



# 9

## Governance Patterns and Opportunities for Young Adults in Austria, Spain and Portugal

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### 9.1 Introduction

Policies and multilevel governance patterns are said to have a relevant role in shaping youth transitions and labour market integration (Piopiunik & Ryan, 2012). Institutions and policy interventions configure opportunity structures which condition young people's agency (Roberts, 2009),

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influencing the transitions between the education system and the labour market in several ways. A key point here is the attainment of vocational and professional qualifications that can help young people enter the labour market or improve their position in it (Raffe, 2014). In this chapter, we focus on the role played by different governance patterns in shaping youth transitions from education to work and within the labour market (Dale & Parreira do Amaral, 2015). In doing so, we use governance and policy studies as an analytical lens to apply the general framework of institutional opportunity structures.

We compare specific policies as forms of cooperation among central state, local authority and private actors, and their impact on the opportunities of young people caught in the transition from education to work in different national and local contexts. The criteria for comparison were derived from the adoption of a governance and policy studies perspective. Following Bevir (2011), we look at interventions aimed at contrasting the impact of social risks, analysing the design of the interventions, the target group, the aims, the specific output, and the contribution to wider outcomes of the policies in terms of aggregated labour market integration and educational attainment. Moreover, we pay specific attention to the scalar levels of the actors and to the interdependence between public and private actors involved in the provision, respectively defined as the vertical and horizontal axis of coordination (Øverbye et al., 2010; Bache et al., 2016). How are the policies designed, justified and what are the actors involved in the implementation? What are the outcomes of the measures and how do they contribute to shaping youth opportunities in the selected regions?

A deep insight into particular cases can explain how specific patterns of governance at the national and/or local level contribute to the desired or unexpected effects of lifelong learning (LLL) policies. We compare policies adopted in functional regions from three European countries, concretely two southern countries, Portugal and Spain, and Austria. Austria has widely been identified as positive example, as far as integration of youth in the labour market is concerned, given the occupational performances and the structure of the VET and LLL systems (Parreira do Amaral et al., 2020). On the other hand, Portugal and Spain have suffered greatly from the impact of the Great Recession and face high and sustained rates of youth unemployment (Scandurra et al., 2020a).

The following policies were selected for comparison. In the Upper Austria region, the policy intervention selected (AT\_P3<sup>1</sup>) aims at recognising and improving qualifications for people that have not completed apprenticeship training. In Girona (Catalonia region of Spain), the selected programme (SP\_P4) targets young people who are neither studying nor working, mostly early school leavers (ESL) and intends to improve education and professional qualifications. In Vale do Ave (Norte region of Portugal), the professional courses (PT\_P2) selected are targeted at under-qualified young adults, unemployed or not and offer compulsory education and professional certification, while giving access to further studies or the labour market. The cases stress the relevance of qualifications for youth with low education in accessing the labour market (Heisig et al., 2019). However, they are differently designed and are linked to the specific characteristics of their regional contexts (Valiente & Scandurra, 2017).

The empirical data was collected through semi-structured interviews with experts (managers or street-level professionals) conveniently selected based on the scope of the selected LLL policies. On the whole, 21 experts were interviewed: 9 in Upper Austria (Austria), 7 in Vale do Ave (Portugal), and 5 in Girona (Spain). All participants gave their informed consent for participation in the research. These interviews were focused on the policy's design, implementation procedure and challenges, target-groups, actors and impact and stakeholder coordination, looking at the vertical multi-level structure and at the public-private interaction on the horizontal axis.

## 9.2 The Governance Perspective: Policies, Actors and Youth Integration

Access to the labour market is dependent upon individual decisions but is also shaped by the opportunities and constraints produced by economic conditions and the socio-institutional context (De Lange et al., 2014). Accordingly, the present chapter looks at cross-national and cross-regional institutional opportunity structures through the lens of governance and policy studies by exploring policy interventions that attempted to ease the transitions between training and work in local contexts of Austria, Spain, and Portugal.

Although LLL policies are confronted with similar problems related to training and labour market integration, the interventions address different actors and territorial levels with different powers and resources (Kazepov, 2010), resulting in various LLL landscapes across European countries and regions (Parreira do Amaral et al., 2020). A governance perspective calls attention to regulatory structures, providing a useful lens to operationalize the institutional dimension of opportunity structures. Policy studies in this field set the focus on regulations, actions, and interventions aimed at contrasting the impact of social risks, analysing the design of the interventions and looking at the objectives, rules of access and resources; and the specific outputs, for instance in terms of participants and achievements, as well as in the contribution to wider outcomes of aggregated labour market integration and educational attainment (Bevir, 2011).

In all the phases of design and implementation, the provision of policies may involve not only the state, but also a broader set of actors (Ascoli & Ranci, 2003). Private companies, non-governmental and international organisations, political parties, other social partners, and individuals are capable of addressing societal problems. The governance perspective adds a specific logic to this, looking at the various public and private actors involved in policy provision, and at the mechanisms of interaction and coordination among these stakeholders (Parreira do Amaral et al., 2020). In LLL landscapes, initial and further vocational training (VET) plays a major role, as it explicitly targets the passage from education to employment. Empirical evidence shows how different schemes and VET configurations are among countries, due to various mixes of school- and work-based training, degrees of involvement of private companies, social partners, and state regulations (see Eichhorst et al., 2015; Kazepov et al., 2020). Accordingly, specific configurations contribute to certain outcomes in terms of insertion into the labour market and equality of opportunities for youth (Bol & Van de Werfhorst, 2013). Several authors have compared groups of countries with similar institutional arrangements that shape the passage from education to work, identifying different typologies of school-to-work transition systems or regimes, or skill formation systems (Smyth et al., 2001; Pastore, 2015; Scandurra & Calero, 2020). Among these, Central European countries, like Germany or

Austria, heavily rely on the provision of vocational training through dual apprenticeships, tight links with an occupational labour market that value professional and educational certifications and the high involvement of private firms, all features associated with comparative high youth employment (Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2012). Conversely, Southern European countries like Spain or Italy present relatively high levels of youth unemployment people, associated with a fragmented provision of vocational training with weak links to the labour market (Pastore, 2015; Cefalo, 2019). In light of this, these countries recently engaged in several reforms of training policies, in an attempt to improve youth employment outcomes.

While governance refers to the interdependence between governments and the non-governmental, the concept of multilevel governance adds the dimension of scale, looking at the increasing interdependence between governments of different territorial levels (Kazepov, 2010). Political authorities are confronted with externalities that differ in territorial reach (Andreotti et al., 2012). These differences make it necessary for governance to also operate at multiple scales. The interdependence between public and private actors defines the horizontal axis of coordination; however, it takes place in multilevel systems of LLL education governance where the actors involved present typical “levels” with particular modes of action, ranging from supranational actors (like the EU) to national, subnational and local ones (Øverbye et al., 2010). Bache and Flinders (2004) define multilevel governance as the vertical (multiple levels) and horizontal (multiple actors) dispersion of central government authority. Therefore, the territorial coordination of responsibilities for training and labour market policies may bring about regional differences in policy provisions and outcomes (Bacher et al., 2017). Multiscalar institutions interact with the local economy, creating regional skills ecosystems (Dalziel, 2015) as locally contextualised configurations of policies and actors that impact subnational differences in insertion in the labour market for young people. Accordingly, recent evidence also emphasises intra-national variations as an under-researched issue in the research on education-work transitions, paving the way for cross-regional comparisons of policies and contexts (Rodrigues et al., 2020; Scandurra et al., 2020b). In this chapter, we compare policies using criteria derived from

the above-mentioned literature on policy and multilevel governance studies. This research suggests that different countries and regions provide particular contexts for the implementation of LLL policies and governance patterns. In turn, policy design, implementation, and the coordination among actors involved may have a significant impact on youth opportunities in the local labour markets.

### **9.3 Context: A Snapshot of Employment Outcomes of LLL Governance**

In this section, we provide a very brief description of the LLL context for the three countries and three regions chosen for the analysis. We based this overview on a very short list of indicators such as youth unemployment, NEET rate, early school leaving (ESL) rate, and post-secondary education access. In Table 9.1, we report the average and the starting and ending rate together with the variation over the period of these indicators. On average, Austria has 59.9% of young adults employed (those aged between 20 and 34 years) with at least mandatory education, while Spain reports 62.4% and Portugal 77.2% for this indicator. Upper Austria reports a slighter higher rate compared to the country average; however, there was a decrease in employment for those with at least mandatory education of -7.6% between 2004 and 2018, indicating a poor trend in the integration in the labour market for this subgroup. In Spain and Catalonia there is also a negative evolution of this indicator, although for the case of Catalonia this is reduced (-10.6% versus -13.1). Portugal as a country registers a decrease as well, but this is not the case for the Norte region, where there was a slight increase of 1.7%. When we consider those who have upper secondary education, Austria and Upper Austria register a higher share of employment being respectively 89.7% and 86.7% with a positive evolution over the period. On the contrary, Catalonia, Norte, and their respective countries report lower initial levels and a reduction in this rate over the period. This amount of almost -8.1% in the case of Catalonia indicates a considerable loss of employment for this group. Employment for tertiary-educated young adults is generally

**Table 9.1** Selection of key indicators at regional and national level

	Employment rate education 0–2 ISCED, 20–34 years				Employment rate education 3–4 ISCED, 20–34 years				Employment rate education 5–8 ISCED, 20–34 years				Early School Leavers rate, 18–24 years				NEET rate, 18–24 years			
	2004		2018		2004		2018		2004		2018		2004		2018		2004		2018	
	Average	Delta	Average	Delta	Average	Delta	Average	Delta	Average	Delta	Average	Delta	Average	Delta	Average	Delta	Average	Delta	Average	Delta
Austria	59.9	57.1	65.4	8.3	86.7	84.3	87.7	3.4	90.1	93.5	90.4	-3.1	8.5	9.8	7.3	-2.5	9.3	10.8	8.1	-2.7
Upper Austria	65.3	75.9	68.3	-7.6	89.7	87.1	91.5	4.4	91.7	90.7	89.0	-1.7	8.4	8.8	8.9	-0.1	7.6	9.8	7.4	-2.4
Spain	62.4	86.4	73.3	-13.1	72.9	79.8	73.2	-6.6	81.9	87.0	89.2	2.2	25.8	32.2	17.9	-14.3	18.8	14.9	16.1	1.2
Catalonia	66.2	72.3	61.7	-10.6	75.4	85.1	77.0	-8.1	86.2	85.7	82.4	-3.3	25.9	34.1	17.0	-17.1	19.3	14.5	16.1	1.6
Portugal	77.2	82.7	80.5	-2.2	82.7	88.1	84.5	-3.6	84.8	90.6	87.8	-2.8	25.2	39.3	11.8	-27.5	14.6	12.4	11.7	-0.7
Norte	78.9	82.9	84.6	1.7	81.6	89.1	84.8	-4.3	83.1	89.9	87.6	-2.3	27.6	46.5	10.1	-36.4	14.7	12.8	11.3	-1.5

Source: Eurostat online database

higher in Austria and Upper Austria reaching 91.7% on average in this region while Catalonia reports 86.2% and Norte 83.1%. However, there is a negative trend in all the regions and country considered between 2–3% except for Spain, which gains almost 2.2% over the period.

When examining educationally excluded young adults (ESL) or those who are not studying nor looking for a job (NEET), we find a nuanced picture. All territories experienced a decline in the ESL rate, although the decline was smaller in Austria than in the rest of the territories analysed. This is because the Austrian LLL system historically shows low ESL and at the beginning of the period analysed, they start from a very low base. On one hand, Austria and Upper Austria respectively report a very similar average ESL rate of 8.5% and 8.4%. These territories couple a very low ESL rate together with a low NEET, which is 9.3% in Austria and 7.6% in Upper Austria. Moreover, they experience a decline of NEET for more than 2%. On the other hand, Spain and Portugal together with Norte and Catalonia experience a stark decrease in ESL over the period. They are two of the countries with a traditionally higher share of ESL and this was reduced by half in Spain and more almost 70% in Portugal on average. Both Catalonia and Norte reduced ESL even more than their respective countries, with Norte having the most remarkable reduction of -36.4% which represents a percentage change of almost -80%. However, when examining the NEET rate of these regions, we find that there is a very slight reduction in Portugal (-0.7%) and Norte (-1.5%) and an increase of 1.2% in Spain and 1.6% in Catalonia. This shows the negative long-term effect of job loss and the long path to recovery of both Portugal and Spain. This is also reinforced by their higher average over the period, 18.8% for Spain, and 14.6% for Portugal, while in Austria it is 9.3%. For the case of Spain, the path to recovery from the Great Recession took a very long time and the negative consequences are still tangible without a clear sign of reaching the previous level of young labour market access shortly.

To sum up, this snapshot description describes some important differentiation between contexts of LLL governance in these territories, by looking at outcomes on youth labour markets. These differences are well established in the literature of school to work transition (Walther, 2017) and skills formation (Scandurra & Calero, 2020). However, territorial



responses to economic challenges are relevant in shaping very different equilibria of youth transition and the allegedly assumed national homogeneity cannot be taken for granted.

## **9.4 Analysis of Local Case Studies and Governance Structures**

### **9.4.1 The Case Study in Upper Austria**

#### **9.4.1.1 Target Group and Actors Involved**

The AT\_P3 policy is a social partnership project stemming from the collaboration between the local sections of the Chamber of Labour and the Chamber of Economy, with the support of the regional government (“Land”) of Upper Austria. It was implemented in Upper Austria to facilitate the official recognition of informally acquired professional skills. Its target group is people who are 22 years or older, who (1) are employed and have acquired the skills of the respective occupational profile but do not hold an apprenticeship or (2) have not been employed in the training domain for more than five years. Although it does not specifically address young adults, it is highly relevant for them in a context that gives major importance to formal qualifications for labour market integration.

The policy relies on cooperation between the social partner, public institutional actors, and adult education institutions. It is funded by the government of Upper Austria and by the Chamber of Labour. The Chamber of Labour, the Chamber of Economy, the Public Employment Service, and the Upper Austrian authorities are the main actors involved in the provision of the service. Street-level coordination mainly takes place between the Chambers and education providers to organise training courses according to previous participants’ skills assessment. The Chamber of Labour and the Chamber of Commerce mainly interact through the programme’s steering committee. This cooperation among social partners is embedded within the Austrian social partnership culture of negotiations and concessions.

### 9.4.1.2 Justification and Aims

At the origin of the project was, on the one hand, the complaint from the Chamber of Economy about the so-called shortage in skilled workers and, on the other hand, the position of the department of education at the Chamber of Labour, that pursues the increase of accessibility of further education for unskilled workers. This lifelong learning policy is based on preventing future unemployment through additional training and recognition of previously acquired skills. Particular attention is devoted to young people who were not able to get a qualification through apprenticeship, because they abandoned the course or failed the final examination. In the Austrian context, where qualifications are highly valued by the employers, this is considered as a weakness to be addressed to allow people to develop a satisfying labour market career. Workers with apprenticeship certificates achieve higher wage categories and have other job-related rights when compared to unskilled employers. The expected impact of AT\_P3 was to reduce the individual risk of unemployment and to smoothen life course transitions by certificating participants' professional skills.

### 9.4.1.3 Implementation

The project specifically applies to 20 occupational profiles selected by looking at the labour market demand for skilled workers in the specific branches. The profiles range from knowledge-intensive activities (IT, engineering), to manufacture (metalworking), to less knowledge-intensive and manual activities (bakers, retail, restaurant service employees, carpenters). After a skills evaluation, eligible persons acquire the missing skills—if necessary—in training courses and subsequently conduct a practical test to get a formal qualification recognising the skills possessed or acquired during the training.

Initially, the Chamber of Economy had some doubts regarding the AT\_P3 policy, fearing that the programme might bring too “cheap” qualifications for the employees, without a strong value-added for employers. In the implementation phase, the disagreements between the social

partners emerging during the design of the measure seemed to leave space for a more coordinated effort, shifting the focus on the advantages coming from formal recognition and coherent training to complementing already existing skills.

#### 9.4.1.4 Outcomes

According to the experts interviewed, the assessment carried out at the end of 2017 revealed that the project had called up a total of 700 participants. According to the Chamber of Labour, one-third of the participants are under 29, 59% are males and 41% females. The most important success criterion for AT\_P3 is the number of participants attaining their apprenticeship certificate. The ratio of successful participants was between 70% and 80% in 2017 (Cefalo et al., 2018), which is close to the success rate of standard final apprenticeship tests. It was reported that from the start of the project, around 1,000 people in Upper Austria have completed an apprenticeship through this programme (BKA, 2020).

AT\_P3 is seen as successful case by the experts interviewed, as the programme reduces biographical uncertainty by providing an officially recognised certificate.

It just opens up many more opportunities than one has when working as an unskilled worker. Not only regarding the stability of one's job but also regarding income. Also regarding further education [...] or whatever you can do afterwards. And also regarding social prestige (AT\_Ex2).

Young participants benefit from more job security, higher pay levels, and more opportunities regarding further education. Companies seek their advantage by encouraging and supporting young people in their training, as they will get highly skilled staff and improve their reputation and the competitiveness of Upper Austria. The most innovative aspect of AT\_P3 is related to its original approach in the field of Austrian activation and training policies (Lassnigg, 2011). Previous policies aiming at the formal qualification of unskilled individuals mainly focused on the learning of theoretical subjects, not considering the target groups'

existing practical knowledge. Also, unskilled workers and employees have often had negative learning experiences. In this case, positive learning experiences via practice-based and adult learning approaches have proven to readjust their image of learning. For some participants, this has led to further engagement in formal education, up to university graduation.

Since [the participation in] AT\_P3, I know that I can learn. No one had expected this from me, that I know something. But now, I proved it, the feeling of self-esteem has increased. [...] We have one guy, who trained for two occupations via AT\_P3 and he's studying law now, because he also did his university entrances exam [...] Almost the most important thing is that people start learning. Because then they acquire a taste for it (AT\_Ex 18).

The policy has been generally classified as very successful and has been transferred to other Austrian regions, although as “reduced versions”. However, the standardisation of the action (as a best practice) in different regional contexts may prove to be problematic. The outcomes of AT\_P3 seem to be significantly related to Upper Austria's economic structure, particularly the strong industrial sector and the persisting traditional corporate frame.

## **9.4.2 The Case Study in Girona**

### **9.4.2.1 Target Group and Actors Involved**

In 2012, the Catalan Employment Service (SOC in its acronym in Catalan) launched the SP\_P4 as a revised version of a previous similar programme. Both of them were co-funded by the Catalan government and the European Social Fund. The SP\_P4 is a 12–15 months programme aimed at improving the employability of unemployed and unskilled young adults aged from 16 to 24 by providing them with 3 months vocational training and 1 month of training in a work environment. It also provides career guidance and apprenticeship experiences to its beneficiaries. This improvement had to be attained through the provision of professional training, counselling, and opportunities to go back to school at least until the achievement of the compulsory secondary

education certificate. After two editions, the SP\_P4 was subordinated to the deployment of the Youth Guarantee scheme all over Catalonia in 2014. This new framework does not seem to have produced contradictions between the objectives of the different policies as they formally share their concern about NEETs and offer different resources to deal with this situation.

#### **9.4.2.2 Justification and Aims**

The aim of both SP\_P4 and its predecessor was to improve the employability of young people who were neither studying nor working (NEETs). The intention is likewise to encourage the attainment of the mandatory secondary qualification and provide support in job placement. Since 2012, the Youth for Occupation programme (JPO, in Catalan) has responded to many vulnerable young adults in Catalonia by providing them with short-term training and apprenticeship experiences along with counselling and guidance for improving their employment opportunities.

#### **9.4.2.3 Implementation**

As stated by different street-level workers interviewed, the programme has improved since its inception due to the increasing awareness in the SOC of its need for adaptation to improve its response to local needs.

The law passed in 2015 goes in this direction, trying out these strategies that started in some territories, strategies that state there is an agreement between local administration, social agents, the different entities of the productive level, trade unions, whatever, well, they have to agree and say: “In this territory we need this, this and this” and “well, if you tell us we can also adapt these policies in the same direction”. The law also wants to start a degree of decentralisation of these attributions, which are very concentrated on the Generalitat [Catalan Government], to decentralise them to the territories will probably adapt them better to their needs. [...] this is also the way the European Union talks, referring to proximity, about making the policies fit the territories as closely as possible (SP\_Ex5).

These improvements have led to the promotion of a new intervention strategy by the SOC, which started in 2018. This strategy intends to decentralise the activity of the Catalan Service and promote coordination and collaboration among local public and private actors in each territory. The shift seems to respond to two fundamental critiques from the local and organisational levels carrying out the programme. First, they complain of their lack of autonomy in managing the programme. This refers to the pre-established distribution of the resources they receive (fixed amount per beneficiary) among the different actions they develop but also to their lack of ability to modify some of the programme's rigidities to their own needs.

Second, they complain of lack of coordination among all the providers at the local level.

Our theory is that, when we started the SP\_P4 in this city, it was the only training offered to young people of this age. I received 224 applications in the selection process [for 20 places]. Imagine! And it was the same in 2013. Then we started to offer hotel and catering courses too. When the Youth Guarantee Programme came in 2014, more profit-making and non-profit-making organisations started to provide the YG scheme courses. And so, selection became a challenge. Since all providers were selecting, many thought: "I'll keep this youngster". Competition between this city and the one next door was reckless (SP\_Ex11).

This problem started in 2014, when the YG scheme started its deployment in the region. While previously providers were already offering training to the same target group, competition among them became stronger with the introduction of the YG scheme. In this scenario, different public and private providers compete to recruit as many young people as possible, because their funding depends on the number of beneficiaries they recruit, meaning that there are overlaps and gaps in the training courses available in the area (the cheaper the course, the broader its offer). Moreover, in many instances this implies bad counselling practices by the suppliers, who seek their own benefit more than that of the young people.

Regarding the particular situation of the programme at the local level, some questions should be highlighted. Firstly, the programme depends

on the youth section of the City Council. The responsible technical staffs are aware of the difficulties faced by the young people in the region. Their trajectories are taken into account beyond their relationship with employment, and therefore a wider vision of their situation is expressed. Contrary to what seems to be the main political focus of the development of the YG scheme in Spain and also in Catalonia, the implementation of this programme pays attention to the different dimensions of the personal development of the young people, not only to those related to their employability. In fact, as stated by the person responsible for the youth section, the skills on which all the activities of the section are based are those defined by the World Health Organisation and UNICEF.

I mean, the WHO [World Health Organisation] says “In the end, the most important thing is for you to be able to solve a conflict, for you to be able to work in a team, for you to be able to have proactive ideas, to provide something to the team in the work”. In the end. This is the most important thing. Of course, training equips you with these tools, but the eventual outcome is mainly a question of emotional education (SP\_Ex13).

These life skills are closely related with questions of self-satisfaction, motivation, stability, mental health, and so on and are considered as key abilities to address different questions such as education, democracy, gender equality, lifelong learning, and so on. This is an important difference in their approach compared to the focus of other administrations, which are more centred on “utilitarian” skills (employability, adaptation, etc.).

Secondly, and regardless of this focus on life skills, the actual implementation of the programme strongly emphasises individual interventions over contextual or social ones. Despite opening their focus from employability to “quality of life”, the actions conducted through the SP\_P4 programme are closely focused on each young person’s capacity to overcome his/her situation. To this end, close relationships are established between street-level employees and mentored young people.

Thirdly, the functional region and particularly the territory covered by the city of Girona and surroundings is increasingly characterised by a public effort to improve coordination among private and public actors, and among different administrative levels.

#### **9.4.2.4 Outcomes**

Regarding the local labour force, 52% of the active population are foreigners, while this group represent 29.4% of the overall population in Catalonia. Therefore, in this local setting the target group for SP\_P4 differs from the target group in other cities. We have no data on what percentage of the 230 beneficiaries of the programme from 2012 to 2017 were foreigners. However, despite the reluctance of street-level employees to make this claim, their indirect comments and our observations led us to think that foreigners are the clear majority.

In consequence, the official descriptions portray the beneficiaries as young people rather than unemployed, early school leavers or foreigners. Compared to the Spanish national and Catalan governments, this premise implies another understanding of the causes of the vulnerability of these young adults.

Actually, a loose regulation allows local authorities to implement SP\_P4 by means of the specific practices that best fit with their political orientation. In this regard, the SP\_P4 programme in this city differs from the instrumental orientation of the original purpose and confers more expressive elements to it. Strong emphasis is therefore placed on the importance of the programme not only for improving the employability of its beneficiaries, but also for offering them guidance and support in all spheres of their daily life.

### **9.4.3 The Case Study in Vale do Ave**

#### **9.4.3.1 Target Group and Actors Involved**

Professional courses (PT\_P2) are part of the Portuguese Vocational Education and Training (VET) provision, which are mainly targeted at young people aged over 15 who have completed basic education and seek more practical and labour market-oriented training, and/or pursue higher studies. These PT\_P2 are seen by the experts and managers as addressing mainly young people who had difficulties succeeding and have no interest in continuing in regular school or are currently neither working nor



in education and training. This secondary educational pathway allows students access to dual certification, simultaneously granting a school certification of secondary education, and a professional certification associated with the qualification (Level 4). Based on a three-year structure, which is organised by modules, PT\_P2 enable greater flexibility and adaptability to the students' learning processes. The curricular plan consists of three training components: sociocultural, scientific, and technical, which includes training in a work context (an internship of 420 hours) and a professional aptitude test. These courses are funded by the European Social Fund and the national counterpart, under the priority axis for promotion of youth educational success, reduction of early school dropout, and increase of qualifications. Their management is a joint responsibility of the National Agency for Qualification and Professional Education (ANQEP) and the Ministry of Education; however, on the ground, its implementation depends on the performance and collaboration of relevant local and national actors, stakeholders, and institutions, from schools to companies, under the coordination of Intermunicipal Community of VdA (CIM Ave).

#### **9.4.3.2 Justification and Aims**

The main challenges that the Vale do Ave (VdA) region faces nowadays are mostly related to young people's lack and/or inadequacy of qualifications, as expressed by the experts. This situation partly results from the high dropout and failure levels in the region and contributes to youth unemployment, NEET, and emigration. This is not just a local problem but also a national issue; even so, VdA differs from other national regions for being a considerably young and industrialised region. Industry is the main source of economic development, requiring a smaller workforce but more skilled than before and this is seen as problematic in a context of a lack of qualified workers. School disaffection, absenteeism, grade retention, and early school leaving before completing compulsory secondary education are the most pressing problems to be tackled by PT\_P2. The dominant political discourse tends to justify these problems by using an educational deficit framework; therefore, investment in education and

training will improve youth academic and professional qualifications, which will decrease unemployment and reduce social exclusion, acting on a preventive basis. In the Vale do Ave region, the implementation of PT\_P2 goes beyond the education sector and requires the involvement of the labour market and the social and youth sectors.

### 9.4.3.3 Implementation

The candidates are firstly interviewed by a LLL professional to collect their personal, educational, and professional experiences, and then they are invited to express their future expectations. Then, ideally, based on their personal characteristics and life courses, different hypotheses are presented to them. However, as expressed by some experts, the financing system is the main determinant of the available offer, which means that some young people do not have opportunity to pursue their initial goal and ending up choosing an available alternative. Educational institutions call for more funding, time, and autonomy to deal with the current educational challenges, but also to manage their education and training provision without neglecting their local specificities, given that the definition and implementation of PT\_P2 are driven by the national government level, following European recommendations. In monitoring the match between the qualification supply and demand in the region, the companies' stakeholders and their needs and interests must be considered in the view of the educational managers, as an attempt to fit youth academic and professional qualifications to labour market demands. As stated by an expert:

this work is done based on a diagnosis of needs, which is then compared with the diagnosis of CIM Ave. Our advantage is the strength that our education and training network has already acquired and the prestige acquired with the Ministry of Education, which often allows us to counter some guidelines that come from the diagnoses made by the IEFP, CIM Ave, and that we locally managed to advance with training in areas that were not considered as priorities in diagnoses, but which are validated by enterprises. It makes perfect sense for us to work this way (PT\_Ex6).

The partnerships with the local economic and social stakeholders are particularly important to maximise the human and material resources available. All experts interviewed recognised the existence of conflict; however, it is easily solved. It is in the best interest of all partners involved to respond to the VdA needs:

there is no point in having different interests; it's in everyone's best interest to be in the market, that each one does what they know best according to each one's quality and skills, and the answers should be those that the municipality and the region need, both in quantity and in diversity. To arrive at this final proposal, obviously, there is discussion, I would not say conflict. The result is positive; if this discussion did not take place, we would possibly be here running over each other and maybe we could not do a job with the quality and assertiveness with which we do (PT\_Ex6).

#### **9.4.3.4 Outcomes**

Experts and young adults described the existence of social stigma around PT\_P2. Young people who choose this educational pathway are commonly described as underachievers or as those with low professional aspirations. However, experts and managers also recognise an increased interest from young people in this educational alternative. Overall, the experts shared that is difficult to evaluate the outcomes of this educational policy, since it takes time to perceive change. Notwithstanding, they highlighted some aspects of the positive impact on personal, social, and economic conditions of VdA. It contributes to increasing the rate of young people who complete the secondary education, while obtaining professional training and qualifications that could help them to access the labour market. Besides, it has a clear effect on individual self-esteem, particularly by expanding their perspectives and options and enabling them for decision-making processes. The ultimate goal of these courses is to increase youth qualifications, and consequently their employment. The experts interviewed consider unemployment more than an educational issue, or an individual responsibility. Unemployment is a social and structural problem, which means that tackling uncertainty and vulnerability of youth life courses in VdA requires a systemic and decentralised response.

## **9.5 Comparison: Impact of the Interaction Between Governance Patterns and Context Specificities on Youth Labour Market Integration**

In this chapter, we began by referring to research that suggests that different countries and regions provide particular contexts for LLL policy implementation and multilevel governance patterns, which in turn impact youth opportunities in the education and labour market. In this section, we present a brief comparative analysis of the three case studies to contribute to this discussion.

National funds and the European Social Fund are the main sources of funding, under the justification that this investment will reduce early school leaving, increase academic and professional qualifications, and consequently raise youth employability. Differences across cases were found regarding the criteria used to define the target-group, such as the required age, current early school living (in all cases), unemployment (in all cases), absence of compulsory certification (in VdA and Girona), lack of certificated professional qualifications, and immigrant status (in the Austrian and Spanish cases), among others. Even with the noted differences in the composition of the target-group, all cases combine preventive and activation strategies targeted at vulnerable groups such as under skilled and unqualified youth. In the three case studies, there is evidence of a strong connection between education, training, and the labour market. This means that all analysed LLL policies are characterised by a dominant focus on improving young adults' knowledge and skills relevant to the constant and dynamic demand of the labour market; however, they are also supposed to bring wider psychological benefits to the young beneficiaries. When looking at how LLL policies under study are put into practice, we found variations between cases, such as in their duration and structure. Besides these disparities, all LLL policies put emphasis on certifications recognising the skills acquired during training, as well as on practical learning and evaluation.

Looking at the vertical axis of coordination, all LLL policies analysed adopt a design based on a top-down approach, which means that the EU,

national and regional governments hold a key role in the implementation and evaluation guidelines to follow at local level; however, there is more or less space for decentralisation, which is regarded as essential to the adaptation of LLL policies to local economic and social landscape in all cases. All policies are based on a broad network of cooperating local actors and the adequacy of the regional and/or local configurations and specificities. In all cases, the horizontal coordination among the different stakeholders is mostly managed by a national or local public entity, like the Intermunicipal Community of Vale do Ave, the Economic and Labour Chambers in Upper Austria (usually regarded as semi-public organisations involved in the provision and monitoring of training), and the youth section of the Girona City Council. The actors involved are mostly public organisations, social enterprises, public and private education institutions, and companies, as is the cases of Girona and VdA. Given the variety of actors' roles and interests, the coordination among actors and its impact is evaluated in different ways. More concretely, in Upper Austria and Vale do Ave, the coordination efforts are described as successful, increasing the match between labour market skills supply and demand, and overcoming the formal system's rigidity; however, in Girona, there is evidence of a lack of coordination among local actors due to their competing interests (such as funding), which compromises practices and results.

Regarding specific outputs and outcomes, all cases are evaluated as particularly successful in their countries, even describing different results and limitations. In Upper Austria, a high number of participants achieved their apprenticeship certificate, which is seen as a condition to access to better economic, professional, and education opportunities. In VdA, the increased rate of youth who complete the secondary education, while improving professional qualifications is seen as helpful in accessing the labour market. While not as evident as in the previous cases, in Girona, the focus is not clearly on youth professional qualifications, but more on their personal development. As already mentioned, the main goal of these LLL policies is to prevent or reduce youth unemployment; however, young people have different living conditions in the three contexts analysed. In Upper Austria, the LLL policy seems to tackle uncertainty and vulnerability in youth life courses, contrary to what happens in Girona

and VdA, which represent two notable examples that youth unemployment is a social problem that goes beyond a greater investment in education and training.

## 9.6 Conclusions

This chapter shows that different governance patterns and policies influence the opportunities of youth to participate in education and the labour market, thus shaping youth transition patterns. Beyond differences in regulations, target groups and procedures, achievement and recognition of professional qualifications were identified as the main area of intervention to increase youth employability. The generally positive impacts on youth opportunities highlight a policy challenge for improving young adults' knowledge and skills such that they match the dynamic development of labour market demand.

The compared policies display different educational and employment outcomes and specific modes of governance, as forms of cooperation among state and private actors that interact with characteristics of national and local contexts. Beyond the common top-down design approach of the LLL policies considered, a significant trait is the existence of some degree of adaptation to local economic and social landscape. The horizontal coordination among local actors involved in the provision of LLL policies emerged as strategic. The mode of governance in Upper Austria shows how the long-standing tradition of cooperation between social partners can produce qualifications that match with both the specific labour market and individual needs. Coordination efforts were also part of a successful mode of governance in VdA, helping to overcome the formal system's rigidity. Conversely, in Girona, the lack of coordination among local actors, coupled with diminished institutional capacities and resources, partially compromised the expected results of the policy.

The policies analysed show the possibility of combining preventive and activation strategies, within different and context-based modes of governance, with a positive impact on the opportunities of vulnerable groups such as early school leavers. These opportunities should go beyond

employment outcomes, as they also open new learning possibilities, improvements in knowledge and self-esteem for the people involved, as well as foster a positive equilibrium for the local context at an aggregate level.

## Note

1. To safeguard the privacy of the interviewees, the official names of the policies and measures at the core of the case studies analysed in this chapter have been replaced by codes. Specifically, the codes report the abbreviation of the country name followed by “P” (“Policy”) and a sequence number on the basis of the order of appearance of the policies in the book. The only exception is constituted by Youth Guarantee as it represents a broad international policy programme integrating different sub-measures at the core of the case study located in Spain.

The codes attached to the quotations from interviews report the abbreviation of the country name followed by “Ex” (“Expert” for street level professionals, policy managers, and policymakers) and the sequence number attributed by the different research teams while collecting the interviews.

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