Baranja, then why do they keep enrolling 100 Croatian language students each year. Why?! Where are they going to work?! There’re no jobs. This is no longer an employers’ issue. People can’t retire at a rate at which new graduates are produced. Literally. They have to shrink the quotas... Osijek, employed and students*

The narrative about enrolment quotas, which was also more present in focus groups in bigger towns, highlighted two main dimensions. The first one relates to opinions about the reasons why educational institutions enrol “too big” a number of students who have difficulties in getting a job after graduation. The prevailing perception of the reason why this happens is the fact that this is often the main source of funding for numerous educational institutions, and this primarily refers to universities. Additionally, it is widely accepted that educational institutions in Croatia demonstrate a very low level of responsibility for their students’ future prospects, and they often do not disclose the “real truth” about employability of certain professions.

Another important dimension of the quotas narrative is connected to the debate about the core function of education, where it is possible to identify two conflicting approaches. The first one leans towards a “market-oriented” solution:

***TYPE 3:** Although I would like to point out the “low-quality and unadjusted education system”. In my opinion we should definitely have a planned education. ‘Cause there’re too many economists and other professions that are not in demand. I think this should be balanced somehow.*

49

***TYPE 3:** They should shrink the quotas...*

TYPE 3:** Yeah, definitely. Sorry. We need this and this number of workers, so we will plan and educate this and this number of young people. **Pula, unemployed and inactive

Interestingly, the focus groups in big towns often formulated a different set of opinions:

TYPE 5:** I think that, because of the high unemployment, we somehow have forgotten what the primary function of education is. Educational institutions don’t exist to employ young people but to educate them, and we all should have a right to education. This is our constitutional and democratic right. And also our right to choose freely what to study. It’s true, there’re too many lawyers and economists, both male and female. But at the end of the day, if that’s what they want to study, then they should be allowed to. **Split, employed and students

The conflicting opinions are at the very core of the dilemma of whether the education system should be adapted to market demands and to what extent. Regardless of the opposing views, the current state is perceived mainly as unsustainable and damaging to future generations leaving the education system.

The state of education was a topic recognized mainly by participants in bigger towns. They generally singled out the unsatisfactory transfer of relevant competencies and unadjusted enrolment quotas to the current needs of the labour market. But are there additional factors which affect young people even before they enter the labour market? According to our participants, there are, and somewhat surprisingly, they refer to specific characteristics of young people as a social group.

6.3. Young people as a social group: (un)fit for challenges of time

50

Young people have always been a demanding social group, for researchers, as well as those whose task is to answer their needs through their public engagement. Often it is possible to hear arguments that, due to their heterogeneity, young people do not make up a separate social group, but merely a segment of population defined by an age limit.

So it is interesting to see that in most cases the participants did not hesitate to think about young people as a separate social group with its specific characteristics:

TYPE 5: It's just that these people are totally disinterested...

TYPE 6: There's no willingness.

TYPE 5: Eighty percent of young people in Croatia are totally disinterested, just waiting for something to fall off the sky.

TYPE 7: And these people don't want to work, get it?

TYPE 5: They don't want to work. They get 600 Kuna of social benefits. Enough for going out with mates.

FACILITATOR: *Are there many young people like this? Marija, you wanted to say something?*

TYPE 5: *They're looking for a job, but at the same time praying to god that they don't find it. They're just looking for excuses.*

TYPE 5: *Yeah.*

FACILITATOR: *Tell me more about this frame of mind. What do you think how this happens?*

TYPE 5: *They know they should find a job but they're not determined enough. They're bothered by all this application-writing...*

TYPE 6: *This might've been true before, but not anymore. People nowadays are really looking for a job but they can't find it. A friend of mine applied to more than 30 positions last month and he can't find a job. **Knin, employed and students***

Discussions like this were quite common in a many focus groups, especially those with employed young persons and students. It is also very interesting to note the way the participants in the above quotation, when speaking about young people – a social group they belong to as well, actually describe unemployed young people. As we are about to see, within this discourse, “young people” are predominantly described in negative colours which points to the existence of a certain stigma which is closely linked to the status of (long-term) unemployment.

51

6.3.1. Mentality of (unemployed) young people

Mentality of (unemployed) young people is recognized as a relevant theme which is often linked by our participants, particularly employed persons and students, with the problem of unemployment. The term mentality, according to the Farlex online dictionary, denotes:

1. the state or quality of mental or intellectual ability;
2. a way of thinking; mental inclination or character.

The way our participants understand mentality encompasses both definitions, although they tend to emphasize the second one – a “frame of mind” by which unemployed young people contribute to their own difficult position. The following paragraphs will portray the most relevant

elements of the mentality of (unemployed) young people, as seen primarily by our employed participants and students.

It appears that a big chunk of the problem stems from what some participants consider unreal expectations:

TYPE 6: *Well, OK. Don't do the job. But then don't complain that you're unemployed and there's no work. No. Don't say that. 'Cause we all need some motivation, or like he said, we need someone to bring everything on a platter. Someone should come and promise him, "Listen, you work like this for six months and then I'll give you a raise." In this case he might take it on. But why not just get going? 'Cause you have no job? 'Cause you complain all the time? Well, you should just get going. Nobody ever went from university directly to the top. Nobody.*

FACILITATOR: *Of course.*

TYPE 5: *There was this interesting survey done at The Faculty of Engineering and Computing in Zagreb. They asked a group of juniors, one year till graduation, what they expected. This Faculty has (...) one of the strongest in Croatia, even comparable to abroad, for its students. They get offered jobs right after graduation. Anyways, this survey they did, most of the students thought they would get executive positions right away, minimum 2000 euro salaries, company cars, planes, condos... And who knows what else. Rijeka, employed and students*

52

Besides the problem that many young people persist in the paradigm of a “secure and well-paid job”, the participants also identified other negative traits. They perceive them as lazy, lacking in initiative, being used to somebody else “fixing them a job”, and likely to shift the responsibility to “others”. They always expect a tad more than they realistically can get, thus often legitimizing the attitude that there are no “right jobs”. The participants detected more problems: young people are not risk-takers, they tend to give up easily on their goals and they lack awareness about their own future prospects. Employed persons and students often pointed out that the culture of public service is not very prominent among young people in Croatia which contributes to the fact that they are not able to articulate their needs in a manner which could lead to positive change. Often they are not aware of the need for continuing education which can negatively affect their competitiveness.

This type of opinion certainly did not remain uncontested. This is what an employed participant from Zagreb had to say about it:

FACILITATOR: *Mhm. Young people are inactive. (WRITING DOWN)*

TYPE 6: *I'd like to, this... complaint. I've heard a lot about this complaint that young people are inactive, but I don't think it's universally true. 'Cause I think there're some young people who are inactive and would be inactive one way or the other. Just like there're inactive children or inactive adults. I think it's more about disappointment, when you finish university you don't get a chance to work in your profession. It doesn't have to be extremely well-paid, but at least paid enough so you don't feel totally under-valued doing a job. Zagreb, employed and students*

Does the described “mentality” refer to most of unemployed young people or to a minority of them? Is there such a thing like the “mentality of young people” which contributes to their socio-economic position? How is it that some young people are aware of it, others are not, and some even deny it? Although this study does not offer explicit answers to these questions, we believe that following chapters offer them a clearer context.

53

6.3.2. The influence of the starting point on available opportunities

We have already mentioned the issue of young peoples' unrealistic expectations and placed it within the mentality narrative. However, is it only the mentality which influences the readiness of young people to “adjust” their expectations? A valuable opinion comes from Pula:

TYPE 7: *I would work. I mean, I've had all sorts of jobs in my life. Really, everything. I would work, of course. I mean, if I had a kid, I'd drop out of university, drop out of everything, and go and work in a supermarket.*

TYPE 6: *OK, but say you don't have a kid, say you graduate and start looking for a job and...*

TYPE 7: *I'd do the same for sure. I would. I wouldn't wait for 5 years, I'd work somewhere else. I'd go there and say OK ...*

TYPE 6: *Yeah, but most people with a university diploma say, “A supermarket? No way. It's like...”*

TYPE 7: *No. It's not like I'm categorical about it, I don't take it as a life goal. It's only...*

TYPE 6: *Temporary, till you find something better. Pula, employed and students*

Most participants recognize other circumstances which influence the choice of strategies that young people might employ when they enter the labour market. Their common denominator might be the “starting point”, which, besides the responsibility for children and family quoted above, refers to many other factors.

A young person, according to our participants, is greatly conditioned by his or her community. A level of collective solidarity encourages families to support their unemployed members, which may lead to the lack of initiative to find employment. On the other hand, growing up in a family which values and nurtures individual responsibility may encourage a young person to keep his or her expectations realistic. Place of residence is also factored as an important element of “community”. The participants often note that bigger towns offer more opportunities for young people, but also that living in bigger areas is not equally available to everyone:

54

TYPE 3: *I've thought about it already. But if I get paid there 4000 Kuna, that's not enough for a living.*

FACILITATOR: *Mhm.*

TYPE 3: *It's barely enough for a mere survival. And it's still a burden to my parents. It's like I'm still a student, when they used to support me. It's not something I see for myself.*

FACILITATOR: *I see.*

TYPE 3: *I'll never get work experience, have a great job with a pay that's enough for getting by. Realistically, that's not happening. Slatina, unemployed and inactive*

Additionally, the availability of opportunities for young people is often conditioned by the degree of education and work experience. The participants notice that a higher degree of both tends to result in less willingness to accept sub-standard employment outside one's profession.

Finally, corruption and favouritism are also recognized as relevant factors which guide young people's decisions. If there is hope that a job may be “fixed”, young people are more likely to wait longer for a job they “deserve”.

6.3.3. (Ir)relevance of job-searching skills

Discussions about skills required for job-searching, and to which extent they can affect young peoples' prospects at the labour market, were often very heated and dynamic. This narrative was most present in groups with employed persons and students organized in bigger towns. In most cases, the debate about job-searching skills produced a very interesting polarisation, often among participants in a same group. One side is presented by our participants from Split:

***TYPE 5:** Young people don't really get the need for continuing education. This attitude "I don't need a resume. I don't want to write it..." This is a problem for our future economy, 'cause this is something that will be... These young people will be on our backs, 'cause soon they will no longer be young. And they will soon become the people whom we will have to feed, we who work. Maybe this is not really an OK attitude... But having 20-25 years and thinking that you don't need a resume 'cause nobody's going to look at it anyway. Maybe it's not too...*

TIP 6: Optimistic. Split, employed and students

55

Some participants argue that many young people do not use enough the available job-searching tools and this has a negative impact on their prospects at the labour market. It is also interesting that this opinion predominates among the participants who have not fully entered the labour market. However, they also recognize that there is another side to the story about job-searching tools. The main protagonist of the above quotation, a student from Split, when asked to which degree can the skills actually help when there are very few jobs available, considered the limitations of this factor:

***TYPE 5:** I know this person who, in the last three months, sent her resume to, like, 150 addresses, by mail and e-mail. She got some 20 automatic e-mail replies and maybe 2 proper e-mails. They said they're not currently looking for anyone. Split, employed and students*

However, some participants go even further in rejecting job-searching skills as a relevant factor in today's conditions. A student from Zagreb formulates his position by questioning the relevance of job-searching skills, using the current state of economy as his argument:

FACILITATOR: Yes, yes. But what do you think? How do the rest of you understand this argument?

TYPE 6: That young people in Croatia don't know how to look for a job?

FACILITATOR: Yes.

TYPE 5: It's one very lousy excuse of those who are supposed to be responsible for... That young people can prosper. It's purely rhetoric...

FACILITATOR: So you don't think at all that some skills are important in helping a person find a job?

TYPE 5: Maybe in some other circumstances...

FACILITATOR: Which other circumstances?

TYPE 5: If there were more jobs available. More ways to find a job. In our case, you can look all you want and have all the high quality standards in the world, but you're not going to find a job. **Zagreb, employed and students**

56

Job-searching skills – a relevant factor or just another mechanism for shifting responsibility to young people for their difficult position: this is the range of opinions of our participants in the focus groups. Nevertheless, this part will be very interesting in relation to the section of the study which focuses on obstacles, where very few participants of the focus groups with unemployed and inactive persons recognize their insufficient skills as a significant barrier to their future employment! All creators of current and future active employment policy measures should definitely pay attention to this fact.

Young people enter the labour market from different starting points, with a more or less adequate set of tools acquired through different kinds of education. Although we tried to direct the discussion towards the topic of the “labour market”, the participants often managed to broaden the concept and speak about the problem of youth unemployment in the context of “Croatian economic conditions”. The following paragraphs offer a view of how young people perceive economic prospects and their influence on youth unemployment.

6.4. Croatian economic conditions: a pessimistic diagnosis

By the term “economic conditions” in this study we refer to the general “health” of the Croatian economy, which the participants consider important for young peoples’ prospects at the labour market. Our participants’ “diagnosis” is related to the general state of economy which is reflected on the labour market. However, the most commonly recognized element of the labour market refers to employers’ practices, which our participants often see as unjust. This was the basis for the second dominant narrative of this discourse.

6.4.1. The general state of economy

“Croatia is not currently in crisis; Croatia is permanently in crisis”, says one group of participants ironically describing the economic conditions in Croatia. It appears that they share this view with Ivo Družić, professor at the Faculty of Economics and Business in Zagreb, who warns that in 2010 Croatia had some 200000 less employees than in the mid 80s (Družić, 2012: 88). Družić also claims that this loss should be seen in the context of a wider trend of a stabilization policy which, from the early 80s on, has limited the growth of the Croatian economy. This trend has led not only to a negative average annual rate of employment growth of -0.04% in the period between 1980 and 2010, but it also has changed the employment structure – there has been a significant loss in jobs in sectors which produce added value. This loss has been substituted (partially) by an increased employment in the national and local governments, which mainly only redistributes this added value (Družić, 2012: 98). The participants of the focus groups belong to a generation which is perhaps too young to remember the times before the reduction of the Croatian production potential, but they can very well see its remnants and speak about it with a certain melancholy:

57

TYPE 3: Let's see. Let's stick to the numbers. Đuro Đaković [a steel factory], 15000 employees. OLT [a steel factory], how many? Let's say ten thousand. (...) DIN from Đurđenovac [a wood-processing plant]. The entire town will die out because of it. When we look at it realistically, what is there in Đur-

denovac? Three stores. And where do we get the money to shop in these stores? What else do we have? These are some of the biggest factories in the region which employed some 50-60-70 thousand people. When you look at it, it's basically the entire population of Osijek. If they worked. The 4 factories. Just look at it: leather production, the matches factory, all gone, like you said.
Osijek, unemployed and inactive

TYPE 7: *Karlovac is a very interesting town in this respect. I think it used to be one of the most industrialized towns in Yugoslavia. Everything was here. There was the army; one part was here because of the army. But people stayed here because of work. I mean, take Jugoturbina [a pumps and engines factory], for example. People worked in three shifts. It took 40 buses to transport people to work in a single shift. So, how many people is that. In just one shift. Plus the people who drove their own cars. This company issued a world standard. It is still used nowadays. And I don't even have to speak about its qualities. I don't understand why, regardless of the situation in Croatia, we couldn't sustain something the entire world appreciated... ŽČ was the world's only producer of nails for... For horses... For horse shoes. And it also went bust. What, there're no more horses in the world?*
Karlovac, employed and students

58

Similar opinions were present in most focus groups, **regardless of the size of the town or the employment status of the participants**, which only adds to their importance. But does everybody think that the loss of industrial production necessarily means fewer jobs? It appears not. Some think that jobs are there and the problem lies somewhere else:

FACILITATOR: *So what do you, young hopes, think?*

TYPE 5: *For instance, unemployment is sky-high in the country so young people... But that's not true, there are jobs available. Maybe not in your profession. If you graduate, maybe you're not going to find a job in your profession. But there're jobs for sure. It's true. I go to the Employment Service every month.*
Slatina, employed and students

Nevertheless, most participants think that there are no jobs. They point out that obtaining a diploma in professions which up until recently meant a "secure" job, is no longer a guarantee that a young person will not go through the experience of prolonged unemployment. They also note that the reality of the Croatian labour market is such that even (very) poorly paid jobs are often unavailable to young people:

TYPE 1: *I was once at an interview for a job. It was me and two other people, 40 year-olds. The pay was 1800 Kuna. It was ridiculous to me that the entire country was in this situation. That I and two 40 year-olds should fight over a 1800-kuna job. It's absolutely absurd. Split, unemployed and inactive*

But it seems that this is not the only “absurdity” which our participants relate to the general state of the Croatian economy. As an example, we provide an intervention by an employed participant from Rijeka who thinks that the upcoming pensions reform will not bring anything good to young people who are about to enter the labour market:

FACILITATOR: *Mario, what do you mean when you say politics? Explain it to me a bit.*

TYPE 6: *Well, firstly, young people are looking for jobs, right? But they keep raising the retirement age. There's no shift. There're no people who would retire and leave their positions to young people to prove themselves there or somewhere else. Like Linić [the current finance minister] recently said, “If Social Democrats win the elections, the retirement age goes up to 67 years.” He blurted this out in public. And that's it. He thinks it's great. But it's not great. It's not great because the longer you keep older people employed, there will be less jobs for young people. OK, there'll always be work. Maybe, I don't know, today is... Today it's really awful because of this problem. And it really is a problem. Because if you keep a person, for example, in 3. Maj [a shipyard in Rijeka]... They ask 65 year-olds, who have the right to retire, who are ready for it, “Do you want to retire?” “No, I want to keep working.” Rijeka, employed and students*

59

It appears that young people's specific perspective allows them to differentiate between “short-term and long-term”. They warn that some short-term moves can cause negative consequences in future, in the same manner that ignoring the need for urgent intervention in relation to those which focus on future development, may have negative impacts on the Croatian economy. In any case, the current state of economy is perceived as desperate, and it is somewhat surprising that the narrative about the importance of industrial production is so wide-spread among the participants who, according to conventional opinion, live in a “post-industrial society”.

6.4.2. (Unjust) practices of Croatian employers

The participants, **regardless** of the town size and the focus group they participated in, are generally dissatisfied by practices of Croatian employers. They primarily criticize frequent non-transparent recruitment practices which refer to employee selection based on favouritism, where the key factors still remain family relations and political connections. They also note that advertising a job does not always imply a sincere will of an employer to hire the best candidate and that criteria often get tailored to meet the profile of an already selected candidate:

***TYPE 6:** Firstly, in 90 percent of advertised job vacancies it's questionable if anyone ever gets the job, 'cause they want someone particular to take the job immediately. It's not necessarily the connections, I mean, I would do the same if I worked in a company and I knew this somebody's kid who has a degree I need. And I've known this kid, I've known him for five-six years. So I take this kid and I don't advertise the job. And all these vacancies, they have all sorts of weird conditions, like 17-month work experience. So weird, so it's...*

***TYPE 5:** Clear that it's fixed.*

***TYPE 7:** Everything's clear right away. Rijeka, employed and students*

60

The “list of sins” which the participants attribute to Croatian employers is varied and comprehensive, and most refer to various ways of “cutting corners” on the expense of one’s own employees. The list features the practice of deceiving employees who are lead to believe that all the taxes and benefits related to their employment are being paid, when in fact they are not; and frequent cases of employees not being paid their wages regularly. All this often happens with a taciturn blessing of the state which keeps tolerating such practices. The participants also note that Croatian employers tend to (ab)use temporary employment contracts and other types of flexible employment arrangements (in line with the current European trends). The following quotation almost perfectly describes the aforementioned intermediary zone concept and the role of the employer in its creation (and spreading):

***TYPE 6:** When he graduated he got a job in a company. He worked for peanuts. After 10 months he got a new job and moved on. A bigger salary, of course. They gave him a new contract. For the duration of 3 months. Great. He came there and he said to himself, “I have to work hard to prove myself.”*

*This makes sense, so he could get a permanent job. After 3 months, they gave him a new contract, again for 3 months. And he says, "This money that I get, with all the work that I do, it's simply not enough. I stay overtime. Sometimes I have 3 hours overtime a day. I work weekends. Sometimes they call me during the night. For an intervention or something." So after the six months they gave him a new 1-month contract. **Osijek, employed and students***

Situations like this increase participants' discontent and cause them to believe that employers do not appreciate young people's efforts, and constantly prevent them from completing their transition into the labour market, and from adjusting their needs and life styles accordingly.

Besides the problems connected to various non-transparent practices and favouritism and the disregard for employees' rights, the participants tend to criticize expertise and business culture of Croatian employers. Some claim that employers usually do not know what they really need. Often they look for an employer who can "do it all" and they seldom encourage expertise and excellence in their own businesses. Several focus groups highlighted the problem of discrimination on the basis of sex, physical disability or life-style (openly commenting earrings on men or visible tattoos) in job interviews. But what perhaps irritates the participants the most is the lack of professional business communication, which they consider to be an indicator of elementary business culture:

61

TYPE 3:** Let's not forget the disregard for business culture. If you send your resume to a company which has a person in charge of receiving resumes, and this person makes 4000-5000 Kuna a month. The least this person could do is say, "Thank you for sending us your resume." And that's it. These are the things companies should pay attention to. 'Cause this makes an impression about the company you're applying to. About how it treats its employees. **Split, unemployed and inactive

Finally, it is interesting to see the perspective of a participant from Karlovac who has experience in running a business of his own, taking into consideration that the profile of former or current employers was not present in the focus groups. His opinions indicate that the process of hiring a new employee can be radically different from an employer's perspective:

TYPE 7:** It's a very specific situation and I have to start from the beginning. I was running a glass&plastic vessels production and repair business. Until last year. I was 22 when I started it. This is a business for which there is no school, no training, no nothing. You have to learn it by doing. And whomever I employed, even a naval engineer, he would know only the theory, and he would be as useful to me as the next person who knew nothing whatsoever about the job. I had to invest time in this person. Whoever it was. So, what was the line between "hired and not hired"? The experience I had with these people. Actually, what mattered to me was who was ready to learn and give all they got. To become the person I needed for the job. **Karlovac, employed and students

There is no doubt that most employers would justify their positions and actions by "specific" circumstances. In this sense, the dominant narrative brought forth by our participants about the practices of Croatian employers can be considered indicative. But for a better understanding of the practices of Croatian employers, it is necessary to examine in detail the other side of the coin.

62

The participants perceive the economic conditions in the country as extremely unfavourable to young people at the start of their professional life. However, is there a remedy for the situation when the economy does not deliver the desired results? It appears, in this case, that activities of the state take on a more prominent role. The following discourse relates to the work of state institutions which the participants recognize as relevant in the youth unemployment debate.

6.5. Institutional practices: a gap between the reality and the needs

Interpretation of the meaning which the participants attribute to the "role of the state" represents one of the biggest challenges of this study. On one hand, the participants intensely debated the ways in which the entire state apparatus influences the problem of youth unemployment. On the other hand, a narrative about one of state institutions – the Croatian Employment Service (CES) – dominated over the entire discourse. So we decided to build one narrative around what experts broadly defi-

ne as “state intervention”, and another specifically linked to the work of CES. In the latter we will attempt to focus on the general remarks about the work of the institution, whereas more concrete examples will be dealt with in the chapter on obstacles and support.

6.5.1. The state: support or obstacle?

TYPE 7: This has to do, generally speaking, with adopting laws which could encourage production, or protect workers’ rights. Or simplify the hiring procedures for employers. Today I’ve read in the papers that it’s no longer going to be possible to pay out worker’s wages without paying all the taxes and benefits, which hasn’t been the case so far. So a colleague of mine asks me what I think about this. Considering the current situation... With the state, employed and unemployed people, employers... I think that at the moment this could lead to new layoffs. Am I right or not? We’ll see. Karlovac, employed and students

Much like this young participant from Karlovac who found employment after a long search, other employed and unemployed participants in focus groups in smaller towns put the topic of state intervention on the agenda of the youth unemployment debate. This group of participants offers a predominantly negative perception of the current labour legislation, which is mostly founded on their experiences or those of their peers. Some argue that Croatian laws are merely “empty words” and they express their concern over their violations. Others think the problem lies in the fact that the quality of implementation is lacking, highlighting the role of corrupt state officials. Along with political corruption, the participants criticize the frequent problem of “doing favours” based on friendly or family relations, with the purpose of taking advantage of various opportunities offered by state measures and other interventions. The participants claim that these practices are present even at the lowest administrative levels. Unlike their peers from small towns, the participants from macro-regional centres referred less to the quality of employment public policies (or the lack thereof), and tended to emphasize cases of “abuse” of active employment policy measures available to employers/young people:

TYPE 8: *Well I don't really know. They told me something at the Employment Service. I've been registered with the Employment Service for over a year and there are some measures. I don't know what they're called. And I don't even know if it exists any more, but I know there was this one measure. Actually, they called me to apply for a job at the brewery just because of this measure. It's, I don't know, the state pays your wages for a year. Or something like this. I don't know.*

TYPE 1: *The state pays 1600 Kuna.*

TYPE 2: *It pays 1600 Kuna, health and social insurance.*

TYPE 8: *Yeah, there used to be this measure.*

TYPE 2: *Then you get fired so they can hire another one for whom they get 1600 Kuna and who will work for them for free. **Osijek, unemployed and inactive***

This narrative is mainly characterized by dissatisfaction caused by incompetency and the unwillingness of the state to create “general preconditions” for solving the problem of youth unemployment. However, most participants focus their attention to the work of a state institution through which all institutional practices connected to youth unemployment are most clearly manifested.

64

6.5.2. Work of the Croatian Employment Service

Quality of work of the Croatian Employment Service was, expectedly, was one of the hottest topics in the focus groups with unemployed and inactive persons, although it was often tackled in the groups with employed persons and students as well. The work of CES was mainly discussed from a client's perspective, which is not altogether surprising because most of the participants at some point used its services.

The CES narrative was dominated by dissatisfaction of former and current clients. Young people expect from CES concrete help and quality information about potential jobs. However, most think that CES merely “gets them through the system”. Instead of obtaining tangible support, they only get drawn further into the world of unemployment, as recounted by an employed participant from Slatina who found a job after a long search:

TYPE 7: *'Cause I really think that... That it's questionable the way some people search for a job and it's very important to let them know. People who literally don't know a thing about job-searching. I think they should be trained. And that's primarily the job of the Employment Service. Which, in my opinion... I mean, I honestly can't say... I got, in a year, while there was still a bunch of job vacancies, I got called from the Employment Service just once. They called me once because there was this job opening in Virovitica. So a person comes there. "Good afternoon." They stamp your unemployment card. "Good-bye." There's nothing... I mean... Nobody's telling you anything.*
Slatina, employed and students

The aforementioned dimension of "getting people through the system" is often accompanied by the perception that the work of CES is all about "numbers" and not the real needs of its clients:

TYPE 2: *I think, really, that their work is best described by the first sentence I heard when I came to a counselling session. And the sentence was "You don't have to be registered with the Employment Service."*

TYPE 3: *Yeah. Exactly. Less people registering would make their statistics look better.*

65

TYPE 3: *That's the first sentence. I mean, I registered with CES so they could help me find a job. I, as a young person, try to find a job through them, 'cause it's the thing they do, and the first sentence I hear is "You don't have to be registered with us."*

TYPE 3: *Honestly, they don't care at all.* **Rijeka, unemployed and inactive**

The participants often speak ironically about the services of CES, questioning the engagement and the expertise of its employees. A quotation from a long-term unemployed participant from Split best exemplifies this:

TYPE 3: *I came to the Employment Service. I'm a food technologist, but I worked as an administrator and cashier. So I wanted to undergo professional training through CES. I found this course for administrators. And I came to my counsellor. "Good day." "Good day." She said, "Hurry up. It's ten to 11. It's my break." And she takes out her lunch. What now? She stamped my card and sent me off. So I went. I came back a second time, and she goes again... And I tell her about the course. "But you don't have the necessary qualifications, you must have a diploma in administration." And I tell her, "If I had*

a diploma in administration, then I wouldn't be looking into this, would I." So she puts it on a piece of paper. She had written it down 4 times, to let me know if something comes up. That's how they get rid of people. Split, unemployed and inactive

Consequently, the participants often question the purpose of CES as an institution. However, in doing so, very few of them take into account a wider socio-economic context. A university-educated unemployed participant from Slatina is one of the few who, contrary to the dominant narrative, considers the current limitations of CES:

TYPE 2: *Yeah, but this probably means I should be furious because they can't find me a job. They can't find me a job 'cause there're no jobs. Evidently, no jobs. For the 10 of us, or how many we are. I mean, my counsellor can't create me a job. When there are none. They can offer me, like they did to my friend in Zagreb who also graduated in political science, to train for a forklift truck driver. He has obtained an MA so he could operate a forklift. And he can't even do that without training. 'Cause he doesn't know how to operate a forklift. Slatina, unemployed and inactive*

66

The CES narrative reflects mistrust in operational capabilities of the institution, and sometimes in its employees' motivation and good intentions, which is in stark contrast with findings of some of the recent, mainly quantitative, research (Crnković Pozaić/Meštrović, 2010:6). This image is often substantiated by concrete negative examples of practices, which will be dealt with in more detail in the obstacles chapter. Regardless, this study indicates that the current work of CES in most cases does not succeed in reaching young people as a target group which points to a need for a strategic approach to this issue.

The participants are mostly dissatisfied with the way state institutions react to the problem of youth unemployment. However, along with the general discontent with the role of the state, another interesting set of topics appeared in the focus groups. It connects in a relatively coherent whole the participants' opinions about the role of its inevitable *alter ego* – society.

6.6. The state of society: a race to the bottom?

Most of our participants recognized that values, norms, structures and processes taking place in the society they live in have a considerable impact on their position at the labour market. Simply put, this discourse examines the way in which the society recognizes youth unemployment as a relevant problem, the solutions it creates, and, perhaps most importantly, how it perceives the reasons why some societal solutions are chosen over others. The meta-story of the state of society is divided almost imperceptibly in two main supporting strains. The first one relates to the relationship between older and younger generations, and the other to the general situation in society. Its description is almost inseparable from the discourse about young people as a social group, revealed in Chapter 6.3.

6.6.1. The generation gap: “children of socialism” vs. “children of transition”

67

By examining the complete set of collected data, it becomes apparent that the narrative about the generation gap was not as present as some other narratives, but in several instances it gave an impressive account of mechanisms which, according to the participants' perspective, impacts the way in which older generation perceive youth, particularly unemployed young people.

So, for instance, many unemployed participants from bigger towns note that the professional life of young people often gets evaluated from the point of view of an extinct system in which most of their parents had grown up, which they generally refer to as “socialism”. This situation is often seen as a source of considerable pressure, and some, like this unemployed participant from Split, observe more subtle consequences of this kind of perception:

TYPE 3: There's a perception that young people don't want to work. We all have parents who grew up during socialism, they got married when they were 18-19-20 and had a kid by the time they were 21. They got a job, bought a place of their own. And then they have their 27-year-old son living with them. In a situation like this, in a system like this, none of the newspapers write about why he's unemployed, only about the number of cars we smashed at a

football match, how many of us drink in a park after 11 PM, and this sort of thing. So the entire system is turning against us, 'cause we're... 'Cause they're in a position to do so. 'Cause for them it's just easier. Split, unemployed and inactive

Can the generation gap influence older generations to rationalize to an extent the high youth unemployment and the shifting of blame onto young people? This study did not come to a conclusive answer to this question, but some of the opinions of our employed participants from smaller towns are highly indicative. Some warn that many “children of socialism” do not understand at all the amount of obstacles which today’s younger generations must face. Perhaps the most illustrative example comes from a focus group in Pula:

***TYPE 5:** Now you have a pretty big problem. The way I see it... My dad says, “Why can’t you solve this housing issue?” And I tell him, “OK. Wait. Let me ask you this. What’s the monthly payment for your home loan?” And then he says, “180 Kuna a month.” And that’s the end of the discussion.*

(LAUGHTER)

***TIP 5:** 4500 Kuna.*

***TIP 5:** My brother, when he was buying, he took half of the amount on loan and the rest he paid in cash. If you want to buy something, you have to save. Still he has to pay 2000 a month. And half of the apartment was paid out in cash. Whereas our father pays 180 Kuna a month. And that’s it. The end of the story. Pula, employed and students*

In relation to this, the following question arises: to which extent could the older generations have prepared young people for the challenges they face today. An employed participant from Karlovac who found a job after a long search appears to have an answer to this, and he is not alone:

***TYPE 7:** I don’t know which category should I put this in, but the general level of interest among young people to find a job stems from the way their parents raised them. Our parents, grand-parents, great grand-parents, people around us, they have a totally different way of thinking about the old system which will never come back. So I think that upbringing of young people... It creates this conflict in their heads. In most cases. 'Cause they think, “Yeah. These are my parents. They told me something really good. And it should work*

well.” But the system from 25-30 years ago can’t work today. Karlovac, employed and students

The participants obviously think that legacy of the older generations, reflected in young people’s upbringing, often limits their capacity to understand problems of younger generations, as well as to prepare young people to overcome them. But does this apply to the entire society?

6.6.2. The influence of social climate

Social climate is a term intuitively “easy to understand”, but much harder to define, and an inevitable segment of every definition is “collectiveness” (Adriaanse, 2005: 4-5). For the purposes of this study, social climate denotes a collective or, more precisely, aggregate social “mood”. The participants think that the general social climate does not encourage the development of young people, as well as opportunities available to them in Croatia. This narrative was mostly present in groups with employed persons and students. A negative trait of the Croatian society most frequently perceived by our participants is the fact that expertise is not valued and that promotion at work is often linked to favouritism and corruption. A participant from Knin offers such a perspective:

69

***TYPE 6:** It’s not only this, but I would like to come back to this claim about experts because it really bothers me. In order to hire people and to keep them in subordination, you have to be a first-class manager (...) hires second-class employees...*

***FACILITATOR:** Sorry, I didn’t understand this...*

***TYPE 6:** It’s dangerous to surround yourself with clever people.*

***FACILITATOR:** You think that’s the situation in Croatia ...*

***TYPE 6:** Sure... Knin, employed and students*

They point to the lack of collective consciousness needed for initiating substantial socio-political changes, which often leads people to think that it is always “someone else’s fault”. Precisely because of this most participants see the Croatian society as “conservative and change-resistant”. An interesting point of view comes from an inactive participant from Zagreb, who is planning to leave the country:

TYPE 8: *Although I said many times that the government should change this and that, the problem is that everybody's so lethargic around here. You see a situation and automatically say, "OK. This is how it is and I can't do anything about it." I saw it a million times when I was studying. I'd speak to my colleagues, "Ah. See, the situation is like this and that's it. What can we do?" "But in 20-30 years when we see a generation shift..." I don't think that makes sense. Nothing's going to change, not even in 20-30 years, not until we make it change, not until you ask the government to change it. Until you say, "I've had enough. You have a responsibility to make it happen. And if you don't, we'll have to do something about it." And not just keep saying; "Ah, see, everywhere's the same. The entire country is screwed and there's nothing we can do about it." Zagreb, unemployed and inactive*

Another important characteristic of the social climate in Croatia perceived by the participants in groups with employed persons and students is the relationship between "government" and "citizens". The above quotation exemplifies the manner in which the participants think about the citizens' lack of initiative. However, a reverse mechanism is also recognized. An opinion of an employed participant from Karlovac:

70

TYPE 7: *I'm afraid we're heading towards this, unless something drastically changes. And I would really want it, for the sake of all young people... Not only young people, but everyone who wants to take part and change the society for the better. They should be given an opportunity to do so. I don't think it's nice of us to say that the whole responsibility lies with the people in charge of the state. But still, it's true. And it's even worse of those in power to say, "You're all stupid. You're all lazy. You're all pathetic." Karlovac, employed and students*

Finally, negative image of the Croatian social climate is completed by the legacy of the 90s war, a topic predominantly recognized by the groups with unemployed and inactive participants, especially in Split. Along with the aforementioned botched process of privatisation which, according to the participants, caused much damage, many point out that this period caused many problems which the society is still not able to tackle adequately. An example comes from a participant from Split:

TYPE 3: *When the war ended, all those boys, 25-30 years old, who were all at their prime, they had them retired. Now they are an additional burden to the state, and they could've worked. That's an important factor too.*

TYPE 8: Fine, but I think these people are ill. That's why they're retired.

TYPE 3: But they could've had a job, sweeping the streets or something. No, no, no... But what's really going on?

TYPE 8: I'm sure there're retired people who...

*TYPE 3: When you're doing nothing, you keep coming back to how your buddy died in the war. But when you have a job you don't get to think about it, 'cause you're busy thinking about your work. That's how you, in a way, get rid of your demons. **Split, unemployed and inactive***

If you have an impression that the narrative about social climate somehow mirrors the narrative about the mentality of young (unemployed) people (6.3.1.), you may be entirely right. The evident compatibility between the two chapters clearly illustrates the claim of sociologist Zlatko Miliša that all social anomalies are best reflected in young people (Miliša, 2012). If this is true, we all must ask ourselves about the repercussions of another frequently quoted saying about young people as the “future of our society”. If we combine the image of the society seen through the eyes of our participants and the descriptions of other basic discourses connected to youth unemployment, we come to realize that there is little reason for optimism. But what concrete consequences does youth unemployment bring, according to our participants? This is the topic of the following chapter.

Scheme 2: Overview of the basic discourses and their narratives connected to the problem of youth unemployment

72

YOUTH UNEMPL OYMENT

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

- The general state of economy
- (Un)just practices of Croatian employers

THE STATE OF SOCIETY

- The generation gap
- The influence of social climate

THE STATE OF EDUCATION

- Transfer of competencies
- (Un)adjusted enrolment quotas

73

INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES

- The state: support or obstacle?
- Work of the Croatian Employment Service

YOUNG PEOPLE AS A SOCIAL GROUP

- Mentality of (unemployed) young people
- (Ir)relevance of job-searching skills
- The influence of the starting point on available opportunities

7

7. CONSEQUENCES OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT: PROBLEMS OF TODAY, AN IMAGE OF TOMORROW?

The participants of the focus groups often recognized different consequences of unemployment, and discussions in some groups were filled with memorable accounts and explanations for various consequences. In line with the categories described in following paragraphs, we noticed that the discussion about consequences had two important dimensions. The first dimension discriminates between consequences on the individual and social level. The second dimension is temporal: the participants tended to differentiate between the consequences connected to the current situation or immediate future, and those which will be manifested in a more distant future. These dimensions yielded the typology of social consequences in Table 3.

75

According to the typology, consequences of youth unemployment are numerous and they are manifested on different levels. On the individual level it is possible to say that the description corresponds to the concept of “existential affliction” presented in a study entitled *Unemployed Youth and Social Exclusion in Europe: Learning for Inclusion* (Warner/Wildemeersch/Jansen, 2005: xi). In the short-term it is manifested through various types of psycho-physical problems, and in the long-term it has negative impacts on life chances of a young person. On the other side, our participants think that youth unemployment contributes to a society “racing to the bottom”. In the short-term it is manifested in the boiling social discontent, which can become public unless concrete opportunities for positive social change become available. In the long-term, it is manifested in the loss of the overall social potential.

Table 3: Typology of consequences of youth unemployment

LEVEL/TEMPORAL DIMENSION	SHORT-TERM	LONG-TERM
Individual level	Psycho-physical problems	Negative perception of life chances
Social level	Spread of social discontent	Loss of social potential

In the following paragraphs you will see descriptions of all types of consequences, starting from the problems on the individual level and them moving on to the social problems.

7.1. Psycho-physical problems

76

***TYPE 3:** This is really... When you're unemployed, especially if you're out of work for several years, it really affects the way you think. You start thinking you're incompetent and you start wondering if you're sane at all. 'Cause... You don't really know. You lose your identity. You're confused. You don't know what to do. You start doubting your abilities. Zagreb, unemployed and inactive*

The perspective of our long-term unemployed participant from Zagreb was very much present in the groups with unemployed and inactive persons, especially in bigger towns. The participants listed a number of psycho-physical problems which they experienced in the period of unemployment. The description of this type of problems is dominated by a narrative about the lack of perspective and frustration over endless rejections by employers, which often ends in resignation and giving up after a prolonged period of unemployment. Depression, discontent and deteriorating health are some of the most common “symptoms” of unemployment. The participants relate psychological problems to constant fear for their (future) existence and to “social exclusion⁹” which

⁹ The term social exclusion is put between quotation marks because we cannot be completely certain whether the participants of the focus groups used it consistently, especially since it has become a buzz word in the context of unemployment. On the other hand, it is questionable whether there is a “correct” definition of social exclusion. As the UNDP Report on social exclusion from 2006 puts it, “Although there is not a single commonly accepted definition of social exclusion, it can be described as a multi-dimensional phenomenon which weakens the relationship between an individual and community. The weakening of this relationship may have economic, political, socio-cultural and special repercussions”. (Bayley/Gorančić-Lazetić, 2006: 21)

they tend to feel after a period of unemployment. It is interesting to note that even the participants who experienced only short-term unemployment, often warn about its devastating effects, especially on a person's self-confidence. This can be seen in an example provided by a participant from Zagreb who found employment shortly after graduation:

TYPE 6: *While I was going through a period in which, not that I didn't have any work, but I had very little work, and consequently very little money, it was so hard for me to tell if I was a lousy employee or... Is it that nobody wanted to hire me, or the situation is really bad and there're no jobs. So, this is something which really... Something I couldn't really share with anybody. I mean, I could've shared it but no kind of feedback would appease me. No one would say, "Yes. This is your fault. You have to do this and that. And it's going to be better." or "No, it's not your fault. The crisis has gone rampant." I mean, my experience tells me that people are on their own with this.*
Zagreb, employed and students

Particularly illustrative was the perspective of the participants who experienced prolonged periods of unemployment and then managed to find employment. Thinking back, a participant from Slatina tells her story through a set of "advice" to young people who find themselves in a similar position:

77

TYPE 7: *I never wanted to give up, emotionally or otherwise. So I managed somehow. It's not... It's not that I had to. I had financial support from my parents. And I still do. It's not about that, it's just... I simply said to myself, "OK. I'm not just going to lie around. I'm going to invest something in myself." So I went and got a teaching degree. And then, I don't know, I'm going to learn something. Foreign languages, whatever. I'm going to work on myself. I didn't want to give up and I kept sending my resumes. And I always worked something on the side.*

I gave language lessons to kids and... I don't know. I baked cookies. I gave dance lessons. I didn't want to surrender and just mope around the house, "Oh my. Now let's all cry 'cause I don't have a job". OK. I don't have a job and neither do a million people. I think that's the most important. For a person not to give up and not to give in.
Slatina, employed and students

So a number of participants offer an alternative view of this situation. They think it is important not to “give up and give in”, as our participant from Slatina would say. More importantly, some of them claim, drawing from their experience, that this is the “right way” which may subsequently lead to employment. Nevertheless, it is interesting to hear what the participants have to say about consequences of long-term unemployment on a young person’s life. This leads us to another type of consequences, described in the following paragraphs.

7.2. Negative perception of life chances

78

TYPE 3: That’s what I’m afraid of, that I’ll be stuck here. That I’ll be 50, learning new computer stuff, new technologies. That I won’t understand a thing and that I’ll just complain all the time. That a time will come when I’m really going to regret the life I had. It’s not just about work, just to be clear, or about the money. Ever since I could, I was independent. I had a source of income. I never needed much ‘cause I’m frugal and I manage to get by with what I have. But when you literally have to beg for 10 Kuna for a coffee from your old man... That’s hell when you’re 29. So I’m afraid it’s always going to be like that and that I’ll have a lousy pension and live in an awful apartment. And cook and... Man, I can’t anymore. Zagreb, unemployed and inactive

The fear for (or perhaps of) the future expressed by our long-term unemployed participant from Zagreb is shared by many unemployed and inactive participants. Although memorable mainly because of their emotional charge, the descriptions of the consequences of prolonged unemployment on life chances expressed in the groups with unemployed and inactive persons do not differ dramatically from the ones expounded in the groups with employed persons and students.

The notion of life chances was first introduced in the social sciences by German sociologist Max Weber, and it refers to opportunities available to a person to improve the quality of his or her life. In this sense, the concept is directly linked to the notions of stratification and (vertical) social mobility. This is a probabilistic concept – it denotes a degree of probability that a person’s life, taking into consideration specific factors, takes on a certain direction (Hughes/Sharrock/Martin, 2003). However, some new authors consider Weber’s definition of life chances which is strongly

focused on socio-economic status, to be too reductionist, pointing to the need to introduce other variables, such as sex, age and race, demonstrating the connection between them and a person's choice of a life style, and insisting on taking into consideration particularities of different social groups (Kernion, 2005: 11; Roche, 2006: 9). The analysis of this narrative will try to demonstrate how participants perceive the effects of prolonged unemployment at a young age on opportunities available to a person to improve the quality of his or her life¹⁰. This study unequivocally demonstrates that even short-term unemployment creates in our participants a pessimistic perception of life chances.

The participants also expressed fear connected to their future existence. The unemployed participants from smaller towns say that many young people who experience a delayed entry in the labour market will be forced to work much longer in life and can expect small pensions and a very uncertain old age. They point to the perspective of "40-year-olds without a day of recorded work experience" and they warn about the reluctance of employers to hire them. The fear of this kind of scenario causes many young people to "lower their criteria". Namely, young people are "forced" to take on substandard jobs, because, after a while, there is simply no other option. An employed participant from Zagreb reveals how the mechanism functions:

79

***TYPE 6:** So besides the psychological and existential problems, I think that, after all this disappointment and because they have no money, young people are forced to look for jobs which are... How should I put it? Considerably below their qualifications. This, I think, results in the fact that they no longer follow trends in their profession, they don't continue education, and after a while they simply become incompetent. Because the market moved on in relation to what they used to be before they accepted employment below their competences. Zagreb, employed and students*

Unlike the young people who are about to enter the labour market, the unemployed participants tend to highlight another pitfall of (sudden) unemployment, which relates to the inability to meet previously undertaken financial obligations. A participant from Knin describes this with an example of the "loan trap":

¹⁰ In line with our discussion, "quality of life" in this narrative is not defined by concrete indicators, but is framed by the perception of our participants. Their perception of a "good life" surely deserves a whole new study. However, we believe that the quotations and comments presented here may at least offer guidelines for a future study.

TYPE 3: Take, for instance, my example from 2008. Back then I was working in Varaždin where I had a permanent job. Then my family got into some financial trouble. I had a job and they needed help. So I took a loan, I was barely 19 years old. I took a loan. That's when I got into trouble, get it? I had a permanent job and I figured, "I have a job. I should fix this. I have to. I have to help my parents, right?" And what happened? I was working for a year. And then, "Who's the youngest in the firm? Who came in last is the first to go." And what do I get now? What do I get?

TYPE 8: The loan.

TYPE 3: The loan, the bills. That's my problem now. I have no job, have no income, but the bank keeps sending the bills every month. The bank doesn't care whether you're able to pay or not. **Knin, unemployed and inactive**

In a series of fears expressed in the focus groups, we single out the one best described by the notion of a "useless life" which boils down to "going out for a coffee" and "bad routines" which lead to lethargy. It is also described by the concept of a "prolonged youth" which is usually connected to the inability to become independent from one's parents and to found one's own family.

80

It appears that all participants, more or less, share the aforementioned fears. They generally think that unemployment prevents young people from living the way they want to and to fulfil their potential to the fullest. For many unemployed participants this is already a concrete perspective, while the employed participants and students are well aware of its latent threat.

7.3. The spread of social discontent

Mainly in the groups with employed persons and students organized in smaller towns, the participants tend to see the current situation as a catalyst for negative short-term social processes focusing on young people. The core of their discontent lies in the previously described elements of the social climate permeated by favouritism and corruption. This is emphasized by a participant from Karlovac:

TYPE 7:** Yeah. The perception that you can get a job only through family and other connections or if you own the right political party membership card is additionally discouraging. I think this perception is still pretty strong, especially in some families. **Karlovac, employed and students

Some participants, like this student from Pula, claim that this “mood” can easily spread from one group to another:

TYPE 5:** If you look at it in economic terms. Or however. When things get bad in a country, that's when the biggest football riots start to happen. There were none before or after. It's simple, if you have a dissatisfied group, their discontent easily spreads elsewhere. There has to be some sort of impact on the society, all in all. **Pula, employed and students

Finally, the range of participants' opinions about this type of consequences is rounded up by a negative vision of a society where social discontent linked to youth unemployment may escalate in an open rebellion, not unlike the way described by an employed participant from Zagreb:

81

TYPE 7:** If this goes on, it could cause a rebellion among young people. Young people might organize themselves and organize a riot against the government. People on the streets. Then strikes. Massive strikes. Like in Greece. Take Greece, for example. Burning down government buildings. God forbid, but this situation is obviously going to happen. **Zagreb, employed and students

Although this opinion is more an exception than a rule, it is obvious that the participants recognize that in the short-term youth unemployment contributes to the spread of social discontent and the negative “social mood”. What can we hope for in the long-term?

7.4. The loss of social potential

TYPE 2:** Unfortunately, it's become common for an economist to work as a waiter, and for a lawyer to work as a shop attendant. This has become normal nowadays, but I don't want to be stuck in a shop. That's it. I don't think that's the best I can do. **Split, unemployed and inactive

The perspective of this university-educated unemployed participant from Split expresses the first out of four dominant social deviations recognized by the participants as consequences of long-term unemployment. They consider that in these conditions working outside one's profession has become a "norm" and they wonder what kind of society does not encourage young people to reach their full potential. To most of them the answer is clear: the kind of society which is ready to give up on its own long-term development potential.

This type of consequences dominated the discussions in the groups with employed persons and students, regardless of the town size. Besides the acceptance of unemployment as "normal", another important element of this type of consequences recognized by the participants is the creation of "social parasites": a generation accustomed to living off the state help. A typical description of this "group" comes again from Split, from a group with employed persons and students:

***TYPE 7:** Ha. We're seeing a great number of parasites.*

***FACILITATOR:** Yes? What do you mean by parasites? Explain it to me.*

82

***TYPE 7:** Well... A guy, let's say, can't find work for years, and then he just stops looking. He's in a rut and his only real job is to get from the state as much money as possible. He'll report to the Employment Service, the Centre for Social Care. He can get financial help for heating in the sum of 1200 Kuna. And then he can receive support from the city borough. In the sum of 800 Kuna, depending on the borough. He gets 500 Kuna of social benefits each month. He'll also have two kids and then child support checks will start coming in every month. And so he keeps on living off the state.*
Split, employed and students

The appearance of "social parasites" is often accompanied by an increase in illegal activities and the rise of the black market. While some resign to live off the state, other more "ambitious" individuals choose to raise the quality of their life by resorting to all available mechanisms, which need not be legal. Finally, another dimension of this problem perceived by the participants can be described as the creation of the "incompetent class" which rests on a huge number of unemployed young people who are supposed to be making their mark in the labour market instead. This type of consequence is vividly described by an employed participant from Pula who used to be long-term unemployed:

TYPE 7: *And what will happen... I mean, these young people will grow older. And they're still not going to have any work experience, something they should've acquired when they were young. So we'll have a mass of incompetent people later on. 'Cause these young people will grow older. Pula, employed and students*

Who will transfer professional skills and knowledge to future generations? How will today's young people secure the sustainability of the retirement and healthcare systems? What can motivate competent and educated young people to stay in Croatia? These and similar questions stem from the descriptions of unemployment consequences which we termed as the loss of social potential.

We conclude this section by a perspective of an unemployed participant from Karlovac who compares the situation in Croatia and abroad and warns that Croatia has already become a county of immigrant cheap labour:

TYPE 3: *I wanted to say that this is already happening here. This what the colleague said, that it's going to happen. It's already here, the cheap labour taking more and more jobs. They come from everywhere. Just look at Karlovac. Don't get me wrong. I don't have anything against anyone. But in Karlovac, we have, and I'm almost sure of it, more than 5000 people from Bosnia and Herzegovina, who came to work here for minimum wages. Two thousand Kuna or something. And I can understand why. 'Cause back home they had no work at all. And here at least they have some work. They'll take any job. And maybe it's because they're ready to do anything. They work all day long, from morning till night, at construction sites. Or god knows where. For two thousand Kuna. I think that's one of the reasons for the current situation, 'cause wages are low and it's easy to abuse workers. 'Cause... they know. If you don't want to work, there'll be another fool ready to do anything for this kind of money. Karlovac, unemployed and inactive*

83

The analysis of basic discourses and the consequences linked to the problem of youth unemployment points to the severity of the situation, as felt by our participants. Therefore, it makes sense to examine what kind of barriers/obstacles they tend to come across on the labour market. This is precisely the question we will try to answer in the following chapter.

8

8. OBSTACLES TO YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

This part of study will highlight concrete barriers which our participants recognize as challenges to youth employment in the Croatian context. Therefore, it differs from the descriptions of the basic discourses and their narratives expounded in Chapter 6. When speaking about obstacles, our participants assumed different roles. It is precisely the distinction of the roles which allowed for a detailed classification in this category. So our participants examined obstacles to youth employment from the perspective of a:

1. beneficiary of active employment policy measures,
2. job-seeker,
3. potential entrepreneur.

Therefore, descriptions of the categories will reflect the above roles.

85

8.1. Obstacles to using active employment policy measures

It is reassuring that most participants are aware of the opportunities offered by active employment policy measures, although some individuals question the purpose of the entire system, which they mainly link to CES, as we have seen in the basic discourses chapter. Also, many have benefited from different active employment policy measures, even the participants in the groups with employed persons and students. This makes their perspective very valuable.

This type of obstacles was mainly perceived by the participants from bigger towns in both types of groups. Zagreb is an interesting exception, where neither of the groups expressed this type of personal experience, although the work of CES became a relevant topic, particularly in the group with unemployed and inactive persons.

It should be noted that the participants faced obstacles in using **three types of measures**: on-the-job training without employment, different types of vocational and occupational training offered by CES and incentives for hiring long-term unemployed people. We invite you to read carefully the following quotations because some will show that, even if our participants benefited from a measure, they often do not know its correct title nor they are familiar with its basic elements (who can use it, under which conditions, its duration, etc.).

Problems with on-the-job training without employment can be divided into two main groups. One is connected to the inability to use the measure in cases when a potential beneficiary has any kind of officially recorded work experience, as explained by this university-educated unemployed participant from Rijeka:

TYPE 2: *This measure targeting people younger than 29 allows me to come to a law firm and they get an incentive from the state. But there's a catch, 'cause I can't have worked anywhere else. If I have any kind of recorded work experience then I lose the right to benefit from this measure. So now I'm unemployed for four months, 'cause it has to be a law firm. If I work somewhere else, I will lose the right to this measure, and no law firm is going to hire me.*
Rijeka, unemployed and inactive

86

So any kind of officially recorded work experience, either in one's profession or not, often presents an obstacle to benefiting from this measure. On the other hand, the participants recognized more than once that the problem also lies in the fact that the use of this measure is conditioned by taking a "professional examination", thus limiting it to a relatively small number of professions. A university-educated unemployed participant from Knin does not hide her frustration:

TYPE 2: *Yeah, but take me for example, I'm an accountant. They wouldn't let me work there. I wanted to try at the polytechnic at the accountancy. I couldn't do it 'cause you need to take the professional exam and the polytechnic doesn't require it. They should let us take the exam wherever we can, and not to open 2-3 slots a year. If there's a possibility to take on more candidates... This way we're all hindered on the local level.*
Knin, unemployed and inactive

Encouraging is the fact that the recently adopted Employment Incentive Act makes provisions to solve both these problems. It remains to be seen whether the obstacles will be eliminated in reality by the introduction (and implementation) of the new legal framework.

When speaking about problems related to employment training, the participants usually say that it does not correspond to the needs of young people. An almost perfect description of this mechanism can be seen in the following exchange of our unemployed and inactive participants from Split:

TYPE 3: *I met this girl. She also attended a course in graphic design through the Employment Service. For two months. But she wasn't interested at all. My logical question was, "So why are you doing this?" "Well, I don't know, they told me at CES to finish the course, that it's good for me."*

TYPE 8: *And they give you, I don't know, 1500 Kuna a month?*

TYPE 1: *It's employment training?*

TYPE 8: *Yeah.*

TYPE 3: *So she did it because of the money and because they talked her into it. And it's like you say, maybe she took someone's place, but on the other hand, nothing's changed. She doesn't have a job.*

FACILITATOR: *Thank you, Marko and Ivana. Tamara, you said you did something similar, if I heard you right?*

TYPE 1: *Yeah, yeah. It was last year. It ended in October.*

FACILITATOR: *Tell me, what was the training about?*

TYPE 1: *It's nothing special, for a waitress. I told them... Honestly, I needed some... I had no income, so I told them, "You can put me in a course for florists for all I care. Just give me the monthly allowance and I don't give a damn."*

Split, unemployed and inactive

The participants see the inefficiency of employment training as a result of the combination of the indifference of the CES staff, limited choice of training courses and the (un)availability of financial support for their beneficiaries.

Finally, the participants recognized obstacles to using direct incentives which are available to employees who hire unemployed persons from different categories. A participant from Split who experienced long-term unemployment speaks about her unpleasant experience:

TYPE 7:** Regarding the incentives. When I was looking for a job through CES, they called me to tell me they found me a job. A business of some kind, just starting... Everything seemed just great. To cut the long story short, the employer ended up making threats to me. I had to call... I didn't call the police but I said I would so he stopped. So even with CES you have to double-check. The people at CES... I don't know if anything's changed in the last 5 years. I don't know if they check who they give the incentives to. This way, I think, this guy got, in my name, 30000 Kuna. He just wanted, through a firm that doesn't really exist, to get my incentives. **Split, employed and students

It is disconcerting that here too the participants evaluate negatively the capacities of CES to answer their needs. In this case it is the (in)ability to control employers who benefit from their measures. These experiences (or doubts?) are especially troubling in the context of broadening the scope of several active employment policy measures based on the provisions of the recently adopted Employment Incentive Act. The efficiency of its implementation will largely depend on the competence of the CES employees.

88

8.2. Young people not perceived as potential employees

When they take on the role of job-seekers, the participants see the biggest obstacle in the insistence of employers on previous work experience. This problem is recognized predominantly in bigger towns where the participants warn about an “employer’s rhetoric” about the importance of work experience and expertise in the recruitment process. An unemployed participant from Osijek offers an interesting perspective and point to the rigidity of the definition of work experience embraced by numerous Croatian employers:

TYPE 1:** I mean, if you don't have experience, it doesn't mean that you don't know anything. You don't have experience 'cause the official record is empty. But you can do stuff. 'Cause I can do massages, I can do facials, but the thing is no one's going to give me a chance to prove myself. My employment record is empty, but I know stuff. **Osijek, unemployed and inactive

Besides formal education, the participants most frequently cite different types of temporary and student jobs and volunteering as sources of their expertise. Most of them, especially unemployed participants, often feel frustrated in situations when, for what they perceive to be reasons of pure formality, they automatically get “eliminated from the race” for jobs they could well perform, according to their accounts.

The participants warn that some employers even go a step further. Competing for entry-level and poorly paid positions often requires (formal) work experience. Perhaps accounts like this can offer a hint why many young people, like this participant from Knin, give up on job-searching and become inactive:

TYPE 8: *I applied for a job as a waiter. I have no work experience. The Employment Service said it wasn't necessary. It really did. I came there and so did the guys. From Zagreb. They own a coffee shop chain at petrol stations. Or something like that. So they ask me, "Do you have work experience?" and I say, "I don't. Your ad said it wasn't necessary." "Oh but it is necessary. It's a waiter's job. We're not there often and the work has to be supervised."*
Knin, unemployed and inactive

89

It is interesting to hear the perspective of university-educated participants who, after useless job-searching, start looking for employment outside one's profession, usually competing with candidates with lower qualifications. With a great deal of cynicism they note that, in situations like this, the long years invested in education and getting a formal qualification often become a burden which is not easy to get rid of:

TYPE 2: *I know how this works 'cause my friend applied for the same job, and she also has higher education, like I do. And so what happens? They normally hire someone with a high-school diploma. We're over-qualified. We, university-educated, we're usually over-qualified. I also applied for all sorts of jobs: salesperson in a tobacco shop in a shopping mall, salesperson in Techno-market. The answer was always the same, and CES had nothing to do with it. They didn't notify me about these vacancies. I look for a job all the time. At the end, and I know it sounds ironic, it's the university diploma that becomes an obstacle.*
Rijeka, unemployed and inactive

Situations like this put young people in a sort of limbo. They are aware that jobs are scarce and employers “have all the power” and they are in a position to set unfounded and often unrealistic conditions. This is when the previously described weaknesses of Croatian employers, seen through the eyes of our young participants, become prominent, especially the fact that many “do not know what really they want”. Surely there is more than one “truth” about the current situation, but it is obvious that there is plenty of responsibility to go around.

8.3. Obstacles to youth entrepreneurship

90

On many occasions participants said they thought about starting their own business, especially in the groups with employed persons and students and mostly in bigger towns. However, for all of them initiating their own entrepreneurial venture remains only a thought. Therefore, it seems logical that most unemployed and inactive participants do not even consider it an option. The question is why.

Dominant obstacles appear to be of a financial nature. The participants point out that starting a business in Croatia is extremely costly and almost impossible without an adequate financial backing. A student from Knin illustrates this by comparing examples from Croatia and Canada:

TYPE 5: *A huge problem in Croatia is that, if you want to open up a business, you must have at least twenty thousand Kuna, depending if it's plc or Ltd. And it takes months to get it registered with the Commercial Court. In Canada you fill out an online form and for a hundred dollars you get all the paperwork done. The problem in Croatia is that people don't want to... it takes way too long to open up a business so people lose their motivation and so on... Knin, employed and students*

Besides the financial obstacles to starting a business, the participants point out that the development of an entrepreneurial idea begins even before the formal registration of a firm. They claim that young people find it difficult to obtain information they need when starting a business. An employed participant from Osijek offers his view:

TYPE 6: *Yeah, the problem is when young people have ideas and they want to be entrepreneurs they don't know where to find the information they need. How to open up a firm, how to get incentives, where to find the money? I hear a bunch of young people here who go about it the wrong way. They want to open up... They invest their money without checking all the opportunities available to them, what the state or the EU have to offer. I think there should be an institution where young people could get information precisely about this kind of thing. Apparently, the Employment Service has got nothing, you can only get very basic information, 'cause the staff are busy, in a hurry, and so on. At the Chamber of Commerce no one answers the phone. It's the same with the Chamber of Trades and Crafts. So again the problem remains where to find the information. Osijek, unemployed and students*

They are aware that it is after the registration of a business that real challenges await. They point to the lack of adequate support mechanisms for “fresh” business initiatives. It is interesting that none of the participants in 16 focus groups mentioned the term “business incubator“, and the term “cluster” got mentioned only ones. It was recognized in a description of a support mechanism, and not as an independent idea expressed by the participants without the help of a facilitator.

91

Whether we agree or not with the participants' perception of obstacles, it is hard not to be surprised by their unwillingness to start a business venture. Although it is not hard to agree that Croatia is by no means an entrepreneurial paradise, it is important to note that some participants recognized another, already mentioned and almost invisible, barrier – the mentality influenced by the dominant social climate. A student from Split gives a clear account of this:

TYPE 5: *We're not raised to be entrepreneurs. Our nation is...*

FACILITATOR: *What do you mean when you say we're not raised to be entrepreneurs?*

TYPE 5: *Well, firstly, we're not raised to be... To take risks and be brave. It's probably 'cause our parents used to work in the old system and we come from this kind of environment, where they had... I mean, 90% of us live in apartments our parents got in the old system. They don't have the capitalist spirit. That's why today they struggle at the labour market. And they didn't raise us that way. I don't know what I can offer, I mean what I can do as an entrepreneur. Split, employed and students*

The description of obstacles which young people face at the labour market is based on the experiences of our participants. The problems they identified as crucial for the problem of youth unemployment in Croatia (described in Chapter 6) are reflected in their descriptions of obstacles. They highlighted the influence of the general state of economy and the crisis on the opportunities available to young people, as well as the idea of the dominant mentality which participants often link to the notions of the lack of initiative, conservatism, corruption and aversion to risk-taking. It appears that participants tend to recognize general trends more easily than concrete problems, which is manifested by different lengths of Chapters 6 and 8. This is an important observation for all stakeholders who are interested in including young people in decision-making processes: the fact they have not personally experienced a phenomenon or a process, usually does not prevent young people from having an “opinion” about it. Understanding these opinions is crucial for creating solutions which young people can understand and accept.

This topic deserves perhaps a whole new study, so it is necessary to bring the focus back to the unemployment issue. After having heard general opinions of our participants about youth unemployment, examined its consequences and the things which prevent young people from avoiding their devastating effects, it is time to deal with another important question: who (or what) can young unemployed people rely on?

9

9. SUPPORT TO UNEMPLOYED YOUNG PEOPLE

While categorising the participants' contributions related to the support which is (or could be) available to unemployed young people, we encountered a specific dilemma: what are the criteria for categorisation? Logical criteria seemed to be the type of support (financial, psycho-emotional...) and the type of provider (family, peer groups, state institutions...). However, repeated examination of the material revealed that participants tend to follow certain patterns in their descriptions of support offered by various providers. More specifically, they evaluate different types of support in relation to the degree to which they meet their expectations. The application of this criterion yielded three types of support which are described in the following paragraphs.

9.1. Ambivalent support

94

The term “ambivalent” implies a type of contradiction. It is precisely this type of assessment which was detected from the participants' contributions when speaking about the support they got from their peers and family in periods of unemployment.

The ambivalent nature of the support was recognized mainly by the participants from bigger towns. In relation to their families, many said that their family members provided strong support, financially and emotionally, in the period of unemployment. A university-educated participant from Knin perceives her family's support in such manner:

***FACILITATOR:** Do family and friends help?*

***TYPE 2:** Sure they do. They support me in everything. In job-searching, interviews. They support me in all of this. If it wasn't for them, there wouldn't be anyone else. Knin, unemployed and inactive*

However, many participants warn that parental support rarely comes for “free”. A university-educated unemployed participant from Zagreb offers a vivid description of the aforementioned generation gap which often

prevents parents from understanding the position of unemployed young people, and often transforms good intentions into an additional burden:

***FACILITATOR:** This is interesting. She mentioned the pressure. Does anyone else have similar experiences or opinions about this?*

TYPE 2:** Well, sure. Of course. Coming from those who worked during socialism, like parents and others. It was much simpler back then 'cause once you found a job it was forever. And then they start asking, "When will you find a job? How? Why?" It's so hard for them to see that the situation from 30-40 years ago is not the same today. **Zagreb, unemployed and inactive

Besides unintentionally creating additional pressure which may contribute to the consequences of unemployment described earlier, some participants think that parental support sometimes can have a completely opposite effect from what it was initially meant to be – tolerating the “drone”. The position which was expressed more often by the employed participants and students is neatly summed up in this short exchange between two participants from Knin:

95

***TYPE 5:** Where do these people get the money from?*

TYPE 7:** So who can give them the money? Their mom and dad can give them the money. I sure as hell won't give you money for going out for a coffee. Again, it's the family that supports these drones. **Knin, employed and students

Overall, our participants think that family support, although mostly welcome, sometimes may have unexpected or unwanted consequences, and most recognize that they often come “in a package”. This situation appears similar to peer support, with some minor differences. Namely, the participants' opinions about this type of support are more clearly divided: its effects are perceived either positively or negatively. It is also interesting to note that this topic was more present in focus groups organized in small towns.

One line of argumentation, where peer groups are seen as a source of useful information for job-seekers, as well as of strong emotional and psychological support, is presented by participants from Knin:

FACILITATOR: Does it make you feel lonely or isolated?

TYPE 8: It doesn't, me personally. 'Cause I have at least 5 people who will let me know if they hear about a job opening, or anything like that. A colleague from university will call me from Zagreb. He'll say, "Look, there's a job opening in Požega." I mean, I feel totally OK.

FACILITATOR: So, your friends support you. What about others?

TYPE 8: Absolutely.

TYPE 3: Absolutely. My buddies. 'Cause if you have no one to talk to, who you're going to tell your problems? What then? You just shut yourself and that's it.

TYPE 3: You can have all sorts of friends, but if you don't have the friends who'll listen to you, it's like you have none. **Knin, unemployed and inactive**

On the other hand, unemployed and inactive participants from small towns also note that peer support sometimes simply is not there. They warn about patterns which cause segregation of young people on the basis of their employment status. This often leads to a situation where unemployed young people merely feed each other's sense of frustration and the "nothing can be done" feeling. Participants from Slatina show how this barrier can be manifested:

96

TYPE 8: Yeah. All my friends are also unemployed.

(LAUGHTER)

TYPE 2: Well, that's the kind of people we hang out with. Yeah.

TYPE 8: Those who have a job won't have nothing to do with us 'cause otherwise they would have to keep paying for our drinks. **Slatina, unemployed and inactive**

Family and peer support only partially fulfils our participants' expectations. However, there are actors whose support gets rated in a rather consistent manner.

9.2. Inadequate support

The participants, predominantly from the groups with unemployed and inactive young people, think that the support from CES is unsatisfactory. We have dealt already with the shortcomings in the work of CES which are strongly reflected in the evaluation of the support it provides. The participants point to the lack of interest and motivation of some CES employees and to their practices of irregular communication with clients. Some participants go as far as to say that CES is by no means immune to corruption. When speaking about opportunities offered by CES services, the participants claim that “they always take care of their own”. They are displeased with the quality of services (measures) which are on offer, emphasizing that they are seldom adapted to their needs. It is important to mention that most participants, not unlike this one from Karlovac, are aware of the limited capacities of CES, but they are not satisfied with the lack of basic support to their job-searching efforts:

***TYPE 3:** Look, I don't have big expectations from my counsellor. I just want her to forward me an e-mail, if she thinks something could be of interest to me. Although I can look for it myself. I know that there are probably a thousand of us on her list and that it's hard with all of us. But then again, she could try and do a bit more. Karlovac, unemployed and inactive*

97

It appears that a part of the problem stems from a gap between what young people expect and what CES, within the existing framework, must (and can) do. An often repeated mantra that “they should look for a job themselves” prompts our participants from Pula to question the very purpose of the existence of CES:

***FACILITATOR:** But do you think that it's up to CES to find you a job. Or is it you who have to find a job for yourself? What do you think about this?*

***TYPE 1:** We have to look for a job ourselves. No one can do that for us.*

***TYPE 4:** Yeah, we have to do this. But they should help us, at least to some extent.*

***TYPE 3:** 'Cause, otherwise, what are they there for?*

***TYPE 4:** To help me, as a person. To find a job more easily. To find a job. Or to get contacts. Pula, unemployed and inactive*

There should be no doubt that the perspective of the CES employees would be, perhaps even radically, different from the perspective of our unemployed participants. However, evaluations like this should definitely alarm responsible people in this institution. Based on a substantial number of complaints made by our participants, who are current or former clients of CES, it is safe to say that they rarely perceive CES as a relevant source of support. While taking into account all the limitations which stand in its way, CES and other relevant stakeholders should consider these findings seriously.

9.3. Empowering support

Activities and programmes of civil society organizations, most of all volunteering, are recognized as a source of empowerment, especially by the participants from bigger towns. Some of them, like this unemployed disabled participant from Zagreb, point out that such activities often have a very positive effect on their social life, and help them to smartly fill their time, because time tends to “pass slowly” when you are unemployed:

98

***FACILITATOR:** Is there anything else which might help you with this? Something which might give you support and encouragement?*

TYPE 4:** Well, any kind of activism is great support. You get to meet lots of other people who are more or less the same age as you are. You can always talk about something and that's what gives you hope. 'Cause when you're unemployed for a long time, your days keep getting longer and longer, and you don't feel useful, like you did something that day. So when you do something, even if it's only for an hour, it gets better. **Zagreb, unemployed and inactive

They also note that volunteering allows them to acquire valuable skills which might help them find a job and restore their shaken self-confidence, through the realization of projects which they consider “their own”. An important component, particularly when it comes from a participant who found employment after a long search, is the fact that some employers do indeed recognize and value volunteering experiences of their potential employers:

TYPE 7: *After, I don't know, a year and a half, this woman calls me, "Do you have a job?" I say I volunteer. "Listen, we need someone for... Are you interested?" And I say I am. I mean they can't give me any guarantees, but at least I have a secure job for a year and a half, until she comes back. That's how I got here. My volunteering saved me 'cause I didn't have any other experience.*
Split, employed and students

Relating to the final paragraphs in the previous section, do we dare quote Galileo and say "Eppur si muove!"¹¹? Do young people in Croatia really think that civil society organizations and volunteering programmes are useful ways to spend some quality free time and to acquire competences which might help them get out of the unemployment line? Is this the message of the previously described categorisation? The answer is, in the spirit of ambivalence, yes and no.

Yes, because we tried to present accurately the way our participants perceive different types of support in the period of unemployment. And no, because in this particular case we must not ignore the fact that most participants were recruited by civil society organizations active in the communities where the focus groups took place. Although there were clear limitations which prevented our partner organizations from recruiting participants from the ranks of their members or the members of their partner organizations (see Annex 2), it is not possible to rule out a possibility that the sample might have been biased to a certain extent. If the "snow ball" started off from the circle of people coming from our partner organizations, it is possible to speculate that it first "stopped" at persons who are, if not close to, then certainly familiar with the organizations. We must not dismiss the fact that the focus groups took place on the premises of our partner organizations and we should also keep in mind that there is no such thing as a "neutral place" for them to take place in (Bloor et al., 2001: 39). In conclusion, we would like to make clear that these remarks do not make our findings flawed, but merely point to the need to examine them while taking into consideration their specific context. This should be considered in other research as well, particularly in cases which employ qualitative methodology.

99

¹¹ Translated from Italian: "And yet it moves!"

10

10. PARTICIPANTS TAKE CHARGE – RECOMMENDATIONS AND IDEAS DEVELOPED DURING THE PROCESS

The analysis of the complete set of data yielded 49 recommendations which relate to different aspects of unemployment, and they were expressed in different levels of concreteness or abstraction. After having summarized the recommendations which overlapped content-wise, we decided to group them in five thematic categories, while attempting to order them from the most specific to more general ones. In this chapter we will discuss recommendations which focus on:

1. social change;
2. changes in the education system;
3. improving the position of young people at the labour market;
4. improving the support to young unemployed people.

101

10.1. Recommendations for social change

Many participants recognize the “social impact” on the opinions of young people and their chances at the labour market, so it is not surprising that this topic is the focus of a number of recommendations. It could be stated that some recommendations in this category are only “marginally” linked to the problem of youth unemployment. However, as we have already pointed out several times, the way young people think about unemployment rarely has anything to do with the usual formats or the expectations of “experts”.

We have divided the recommendations in this category into two sub-groups. The first relates to **young people as a social group**, and the second to the **society as a whole**. Firstly, the participants recognized the necessity that young people show more determination and initiative in fulfilling their own potential in all areas of life, including the labour market. Young people can achieve this by becoming more actively involved in the social arena, contributing to their communities through civil society and volunteering activities. This tends to reflect positively on their life chances. An important element leading to the realization of this goal, according to our employed participants from Rijeka, is the introduction of **civic education** into schools:

***TYPE 7:** Now they're introducing civic education into schools. I think that's great. It will substitute "Politics and Economy". It's going to raise awareness, what we've talked earlier, about some stuff. Why vote in elections, and stuff like that. It's also going to be about volunteering, encouraging volunteering, and so on. That's why it's important to us.*

***TYPE 5:** Yeah. Education about basic rights. Our rights. Which we should use. Rijeka, employed and students*

102

Concerning the proposed changes at the level of society, the participants singled out the need to create a social climate (in the sense of the previously described "social mood") which will not be burdened by current existential problems and the fear of the future. A most prominent feature in this context was the interdependence of the state of economy and the state of society. So our unemployed and inactive participants from Slatina suggest "debt elimination" and "termination of interest rates" while an employed participant from Karlovac makes a direct link between investments in production and social development:

***TYPE 7:** Well, generally speaking, no one's doing anything. There's no circulation of money. Here the money doesn't go around. So it's normal that everything suffers. The entire system is down. Really down. We need to make systemic changes which will encourage not only commerce, but industrial production, agriculture... The industries which can... Not right away. Nothing can be restored right away after being systemically destroyed for 20 years. Karlovac, employed and students*

10.2. Recommendations for changes in the education system

Recommendations which focus on changes in the education system can be divided into three sub-groups. The first group of recommendations is more general and addresses some **structural deficiencies of the Croatian education system**. The participants expressed their general dissatisfaction with the fact that young people do not have access to quality information when making crucial decisions about the course of their future education, which may in turn affect their professional prospects. An inactive participant from Zagreb, who is very acute in his diagnosis, thinks this problem should be approached with a combination of comprehensive analysis and transparent informing of young people:

TYPE 8: *I think they should be really transparent and show the results. We should have teacher evaluations, we should have... In order to show how many former students... What are they called? Alumni? How many of them are employed. So you know when you're enrolling in a university programme. Was it 20% of graduates who found a job in their field or was it 90%. This can help you decide. You need to know what your chances are. And not find this out after you graduate, "Boooo. Nobody's going to hire me. I can't find a job 'cause my profession doesn't exist anymore."* **Zagreb, unemployed and inactive**

103

This discussion popped up in different forms in many groups and usually it was connected to the issue of enrolment quotas. Although some participants (particularly employed and students) were eager to "slash or increase" enrolment quotas depending on the needs of the market, the same participant from Zagreb thinks that this approach cannot lead to desired outcomes without a comprehensive analysis:

FACILITATOR: *The people said, "OK. Yes. Adjusting quotas is important, but the market changes as well." So what about this?*

TYPE 8: *Well, you gotta start somewhere. To know at least the approximate number of people who are currently getting employed. And then you could, after having tracked the numbers for 10-15 years, have a temporal analysis, see how things change, and you could draw some conclusion from it. Then maybe people from universities would go and talk to leading people in business. So*

if you are from The Faculty of Engineering and Computing then you go and meet people from telecommunication companies and other companies which employ your students, and ask them about their 5-year plans, what are their prospects, how many employees they are going to need. And then you can pass this information on to your students. Now what we have is a case of severe autism. Everybody's just doing their own thing. Zagreb, unemployed and inactive

The “autism” does not only relate to educational institutions but to employers as well. Probably directly referring to the previously described issue of employers’ falling to see young people as potential employees, our unemployed participants from Knin sent out a clear message to employers:

TYPE 2: *That they don't require work experience.*

FACILITATOR: *Mhm. Who? This is directed to employers, right?*

TYPE 2: *To private businesses.*

TYPE 3: *To all employers.*

FACILITATOR: *To private businesses. How would you phrase your message?*

TYPE 4: *They should get involved in education of young people. They should be present as early as enrolment. That's the only way.*

104

Finally, on more than one occasion, the participants linked their recommendations to the Croatian system of scholarships and student financial aid. The groups with employed participants mostly focused on the idea of providing financial aid for students training for “in-demand jobs”, and on the need for some sort of support and monitoring system for beneficiaries of financial aid, as pointed out by a student from Osijek:

TYPE 5: *So there was this famous “type A” scholarship. It existed before the Bologna system. You could get it on the basis of your university entrance exam. If you do well on the exam, you get the “type A” scholarship. And that's it. You keep getting the financial aid for as long as you study. Regardless of your GPA, attendance, grades... It's unbelievable.*

TYPE 6: *I don't know about that. I got a scholarship from Croatian Telecom. And I had to... It was like... I signed a contract and everything. The condition was that I had to report every month to this guy in the company, who was my mentor. While I was still studying. And he used to give me*

all sorts of reading material. "You have to learn this. This is what we do."
Osijek, employed and students

Another set of recommendations in this category is focused on **curriculum**. The participants recognize the importance of integrating basic business skills and knowledge in the formal education system. An employed participant from Rijeka gives a very concrete example:

***TYPE 6:** What's missing is this very basic component. Sorry. This basic component, that you can't have people graduating from university and not knowing how to write a memo, how to write a decent e-mail, how to fill in a bank transfer form and stuff like that. That's not an administrator's job. Everybody should know how to do these things. When you see some of the job application, you just want to die. These very basic skills aren't covered anywhere in the system. Not in the primary school, not in the secondary school, not in the university. So there's no one who knows this stuff.* **Rijeka, employed and students**

The participants emphasized more than once the need to modernise curriculum and the teaching process. They pointed out the importance of integration of content which would equip young people with the skills and knowledge necessary for starting one's own business. Our education system on all levels was evaluated negatively in the aspect of transferring this type of skills and knowledge.

In the final set of ideas/recommendations the participants express their opinion that educational institutions should take on a more proactive role in assisting their students in career development, which refers specifically to universities. Many groups with employed persons and students formulated recommendations similar to the one by this participant from Pula who found a job after a long search:

***TYPE 7:** Maybe they should somehow connect students with potential employers. Or at least encourage successful students. Promote them. Maybe there could be a university service which would help students so they don't have to fight alone, but to help them network with other actors in this field.*
Pula, employed and students

It is obvious that the education system must overcome numerous, controversial, and sometimes even complicated problems, in order to better pre-

pare young people for the labour market. Our participants have plenty of ideas how to improve the education system. But what changes do they propose in order to improve the situation on the labour market?

10.3. Recommendations for improving the position of young people on the labour market

As we have already seen, the participants perceive volunteering as an important source of support in the period of unemployment, both as a tool for overcoming psychological difficulties, as well as a means for acquiring relevant knowledge which could prove useful at the labour market. However, as our participant from Slatina correctly noted, there is much confusion over what “volunteering” is or is not:

106

***TYPE 7:** I think many people still don't have a clue what volunteering really is, 'cause... Some offer fees for volunteers? But then that's not volunteering. In this case you're a part-time worker. Slatina, employed and students*

This quotation clearly points to the need for more education on volunteering, both for young people and employers. Mixing up volunteering with **internships** was common in many focus groups and it led participants to speak about internships as volunteering, particularly in the recommendations section. One of the interesting recommendations connected to this topic is the idea of tax breaks for employers who offer “volunteering” opportunities for young people without work experience. Another refers to the state support for internships – our participants think that the state should secure financial and material preconditions because “employers cannot afford it”. The participants in general think that volunteering, internships and different part-time jobs should be more recognized by employers. It is important to note that the relatively few examples of situations where employers seem to value this type of engagement were normally linked by our participants with private and civil sectors. A student from Osijek, perhaps prompted by thoughts of her imminent entry in the labour market, points out that it would be useful to put in place some formal mechanisms for recording this kind of experience:

***TYPE 5:** It's the same with student jobs. We all had student jobs, but when it comes to our resumes... You can't put it as work experience, 'cause it's not in your employment record. I mean, I do, 'cause I work at the university, but that doesn't... But some... My sister. She never listed her student jobs in her resume. And her employment record was empty 'cause she just got out of university. I think all the things you did should be somehow recorded. Any work experience. If you volunteered for I don't know how many years then you know how that particular job is done. And I think it should be officially recorded.*
Osijek, employed and students

Within this category we can single out some recommendations which target **employers**. It should be noted that they were brought forth mostly by our participants from Split. This set of recommendations contains ideas like better monitoring of employers for the purpose of preventing the previously described negative practices, as well as a set of ideas for various areas in which Croatian employers should be trained and educated. Along with the aforementioned “business culture”, we would like to highlight a very sensible recommendation by a participant from Karlovac who has entrepreneurial experiences. He offers tips on how to make employers more aware of the fact that without young people there can be no progress, innovation, and hence no sustainability:

107

***TYPE 7:** I mean, training and raising awareness of employers. That's number one. 'Cause they've been banished from a system that's not working today. Anywhere.*

FACILITATOR: What kind of training?

***TYPE 7:** In general, I mean. Relations among employees. How should they behave, how will they... I mean, I still don't get these employers who have 7-8 workers ready for retirement and they count on them to work for the next 30 years. Or I don't know, 15 years. 20. They don't think strategically, what's going to happen in 10 years' time. Only by employing a young person can they modernise their production. That's the only way. And the way of working and the speed, everything. I don't know. When a guy is 60 years old and ready for retirement, you can't expect him to do anything more or better than what he's been doing for the past 40 years.*
Karlovac, employed and students

The final set of recommendations is linked, directly or indirectly, to **active employment policy measures**. The participant often spoke of the need for “these measures” to be more adjusted to the needs of young pe-

ople and to concrete circumstances on the ground. One of the most frequent recommendations is the one which refers to the removal of the provision stipulating previous work experience as a precondition for eligibility for unemployment benefits. A student from Split thinks that this provision does not correspond to the Croatian reality:

***TYPE 5:** If you've never worked, you don't qualify for benefits. But I think it would be OK if people without work experience could also get it. At least young people, 2-3 months after university, until they figure out what they want to do. 'Cause, I mean, when you're 24-25, it's not like you're ready for life. Split, employed and students*

108

The participants also often recommended that the “state should provide more incentives for employing young people” (although it appears that relatively small number of participants know concrete information about the existing incentives), that “employment taxes should be reduced” and that it is important to facilitate procedures for starting a business. Interestingly, they find financial and educational support equally important in the first years of doing business, as well as removing administrative obstacles which seem to be an important off-putting factor for young people. We will conclude this set of recommendations with interesting words from a student from Osijek:

***TYPE 5:** Six months ago my friends opened up a business, Ltd. It took them 3-4 months to do it. And they're, like, young economists with good grades from university. It's unbelievable. I mean, I know that bureaucracy is tough. But even if you understood these things better, it would still take you 40-50 days to open up a business. Osijek, employed and students*

10.4. Recommendations for improving support to unemployed young people

The recommendations in this category were developed mainly by the participants from bigger towns, namely Rijeka and Zagreb. Most refer to the creation of a system which would guarantee young people an effici-

ent transfer of relevant information about employment opportunities, internships, volunteering and life-long learning programmes.

As we have seen earlier, a considerable number of participants argue that there is no system in place which would offer relevant and comprehensive information to young people about this kind of opportunities. Most participants suggest a one-stop-shop type of solution. Among many ideas, we would like to single out the one about stronger involvement of civil society organizations and educational institutions in informing young people about employment and educational opportunities. An interesting idea, linked to an often repeated opinion about the insufficiently used potential of the Internet, is offered by an unemployed participant from Knin:

***TYPE 2:** We all use the Internet. Maybe they could set up a web portal with and list our rights and opportunities, and a place where we could ask all our questions. Instead of calling a zillion numbers. And they just keep re-directing us. Nobody gives you a concrete answer. Maybe a portal where they could find answers to our questions. For us. Instead of calling around, and then, after a while, you end up where you started in the first place. Knin, unemployed and inactive*

109

Another set of recommendations in this category is related to mechanism for transferring to young people specific labour market-related knowledge and skills. This type of ideas was present in the focus groups held in Zagreb. For instance, an inactive participant thinks it may be useful to open up specialized agencies which would offer expert support to young unemployed people:

***TYPE 8:** I've just thought of it. You know these agencies which exist in Western countries, where you can come in and they help you find a job. They tell you what you're missing, information about continuing education, how to prepare for an interview. That sort of stuff. A person who is, simply, an expert in helping people to find a job. All the stuff you don't know. How to write a resume, how to behave at an interview, what do they expect from you, what to wear. All these helpful little details which no one can tell you. Zagreb, unemployed and inactive*

On the other hand, an employed participant from Zagreb, referring to the previously identified obstacles to youth entrepreneurship, empha-

sizes the importance of cooperation and networking, recognized by others as well:

***TYPE 6:** I'd like to mention networking and mobility. I mean, networking of entrepreneurs and initiatives.*

***FACILITATOR:** Sorry, what do you mean by that?*

***TYPE 6:** Well... I mean there should be a network of some kind where people from different sectors could use each other's services.*

***TYPE 5:** Like a cluster.*

110

Finally, the participants want to see the **CES work better**, the public institution they consider crucial in providing support to unemployed young people. In the text covering the work of CES it was very difficult to differentiate between recommendations for improvement from the narrative and the description of the support it offers. It appears that the participants' dissatisfaction and frustrations come "in package" with their recommendations for improvement. In order to avoid unnecessary overlapping, in this category we decided to single out one concrete and often repeated recommendation which refers to potential broadening of the set of services offered by CES, taking into consideration that a number of recommendations targeting the work of CES were integrated in sections 6.5.2., 8.2. and 9.2.

Many participants often feel that the scope of the CES services, which do not necessarily offer the biggest support in job-searching, is rather limited. Some think that the focus of its work should not only be on providing support **in the process of job-searching**, but should include a more comprehensive **support to young people** in how to deal with the problem of unemployment. The previously mentioned idea of a "one stop shop" is clearly formulated into a recommendation through the words of a long-term unemployed participant from Zagreb:

***TYPE 3:** Maybe CES should also have a stronger advisory role. No one gives you information, unless you ask. My counsellor never said, "This looks OK on your resume, and this doesn't." I may not know all this stuff by myself. Sure, I go online and check out examples of good resumes, "This looks OK on your application. You should put this in as well." It's like you said at one point, "This is the attitude you need to have when you go on an interview." I mean... To have someone to talk to. If something happens, to have a legal service, or something like that, which can help you out. I was lucky. I have a lawyer fri-*

end so he explained some stuff to me. But many people don't know what to do. In a situation like that. Zagreb, unemployed and inactive

Considering the previously described negative features of the labour market, it comes as no surprise that this participant thinks that young job-seekers often need, besides the “usual” CES services, access to more specific services – legal help, for instance. Again we come back to the fundamental issue of the gap between young people’s expectations from CES and its (legally) defined mission. However, we should not forget that the art of creating public policies lies in bridging these gaps, and laws are only instruments which policy-makers use for achieving this goal.



11. INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION

As you probably have realized on the basis of the title of this final chapter, you are not about to read a conventional conclusion which gives a systematic summary of the most significant findings of this research and consultation process. This aim was fulfilled, we hope, by the summary presented in Chapter 3. This final section of our journey through the world of youth unemployment, we decided to dedicate to a few subjective, but in our opinion relevant, reflections about the process, which could not fit in previous chapters. We will also try to come back to some of the most prominent implications of this study, both from the aspect of socio-economic development, as well as from the point of view of future roles young people can (and should?) play in it.

For starters, it should be noted that the complexity of unemployment never ceases to intrigue us. If this study has failed to add fresh insights into the socio-economic position of young people in Croatia and their prospects at the labour market, we believe that, at least, it has helped raise awareness that youth unemployment, as seen through the eyes of our protagonists, is not rooted exclusively in the economic sphere, and that the scope of its consequences, as well as their real descriptions, always manage to surpass our expectations. The analysis of discourses and narratives in Chapter 6 indicates that the participants, according to their abilities, imagination and a number of other factors, recognized an entwined web of forces which affect the problem and largely define their current positions and life chances. This is a message to all who wish to create public policies with neatly packaged “instant solutions”. As eminent British author Rhodes said, “Every complex problem has a simple solution. The only difficulty is that it is usually wrong.” (Rhodes, 1997: xv)

This study of youth unemployment lays a sound foundation for a more comprehensive view of what young participants think about the society they live in, and the opportunities it has to offer to them and their peers. Allow us here to express our unequivocal concern. In the course of the implementation of this project, we have observed a wide-spread fear of near and distant future, discontent caused by the lack of understanding and care of older generations, disappointment with capacities of the state to support young people through difficult challenges they face at the labour market, and concern the current direction of our economic “development” does not lead towards a future of welfare and opportunities.

Sceptics will understandably say, “Well put, but why do young people in Croatia choose not to express their discontent in public? Why are the findings of this study so hard to see in the public sphere?” The answer to this question is a source of a great deal of pleasure for us. The use of qualitative methodology, namely focus groups, in the implementation of the structured dialogue on youth unemployment, in our opinion has fulfilled its purpose. Despite the limitations presented in section 4.3.1., we believe that the methodology managed to “feel the pulse” of young people and depict an image of what and how young people think about the problem of unemployment. Of course, the image is still blurry and incomplete, but our hope is that, by further combining qualitative methodology and mechanisms for participation in decision-making processes, we can contribute to the rise of “citizen science” in Croatia, while making sure not to overestimate its benefits and to take into account its weaknesses (Bloor et al., 2001: 98). This suggests that, regardless of the potential embedded in this type of process for expanding knowledge and involving groups which are usually excluded from socio-political debate, it will remain always incomplete, if political structures remain reluctant to draw lessons from it and to transform these lessons into political decisions.

114

Although the limited time of the implementation of this study did not allow for a “type” analysis – our unit of analysis was focus group – it is possible to state that our “type 4” participants, whom we described as young people with “fewer opportunities”, in general did not participate in the focus groups in the same extent as other types, which by no means implies that there were no great contributions. Simply, this is a special group, but its participants are not “special” because they have nothing to say, but quite the contrary. It comes as no surprise that a two-hour discussion with a group of unknown people, who often do not share their opinions, was not for them an ideal setting for discussing really important topics. Their perspective deserves, in our opinion, a separate study adjusted to their needs. However, in general, the collected data possesses enormous and, for now, untapped potentials, primarily through the analysis of the contributions of different types, which can contextualize and deepen the understanding of some of the findings of this study.

The gap between young people and those whom they see as decision-makers, in this case, again proved to be wide and deep. We came to this conclusion by examining repeated outcomes of the consultations with stakeholders. Regardless of the clearly defined framework of the consultations, more often than not we witnessed the dominance of a climate of mutual distrust, misunderstanding and fear. With fair exceptions, many stakeholder representatives often felt attacked by questions of our

participants which tackled the work of their organizations and institutions. Young people, especially our unemployed participants, found it very difficult to step into another person's shoes, rise above the level of their personal problems and see the consultation process as a bigger picture. While recognizing that a part of responsibility lies in the preparation of the focus groups, more exactly in insufficient time designated for "breaking the ice", it is certainly the fact that stakeholders are not accustomed to speaking openly with young people, and vice versa, that is at the core of this problem. On the other hand, it is not surprising: most participants from both "sides" never had the opportunity to practice this approach. If relevant actors show the willingness to adopt the position that the structured dialogue is a **continuous process** of including young people in socio-political life, then there is a hope that the gap will shrink, if not close.

Finally, how to assess the contribution of this study? We believe that that time will be the judge of that. Seen from the aspect of the involvement of young people in solving the problem of youth unemployment and many other social issues which concern them directly, it is possible to say that the achievements correspond to the words of famous British prime-minister:

This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.

Winston Churchill (1874-1965)

The image features a white background with a grid of light pink circles. The circles are arranged in 7 rows and 5 columns. In the center of the grid, the number '12' is displayed in a large, bold, red font. The number '1' is on the left and the number '2' is on the right, both centered vertically within the grid.

12

12. BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS, PAPERS AND RESEARCH:

Adriaanse, Carlinde, 2005. The utility of the 'social climate' concept in understanding urban neighbourhood-life: A theoretical approach and initial empirical evidence. In: Doing, thinking, feeling home: the mental geography of residential environments. International ENHR conference.

Bayley, Deborah/Gorančić-Lazetić, Helena (ed.) 2006. Izvješće o društvenom razvoju, Hrvatska 2006 - Neumreženi: Lica socijalne isključenosti u Hrvatskoj, United Nations Development Program in Croatia, Zagreb

Bell, Jell, Sinclair, 2002. Narrative Inquiry: More Than Just Telling Stories. In: TESOL Quarterly, 36(2), 207 – 213.

Bloor, Michael/Frankland, Jane/Thomas, Michelle/Robson, Kate, 2001. Focus Groups in Social Research. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Butler, Judith, 1997. Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative. Routledge

Crnković Pozaić, Sanja/Meštrović, Branka, 2010. Nezaposlenost mladih: glasovi protagonista: sažetak rezultata istraživanja. Gopa Consultants

Družić, Ivo, 2012. Efficiency of Anti-inflation Paradigm in the long run. In: Backović, Marko/Karadžić, Vesna (ed.), 2012. Economic Development and Institutional Organization(1), CIDEF. Beograd: p67-101.

Finch, Helen/Lewis, Jane, 2003. Focus Group. In: Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Sciences Students and Researchers. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Hughes, John/Sharrock, Wes/Martin J, Peter, 2003. Understanding Classical Sociology: Marx, Weber, Durkheim. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Ilišin, Vlasta, 1999. Mladi na margini društva i politike. Zagreb: Alineja.

Kernion, Nilda I., 2005. Adolescents' Lifestyles and Body Weight Perception. ProQuest Information and Learning Company.

Matković, Teo, 2009. Mladi između obrazovanja i zapošljavanja: isplati li se školovati? United Nations Development Program in Croatia, Zagreb

O'Connor, Hugh, 2011. Youth Unemployment in Ireland – The Forgotten Generation. Dublin: National Youth Council of Ireland

Potočnik, Dunja, 2011. Strukturirani dijalog s mladima u Republici Hrvatskoj. Zagreb: Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes

Rochet, José Manuel, 2006. Capability and Life Chances: An Assessment of Two Analytical Traditions. In: 2006 Annual International Conference

of the Human Development and Capability Association, Groningen, The Netherlands, 29 August-1 September.

Rhodes, R.A.W., 1997. Foreword, In: Kickert, Walter J.M./Klijn, Erik-Hans/Koppenjan, Joop F.M. (ed.). *Managing Complex Networks: Strategies for the Public Sector*, Sage Publications Ltd, xi-xv.

Yanow, Dvora, 2007. *Qualitative-Interpretative Methods in Policy Research*. In: Rabin, Jack/Muzentrider, Robert F./Bartell, Sherrie M. (ed.), 2007. *Handbook of Public Policy Analyses: Theories, Politics and Methods*. CRC Press: p405-417

Warner Wail, Susan/Wildemeersch, Danny/Jansen, Teo, 2005. *Unemployed Youth and Social Exclusion in Europe: Learning for Inclusion*. Ashgate Publishing Limited

OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS:

Commission Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 27 April 2009 – An EU Strategy for Youth: Investing and Empowering – A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities. COM, 27.04. 2009

National Programme for Youth, 2009-2013 Ministry of Family, Veterans' Affairs and Intergenerational Solidarity, 2009

National Employment Action Plan, 2011-2012 Croatian Employment Service, February 2011

United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, World Youth Report 2003: The Global Situation of Youth. New York, 2004

ONLINE SOURCES:

Miliša, Zlatko, 2012: Od skeptične do bumerang generacije, Available at: http://www.dnevno.hr/kolumne/zlatko_milisa/od_skepticne_do_bumerang_generacije_/623284.html, 15.05.2012

Međimurski Internet portal: Zašto sam odlučila reći “Zbogom” Hrvatskoj? Available at: <http://www.emedjimurje.hr/obrazovanje/zasto-sam-odlucila-reci-zbogom-hrvatskoj>, 14.05.2012.

The Statistical Office of the European Union: www.eurostat.eu

Mreža mladih Hrvatske: www.mmh.hr

European Youth Forum: www.youthforum.org

The Free Dictionary: www.thefreedictionary.com

OTHER SOURCES:

Presentation Danko Oračić: Utjecaj gospodarske krize na tržište rada i socijalnu uključenost – stanje i kretanja, JIM and JAP conference on further activities and implementation of measures, 17.05.2011

ANNEX 1: LIST OF MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL WORKING GROUP FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRUCTURED DIALOGUE

1. Ivana Kordić, Volunteers' Centre Zagreb
2. Tatjana Križanec, Croatian Employment Service
3. Morana Makovec¹², Ministry of Social Policy and Youth
4. Lana Načinović, Institute for Labour Market Development
5. Monika Pozderac, Ministry of Labour and Pension System
6. Petra Sentić, Croatian Employers' Association
7. Dunja Potočnik, Institute for Social Research
8. Darko Šeperić, Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia
9. Aleksandra Štengl, Croatian Employment Service
10. Ana Žužić, Association ZUM, Pula

¹² Till the end of 2011 the position of a member of the Working group on behalf of the former Ministry of Family, War Veteran's Affairs and Intergenerational Solidarity was held by Ms Martina Štabi. When the new Ministry of Social Policy and Youth was founded her responsibilities were taken on by Ms Makovec.

ANNEX 2: FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS' RECRUITMENT PROTOCOL

Dear colleagues,

As previously arranged, we will organize 2 focus groups in each town (2 groups x 8 towns adds up to 16 focus groups in this research). The central theme of the research is young people's perception of youth unemployment.

In order for our results to be valid, it is important that our focus groups have a specific composition of participants. Trust me, lots of time and energy has been invested in construing an adequate sample which will guarantee diversity of opinions and ideas (this is the main aim of the structured dialogue method) and at the same time will encourage interaction in the focus groups. So please, follow carefully the following directions for recruiting participants. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me.

BASIC INFORMATION

Number of focus groups: 2 (16 participants per town)

Duration: max. 90 minutes

Age of participants: 15-30

Sex: 8 male, 8 female (structure of focus groups is further explained)

Participants' place of residence: your town or near vicinity (if necessary, transportation to and from location should be arranged)

The process of recruitment

Participants for this research will be recruited through the **snowball method**, which means selecting the sample by using social networks, acquaintances and other social links between individuals. The process begins by choosing a single participant¹³, and through him or her identifying other people (friends, family, acquaintances, "friends of friends") who might fit the profile. These potential participants give recommendations for a next group of potential participants. The process goes on until the desired sample structure is achieved (taking into consideration the below-mentioned limitations).

¹³ This doesn't necessarily mean that you may select only one participant. You can have initial conversations with as many as 15 people. This will give you a more comprehensive recruitment base. Who your first participants will be, we leave up to you.

LIMITATIONS

1. Employees and members of managing bodies of partner organizations may not participate in focus groups.
2. Out of 16 potential participants, only two may come from the ranks of members of partner organizations, assuming they don't fit the description in 1) – volunteers, associates, passive membership.
3. Friends and family may not participate in the same focus group, but they may take part in different groups. So it's very important that you report to us such relationships so we may place these participants in different groups (for example: X fits the criteria of type 5, and he's best friends with Y who fits criteria of type 3). It's really important that we have this information before we start placing participants in different groups.

TYPES OF FOCUS GROUPS PARTICIPANTS

8 unemployed persons (two of each type)

Type 1 – m/f, aged 15-30, completed primary or secondary education, unemployed, actively looking for employment, no work experience (officially recorded)

Type 2 – m/f, aged 15-30, completed higher education, unemployed, actively looking for employment, no work experience (officially recorded)

Type 3 – m/f, aged 15-30, has work experience, lost employment due to the economic crisis, education level irrelevant

Type 4 – m/f, aged 15-30, unemployed, belongs to a group with fewer opportunities (Roma, disabled persons, persons in or out of care, persons with criminal record...)

- 2 students

Type 5 – student, m/f, aged under 25, desirably has some work experience (part-time, student job)

- 4 employed persons

Type 6 – m/f, aged 15-30, found employment soon after (in up to 3 months) completion of education, education level irrelevant

Type 7 – m/f, aged 15-30, found employment after a long search (more than a year), education level irrelevant

- 2 inactive persons

Type 8 – m/f, two basic profiles: a) young persons who after high school didn't manage to enrol into university and are waiting for another chance; b) young people who are, for any number of reasons, dependent on the long-term on a person or institution (for instance: a young pregnant woman supported by her partner)¹⁴

IMPORTANT REMARKS:

1. Participants in this type of focus groups (they don't know each other, nor do you) tend to not show up, although they had confirmed their attendance. So it is good to have a "back up" for each participant who didn't confirm or who simply seems to you a bit "suspicious".
2. Although the tasks of partner organizations are listed below, I would like to point out that your main task is to recruit 16 participants according to the criteria and send us a list of contacts along with justifications why a person fits a certain category **at least four working days** prior to the focus group. We will then contact potential participants and place them in focus groups.
3. In case you're not able to find 8 male and 8 female participants, a 9:7 ratio is acceptable (for example, if you can't find a type 6 male participant, but you have an extra female participant, which increases the overall number of female participants to 9).

123

Role of partner organizations

- recruiting participants according to the instructions (disseminating a call¹⁵ for participation and contacting participants)
- communication with MMH about potential developments and difficulties
- after you have achieved the desired focus group composition, you should send to MMH a detailed list of participants' contacts (and their substitutes) four working days before the focus group takes place, assign participants with their types and briefly explain the underlying categorisation logic; MMH will then divide participants in groups and contact them for confirmation of attendance

¹⁴ We would like to point out that these are model examples and it's possible to find many other instances of young people inactive in the labour market. Being inactive in the labour market means that a person is unemployed and is not looking for employment. So any person who fits this description is a potential type 8 participant. Important: this doesn't refer to students and pensioners who are not considered labour.

¹⁵ MMH will create and send to you a unified call for participants.

- you should arrange, if necessary, transportation for dislocated participants (you can drive them yourself or cover their transportation costs from the amount allocated for partners' costs)
- you should arrange for refreshment for participants
- if you have disabled participants you should make sure that the focus group venue is wheel-chair accessible
- you should arrange for a flip chart with enough paper and marker pens, as well as an adequate working venue
- a focus group in progress should not be interrupted (people coming in and out, loud conversations in the room next-door, phones, etc.)
- one person from your organization should be available for facilitation assistance (note-taking – the role will be described in more detail in the facilitation protocol)

PARTICIPATION OF STAKEHOLDERS

The MMH facilitators will limit the duration of focus groups to a maximum of 90 minutes. After that, 30-40 minutes will be allocated for meetings of participants and representatives of stakeholders. If you have any questions prior to and during the recruitment process, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards,

Nikola Buković, project coordinator

ANNEX 3: RESULTS OF ONLINE CONSULTATIONS

1. Age:

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
15 - 19	156	14.99%
20 - 24	551	52.93%
25 - 30	334	32.08%

2. Sex

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Male	288	27.67%
Female	753	72.33%

3. You are...

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
High school student	85	17%
University student	557	53.51%
Unemployed	228	21.90%
Employed	171	16.43%

125

4. You live in...

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Rural area	141	13.54%
Small town (less than 30000 inhabitants)	201	19.31%
Big town (more than 30000 inhabitants)	158	15.18%
Macro-regional centre (Osijek, Rijeka, Split or Zagreb)	541	51.97%

5. What is your education level?

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
No school	2	0.19%
Elementary school	50	4.80%
Three-year secondary school	33	3.17%
Four-year secondary school	514	49.38%
Polytechnic	65	6.24%
University graduate	316	30.36%
Post-graduate	46	4.42%
Other	15	1.44%

6. What is the monthly amount of income available for your own disposal?

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Less than 500 Kuna	394	37.85%
501 Kuna - 2000 Kuna	370	35.54%
2001 Kuna - 3500 Kuna	119	11.43%
3501 Kuna - 5000 Kuna	78	7.49%
More than 5000 Kuna	80	7.68%

7. What is the source of the above income (multiple Responses are possible)?

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
I receive an allowance from my parents/ guardians	675	64.84%
I receive a scholarship	142	13.64%
I receive a family pension	21	2.02%
I earn income by doing a student job (student contract)	287	27.57%
I earn income by doing a honorary / part-time job	145	13.93%
I have full-time temporary employment	87	8.36%
I have full-time permanent employment	96	9.22%

I work without an employment contract (on the black market)	112	10.76%
Other	61	5.86%

8. (a) In your opinion, is it easier or harder for young people to find employment than persons in the 30-40 age group?

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Much easier	90	8.65%
Somewhat easier	253	24.30%
The same	294	28.24%
Somewhat harder	278	26.71%
Much harder	126	12.10%

8. (b) In your opinion, is it easier or harder for young people to find employment than persons in the 40-50 age group?

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Much easier	133	12.78%
Somewhat easier	339	32.56%
The same	214	20.56%
Somewhat harder	260	24.98%
Much harder	95	9.13%

127

8. (c) In your opinion, is it easier or harder for young people to find employment than persons in the 50+ age group?

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Much easier	462	44.38%
Somewhat easier	151	14.51%
The same	58	5.57%
Somewhat harder	53	5.09%
Much harder	317	30.45%

9. In your opinion, what are the most significant causes of youth unemployment in Croatia?

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Croatian education system is of low quality and does not teach young people the skills and knowledge necessary for the labour market	361	34.68%
Young experts are undervalued in Croatia	335	32.18%
There are no jobs available for holders of a bachelor's degree	362	34.77%
Labour legislation does not encourage youth employment	168	16.14%
Some young people achieve unsatisfactory education results which reflects negatively on their employment prospects	40	3.84%
There are no entry-level jobs	206	19.79%
Employers do not want to employ young people without work experience	732	70.32%
Young people in Croatia expect unrealistically high salaries and secure jobs	103	9.89%
General unemployment in the country is high and young people share the fate of the rest of the population	309	29.68%
Young people do not know how to look for a job	54	5.19%
Public institutions which should help young people to find employment are not doing their job	185	17.77%
Young people do not know persons who could help them to find employment	92	8.84%
Other	21	2.02%

10. In your opinion, who is the most responsible for high youth unemployment in Croatia?

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
National government	761	73.10%
Local and regional governments	333	31.99%
Croatian Employment Service (and other employment agencies)	171	16.43%
Employers	361	34.68%
Trade unions	35	3.36%
Unemployed young people who do not look for employment	157	15.08%
Other	42	4.03%

11. In your opinion, what could help young people to find employment more easily?

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Internships/traineeships in the course of education	573	55.04%
A good system for advertising job vacancies	310	29.78%
Training for efficient job-seeking (how to write a resume, how to do well in a job interview...)	163	15.66%
Support clubs for unemployed young people	44	4.23%
Accessible continuing education	184	17.68%
High-quality continuing education	154	14.79%
Employer incentives for hiring young people	557	53.51%
Other	17	1.63%

12. How does/did being unemployed affect you standard of living?

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
My standard of living significantly deteriorated	290	27.86%
My standard of living somewhat deteriorated	229	22.00%
My standard of living did not change	127	12.20%
My standard of living improved	7	0.67%
I have not been unemployed	388	37.27%

13. Has it ever happened that, due to your unemployment, you and your family lack money for...

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Food	137	13.16%
Clothes	291	27.95%
Bills	309	29.68%
Vacation	469	45.05%
Leisure activities (going out, hobbies...)	483	46.40%
Independent housing	355	34.10%
I have not been unemployed	315	30.26%
Other	64	6.15%

130

14. What do you plan to do in case of long-term unemployment?

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
I will stay in my place of residence and look for a job in my profession	186	17.87%
I will stay in my place of residence and look for any job	358	34.39%
I will look for a job in my profession elsewhere in Croatia	403	38.71%
I will look for any job elsewhere in Croatia	302	29.01%
I will look for a job abroad	478	45.92%
I will continue education in Croatia	290	27.86%
I will continue education abroad	215	20.65%

I will find a volunteering placement in a firm or institution in order to gain work experience	441	42.36%
I will open my own business	293	28.15%
Other	38	3.65%

15. In your opinion, what are the key factors for getting a good job in Croatia?

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Skills and competences required for doing a job, which are not necessarily taught in formal education (communication skills, team work, computer skills...)	363	34.87%
References and recommendations (from teachers, former employers, colleagues...)	154	14.79%
Relevant work experience	394	37.85%
Motivation to perform well at work	104	9.99%
Ambition for career advancement	81	7.78%
Profession-related skills and knowledge	171	16.43%
Willingness to work overtime	92	8.84%
Favouritism	588	56.48%
Other	15	1.44%

131

16. In your opinion, how will Croatia's EU accession affect your employment prospects?

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
It will have very negative effects.	109	10.47%
It will have somewhat negative effects.	128	12.30%
It will not have any effects.	346	33.24%
It will have somewhat positive effects.	400	38.42%
It will have very positive effects.	58	5.57%

17. How would you rate your knowledge about EU-related employment opportunities?

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Very bad	102	9.80%
Bad	281	26.99%
Average	449	43.13%
Good	171	16.43%
Very good	38	3.65%

18. In your opinion, what will be the most positive changes that you expect from Croatia's EU accession?

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Investments and EU funds will open lots of jobs, which will improve youth employment	345	33.14%
Young people will use opportunities to travel and work abroad and their skills and experiences will later contribute to Croatian development	549	52.74%
EU funds will open jobs for young people in poor and disadvantaged areas	163	15.66%
Croatia will improve employment services for young people	107	10.28%
Croatia will improve the education system	121	11.62%
EU accession will not have positive effects	298	28.63%
Other	32	3.07%

19. In your opinion, what will be the most negative changes that you expect from Croatia's EU accession?

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Young people in Croatia will have to compete with immigrant cheap labour	499	47.93%
Many educated young people will emigrate from Croatia to work in other European countries	547	52.55%
Some sectors of economy will suffer from EU competition which will cause more job losses for young people in Croatia	440	42.27%
All good and well-paid jobs in Croatia will be taken by foreigners	251	24.11%
EU accession will not have negative effects	45	4.32%
Other	20	1.92%

ANNEX 4: PROTOCOL ON PREPARATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF FOCUS GROUPS AND CONSULTATIONS

1. PREPARATION AND ARRIVAL OF PARTICIPANTS

The venue should be set up at least 30 minutes before the start of the focus group, and the participants should be told to arrive 10 minutes before. The venue should be set up in the following manner:

1. the partner organization should arrange for a flip chart, paper and marker pens;
2. you should arrange for a (smaller)¹⁶ desk or table and two chairs for the facilitator and the assistant coming from the ranks of your organization, and chairs for participants which should be laid out in a semi-circle;
3. you should make sure that the consultations are not interrupted or disturbed, as described in the Focus group participants' recruitment protocol.

The participants are greeted by a person from the partner organization ("a familiar face") and are introduced to the facilitator. The facilitator engages in brief, non-formal conversations with participants, unrelated to the topic of the meeting. After each conversation, the facilitator hands out to the participant a short questionnaire which aims to collect basic information about the participants.

134

2. PRESENTING THE PROJECT/TECHNICAL INFORMATION (3 MINUTES)

- thank the participants for coming
- emphasize the importance of their participation for the project
- state the title of the project and its donors: the Ministry of Family, War Veterans' Affairs and Intergenerational Solidarity and the Youth in Action programme
- explain the main purpose of the project: to collect young people's experiences and opinions about the problem of unemployment and their recommendations for improvement
- point out that this type of activity is being carried out in 7 more Croatian towns, and inform about the ongoing online consultations

¹⁶ A very big desk or table may create a barrier between participants and the facilitator.

- the outcomes will be presented to decision-makers in May/June 2012 at a one-day conference
- let them know that the entire conversation will be recorded and kindly ask them to speak loudly and clearly and not to interrupt each other
- present the assistant and explain that his/her role is to take notes for the sole purpose of easier identification of speakers in transcriptions of focus group content
- make clear that the organizers will do everything in their power to protect the identity of the participants and will not disclose any personal or sensitive information; give an example of how this will appear in its final form (“Participant Y said...”)
- ask them to refrain from disclosing this type of information about their friends, family, etc.

3. GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER (7 MINUTES)

- check with the participants if it’s OK to be on the first-name basis
- introduce yourself, explain your role in the project and present your facilitation experience (point out that your main role is to facilitate and steer their communication)
- participants take turn and introduce themselves – their name, the manner in which they were recruited, their experience of unemployment (note: at this point it’s possible to ask participants questions relating to the introductory conversations – for example: “So Marko, you live near Osijek. How did you come to our meeting? I hope we didn’t bust your plans...”)
- after the introductions point out that the diversity in the group is a huge value and that differences in opinion and experience are crucial to the success of this process, so in this respect there are no right or wrong answers
- point out that, despite their differences, they also share many common features: age and the position at the labour market

135

4. SET OF QUESTIONS ABOUT FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO UNEMPLOYMENT (20 MINUTES):

- before the first set of questions, you ask the participants to speak freely and not to wait for their name to be called out

The discussion is introduced in this manner:

As we've already said, today we're here to talk about the problem of youth unemployment. In the course of the discussion you can use your own experiences, as well as those of your friends, acquaintances and family. Here we have a set of factors which are usually considered to contribute to youth unemployment. What do you think about the list? Are they totally off the target or do they reflect the reality? Is there something missing, something you'd like to add? (Marker pens are available for writing down new factors. In case participants link this to actors, you should focus it by questions¹⁷.)

Focusing exercise – Take a look at the factors which are thought to cause unemployment¹⁸. Can each of you pick the 3 most important ones? Can you sort them according to their importance?¹⁹

A discussion ensues, as well as comments on potential differences in perception and clearing out potential overlaps and inconsistencies. You encourage the discussion with the following question: "OK, so some of you singled out the X factor, some of you the Y factor and others the Z factor. Can you, please, elaborate on the ways in which they contribute to youth unemployment?"

Two important remarks in this phase:

136

- the facilitator doesn't mention the factors which were not brought up in the discussion by the participants, unless the group is extremely inactive
- in this phase it's important to get every participant to speak; otherwise, this is going to be much more difficult to achieve later on.

5. SET OF QUESTIONS ABOUT RESPONSIBLE ACTORS (20 MINUTES)

Who's responsible for this? You have singled out a number of potential actors, but surely they don't all equally contribute to the problem. Is anyone more responsible? In which manner do they contribute to the problem? Most of you singled out Z, while Marko and Srđan singled out X. What do you think about that? Can you account for your choice? Do

¹⁷ For instance, a participant says that the government is one of the factors contributing to unemployment. The facilitator directs the discussion back to factors by asking following questions: "How does the government contribute to the current situation? By corruption (facilitator's answer to participant's potential answer)? What does that mean? Could you link this description to the X factor? What do the others think?"

¹⁸ The facilitator should have a list of factors on small cards which can be reshuffled according to participants' reactions. The facilitator should also have several empty cards for writing down additional factors identified by participants.

¹⁹ The facilitator reshuffles the cards according to participants' opinions.

you think things work differently in the developed European countries? Can you explain the differences?

6. SET OF QUESTIONS ABOUT EXPERIENCES OF UNEMPLOYMENT²⁰ (20 MINUTES)

What's your experience of unemployment? Tell me more! Which problems are you (or unemployed persons) facing? Why do you think it is so? Do you think that unemployment will have consequences on your future (or the future of your friends/family)? How does being unemployed make you (young people) feel? Do you feel like you're (they're) on your (their) own in the face of these problems? Who offers you (them) support? The facilitator may introduce provocative questions in case the group is non-responsive: "Some say that most unemployed young people don't give a damn. What do you think?"

Important note: In this phase it's important to pay special attention to "type 7" participants (persons who found employment after a long search). You can ask them specific questions like: "Looking back, how do you see your experience of unemployment? How did it affect you and how do you look at work?"

137

7. SET OF QUESTIONS ABOUT RECOMMENDATIONS – POINT OUT THAT THIS IS THE LAST TOPIC OF THIS SECTION (15 MINUTES)

How you think youth unemployment will affect the Croatian society? What are the social consequences of unemployment? If you had the power to change things, what would you do? What changes could improve the present situation?

- the facilitator writes recommendations down on a flip-chart paper

8. OVERVIEW OF THE DISCUSSION (5 MINUTES)

- go over the recommendations and give a short overview of the entire discussion; point out that it was successful and express your gratitude
- announce that they will have 30 minutes to discuss their recommendations with persons relevant to the position of young people at the labour market

²⁰ The parentheses contain questions for participants who haven't experienced unemployment.

9. STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS IMPLEMENTATION PLAN (30 MINUTES)

9.1. INTRODUCING NEW PARTICIPANTS (3 MINUTES)

- briefly introduce them, their organizations/institutions, and why they are relevant to our discussion
- describe to the stake-holder representatives the process so far as extremely valuable and fruitful and move on to presenting the conclusions
- point to the advisory nature of their role in this panel: young participants have a final say on the content of their recommendations!!!

9.2. PRESENTING RECOMMENDATIONS (5 MINUTES)

- the facilitator briefly presents the most important recommendations using the notes on the flip-chart paper

9.3. COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS OF STAKEHOLDER REPRESENTATIVES (10 MINUTES)

- the stakeholders give brief comments on the conclusions and recommendations and suggest improvements
- here the facilitator becomes a moderator (keeps track of time)

9.4. ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS (10 MINUTES)

- the participants are asked if they have any questions for the experts
- they are asked if they wish to change any of their initial recommendations (however, it should be emphasized that it's not necessary to reach a consensus and that different opinions are an asset in this process, and not a burden)
- in case of agreement, changes are made; if consensus is not reached the facilitator states that recommendations will remain unchanged, but the final report will include different opinions as well

9.5. CONCLUSION (2 MINUTES)

- another thank-you to all the participants
- announce the upcoming project activities and state your availability for any further questions

10. ADDITIONAL REMARKS

- the facilitator should be familiar with the Tuckman phases in creating small groups and take into consideration its specificities
- the facilitator should keep track of and adequately respond to non-verbal reactions and cues of participants and examine their meaning
- after an intense exchange, the facilitator should recap the discussion using the names of the participants, which will be helpful for transcribing focus group content
- the assistant from the ranks of the partner organization should take notes for the purpose of easier identification of speakers in a later phase – the notes should be sent to MMH in an electronic form as soon as possible
- there should be a minimum 1-hour break between the focus groups
- it's extremely important to warn the stakeholder representatives about the need for their timely arrival and about their advisory role in the consultations; the final decision about the outcomes of the focus group is up to the young participants

Annex 5: List of stakeholders represented in the structured dialogue consultations

139

Bodies of the Croatian Employment Service:

1. Central Office (Zagreb)
2. District Office in Rijeka
3. District Office in Split
4. District Office in Osijek
5. District Office in Pula
6. District Office in Karlovac
7. Local Office in Slatina
8. Local Office in Knin

Other stakeholders:

9. Croatian Chamber of Commerce – County Chamber in Pula
10. Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia
11. Administrative Department for the Economy of the Istria County

