



Preventing and contrasting the NEET phenomenon

**How to work with NEETs
- A Toolkit for local administrations**

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I. Introduction

At EU level NEETs (Not in Employment Education or Training) are considered one of the most problematic groups in the context of youth unemployment. The aim of the NET not NEET project was to enhance networking and co-operation amongst public and private actors. The objective was to explore and share experiences between the organisations involved in the project and gain knowledge, methods and tools in order to improve performances of local VET systems, employment services and relevant public authorities (VET&PA system), and to better respond to the different needs of NEET people at local and European level. This document is the Toolkit that was developed through the project.

According to the analysis of *European Foundation* for the Improvement of living and working condition about NEET phenomenon, good practices in policy design and implementation can be identified:

- **Policy measures have to be diversified**, tackling different issues along the pathway to employment and paying attention to vulnerable groups that are more likely to cumulate multiple disadvantages. In this regard the project will analyse different measures and systems in Europe, to provide tips and suggestions to policy makers, private and public stakeholders, in order to improve the VET&PA performances according to specific needs of target groups.
- **Young people have to be set on a long-term, sustainable pathway**. They need good-quality, stable and sustainable employment. This includes equipping them with qualifications needed for successful labour market integration. In this regard the project will pay particular attention to the career guidance services offered by Employment and Counselling centres, in order to avoid the skill mismatch, under the perspective of the right to a decent work for youth.
- **The involvement of a range of stakeholders in the design and delivery of youth employment measures** is essential. In this regard the project will involve many different private and public stakeholders and key actors at local and European level, representing the many perspectives playing a role in NEET phenomenon.
- **Youth employment measures should be client-centred**. This means catering for different pathways, for example, from mainstream learning to tailored, supported learning. In this regard a core aspect of the project is the strong involvement of NEET people in re-thinking and proposing new perspectives for measures, approaches and services targeted NEET people, according to their expectations and needs.
- **Successful policies should be innovative**. They should introduce new ways of reaching out to their target groups, with outreach activities forming an important part of efforts to engage disfranchised young people. In this regard this project intends taking into account good practices, successful experiences and innovative measures to define new and tailored policies at European and local level.

II. Background

2.1 NEET in a European context

In 2011, according to Eurostat, 7.5 million young people aged 15–24 years and an additional 6.5 million young people aged 25–29 years were excluded from the labour market and education in Europe. This corresponds to a significant increase in the rate of NEET (Not in Education, Employments and Training) since 2008. In 2008 the percentage of NEET was 11% of all 15–24-year-olds and 17% of all 25–29-year-olds. By 2011 these rates had increased to 13% and 20% respectively. Although the NEET phenomenon is present in most of the European countries there are huge variations between Member States. The highest percentage of NEETs can be found in Bulgaria, Ireland, Italy and Spain, where the rate is around 17% of the young population. At EU policy level, NEETs are considered to be one of the most problematic groups in the context of youth unemployment.

In many European countries the number of young people in long term unemployment has increased since 2008. In Bulgaria, Italy, Ireland and Romania around 40% of jobless young people are long-term unemployed. In Ireland the number of long-term unemployed people is double the pre-crisis level. Other countries like Italy and Bulgaria have also experienced an increase due to the economic recession. The main consequence of long-term unemployment is that it significantly increases the risk of long-term exclusion from the labour market.

In Spain NEETs with a lower educational attainment comprise approximately 70% of the overall NEET population. At the same time having completed tertiary education no longer lowers the risk of unemployment compared to having no qualifications in some European countries. This is the current situation in Italy, Romania and Denmark where people of all educational levels have been hit by the effects of the recent recession, and higher education does not necessarily provide a protective shield against unemployment.

As the NEET phenomenon is a very complex and varied problem concerning cultural, economic, psychological and social issues, holistic and combined strategies are needed. The problem of early school leavers and VET dropout is increasing and diversifying as well in terms of age segments, social groups and risks factors, due to the same social, economic and educational factors underlying unemployment and NEET general trends.

III. Methodology

3.1 The Project – NET not NEET

The overall objective of the NET not NEET (NNN) project was to implement local and European networks, composed of VET&PA actors, supporting and strengthening their services, methodologies and tools and offering them new strategies to contrast the NEET phenomenon at a European and a local level.

The project aimed to improve networking, co-operation and tools, utilising public and private sources already existing in each country involved, to implement performances of VET&PA system to better respond to the different and specific needs of NEET people at local and European level.

3.1.1 Operational objectives of the project

The operational objectives for the project were:

- to strengthen and support services, methodologies and tools provided by the VET system and employment services, according to the needs of the NEETs in each of the partner countries.
- to improve the VET&PA performances through directions provided by the Youth Guarantee Scheme and other European good practices (taking into account local features of labour market and welfare system of each country involved).
- to suggest tailored policy interventions taking into account the specific needs and different features of NEET subgroups in the countries involved.
- to bring public and private stakeholders (Local Administrations, job centres, SME, VET, etc.) and target groups (NEET, young unemployed, dropouts, etc) together in designing the process of integration of VET&PA actions at local level.

Particularly attention will be focused to reinforce and/or implement:

- measures to reintegrate early school-leavers; measures to provide timely support for those who have just made the decision to drop out by encouraging and enabling them to continue their previous studies or to find other more suitable training alternatives.
- measures to prevent early school-leaving. In this regard is our opinion that the education system, and especially VET, should change their teaching didactics (including ICT and social media) and learning principles to include and re-motivate NEET youth.
- new methodologies and strategies of Career guidance, to enable NEETs to get suitable work and to avoid a skill mismatch.
- school-to-work transition policies, because the transition phases are the trickiest ones thus increase one's risk of becoming a NEET.
- measures to foster employability and to remove barriers to employment. The learning and work methods of youth are now heavily dominated by the media world and this project aims to take this into account as added value for new strategies and approaches.

3.1.2 Using complementary strategies

To achieve its objectives the project was based on a double level of complementary strategies

At the bottom-up level young people identified as NEETs were involved in forums and laboratories of dialog. The objective of their involvement was to discuss and propose new methodologies and tools for the VET system, employment services and relevant public authorities, according to their own needs and expectations.

The top-down level involved public and private stakeholders of the VET system, employment services and relevant public authorities. The main activity at this level was peer reviews with the aim to analyse the impact of good practices undertaken by the participating organisations.

The participants from both the bottom-up and top-down level met in the so called, Duelling Moderator Focus Groups. During these events the two points of view (bottom-up and top-down) were integrated and later summarised in the National Strategy papers that can be found on the projects website.

To guarantee that the project results will be used in the future by the projects participants and also deployed by other organisations working with NEETs, the project has presented this Toolkit for public practitioners. This Toolkit is especially for local administrations to provide practical information and guidance on planning and implementing a plan of action focused on NEETs through VET, welfare system and Employment services.

3.2 Methods used

In order to achieve the objectives set out for the project an array of different methods were used where by the different stakeholders were involved and participated. In this section of the toolkit these methods will be presented in more detail.

A complete report of the projects results and findings is presented in the projects transnational strategy paper. This report and all the documentation gathered from each of these events can be found to download from the project's website (www.netnotneet.eu).

3.2.1 Forums of Dialogue

The Forums of Dialogue are web forums, namely virtual areas of dialogue. The youth could connect to these forums in order to find information and participate in discussions.. In the project the forums of dialogue were provided in English, Italian, Spanish, Turkish, Bulgarian and Romanian.

The Forums of Dialogue allowed the participating young people an opportunity to exchange ideas and discuss problems. All the Forums were pre-moderated, which means that, the project staff reserved the right not to publish messages that were deemed not in keeping with the principles of the project.

3.2.2 NEET Laboratories of

Youth involved in the project participated in three so called Laboratories of dialogue. These events took place in: Italy, Spain, Ireland, Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania. The young people met together at Laboratories of dialogue held at a local level and together they had the chance to identify proposals and suggestions for local policy makers. In the laboratories of dialogue topics such as why they stopped looking for a job, why they have not engaged with guidance counselling centres, why they want or have decided to leave school or training courses before getting a diploma and without having already a job etc. were discussed.

These proposals and suggestions were later on presented at the local Duelling Focus Groups.

3.2.3 Duelling Moderator Focus Groups

The Duelling moderator focus group were events where young representatives from NEETs met together with local policy makers, stakeholders and other representatives from the participating partners in the project.

The main goal of the duelling moderator focus group was to open up possibilities for creative discussions that haven't been thought of before. Furthermore, the objective is to shed light on new ways of thinking. A contrary viewpoint added to the mix often facilitates new ideas.

3.3.3 Peer Reviews

Peer Review is a form of external evaluation aimed at supporting the reviewed educational institution in its quality assurance and quality development efforts. An external group of experts, known as Peers, are invited to review the quality of an activity, strategy or policy. During the evaluation process the Peers visit the reviewed institution.

In the NET not NEET project the Peer Reviews took place in:

- Aarhus, Denmark
- Stockholm, Sweden
- Dublin, Ireland

The Peer Reviews were combined with study visits and representatives from organisations involved in the project participated. During the study visits participants visited organisations and initiatives that work with NEETs and was identified as representing good practice within its local context.

IV. Findings

In this chapter, the findings from the project will be presented. This is the part of the report that makes up the practical toolkit for professionals working with NEETs in local administrations. This chapter is divided into three parts; Preventing Measures; Outreach Work; How to Work with NEETs; and finally the opinions of the NEETs in Europe.

1.1 Part 1: Preventing Measures

Many would agree that the ideal situation to work with NEETs is actually to prevent young people from ending up in this situation in the first place. In other words, to prevent the matter before it evolves and becomes a problem. However, this can in many cases be more easily said than done. As mentioned previously in this paper the reasons behind why young people end up not attending education, employment or training are many and varied. However, according to research on early school-leaving the problem cannot be singled out to merely be an individual problem caused by the young person and their environment. Research shows that the reasons for young people to dropping out of school before completing their degree are manifold and cumulative. The cause is often a combination of problems that arise due to problems within the existing mainstream educational system and more complex personal needs. Early school-leaving is therefore an issue that can be prevented through a collective effort that involves the educational system, schools and society (Eurofound, 2012).

With this in mind, preventing measures become both necessary and difficult to identify and implement. The experience from the project is that any preventing measure should be selected based on the individual need of the young person in question. In this Toolkit some preventing measures will be presented that were identified by the projects participants as successful.

4.1.1 Early guidance

The European commission identifies effective career guidance as essential to support young people during their transition periods, especially in the course of their education (Eurofound, 2012). Young people are relatively vulnerable at transition points like the transition to a higher level of education. This transition brings significant changes to the life of the young individual in terms of curriculum and school environment but also in terms of their social and personal lives. These changes are often significant to the young individual and put them at risk of dropping out from education (Eurofound, 2012).

All participants in the project identified early guidance as an important preventing measure for early school-leaving. It was acknowledged that pupils already from an early age should learn about the labour market, career ways and various available educational paths. It is also important that young people receive the opportunity to have early contact with the “real” labour market, meaning that they have the chance to visit companies and are offered opportunities for work-based learning.

4.1.2 Flexible education

One way to address the problems with mainstream education that lead young people to leave school early is to create alternative learning environments and use innovative teaching methods within the exciting public educational system (Eurofound, 2012).

Gøglerskolen, Denmark (School of performers & Craftsman)

Target Group: Young people between the age of 18 and 25. The school offers activities to all young people who are not in education or employment.

Aims and objectives: The overall aim of Gøglerskolen is to offer activities and start a process for each student based on the model; Open up to yourself; Open up to the group; Open up to society. Further, the aim is also to enhance the cultural life of Aarhus, and strengthening the cooperation between institutions and cultures in the city. Another overall aim is to enhance the cooperation between the cultural and commercial sectors of Region Midtjylland.

The school's objectives:

- To enhance the self-esteem and personal strength of the students, including physical confidence and the strength to laugh at one self and the world.
- To provide the student with new abilities, and ensure that all basic skills (Danish, Mathematics, and English) are optimized.
- To cultivate the students' desire, courage, and personal drive towards work and training.
- To enhance the social skills of each individual through interaction with others, group processes, democratic processes and physical exercise.
- To increase the awareness of one's own culture, and that of others.
- To inspire the individual to active participation in public processes through cultural activities, debates, media productions and events.
- To strengthen the individual's inclination to use re-cycled materials, recognize the possibilities and resources present in waste rather than the limitations, and enhance the ecological awareness of our students.

Description: Gøglerskolen is a Second chance school. The school's pedagogy is based on the street performers' and craftsman's trades' traditional philosophy of autonomy, and focus on possibilities rather than obstacles. The school use educational principles, combining play and creativity with order and discipline, from the world of circus and theatre. The school's educational aim is training and jobs, and emphasis is placed on distinguishing between realistic and unrealistic dreams and goals. The school attaches great importance to both process and product, and to a clear distinction between practice, training, work demonstrations (on the one hand) and an actual professional product (on the other hand). With the student's resources as starting point, the school endeavors to attain the highest possible degree of positive experiences. The school's educational principles aim to unite physical and craft-related skills with academic skills and competencies. The school's pedagogy springs from the idea of "the whole person", which is to say a deliberate exercise in acting as an individual, a social individual, and a citizen.

Effectiveness:

The overall majority (90%) of the young people who have attended Gøglerskolen will eventually return to formal education. The few who still are not ready for formal education will be offered either personal counselling (personal problems) or be given a third opportunity at another school like Gøglerskolen – but focusing on other subjects.

One way of creating an environment for more flexible learning is to use different and innovative teaching methods in a non-classroom environment to increase the motivation of young people to learn.

There are a number of ways in which the school curriculum can become more varied, stimulating and relevant to the lives of young people. It can mean that the school has to introduce new teaching methods, updating and thus making the curriculum more relevant, measures to increase the teachers' engagement, improving standards and/or having smaller classes with more one-to-one training sessions, involvement and feedback (Eurofound, 2012). Further, a combination of vocational and work-based learning can also be offered as an alternative environment for pupils at risk of leaving school early.

In the project it became clear that "flexible education" was difficult to define and meant different things to different participating organisations. However, the participants agreed that young people (NEET) should be offered alternative educational paths and the freedom to decide between different alternatives. Further, according to the project's experience, a flexible VET system can only be designed through the close cooperation and efforts of different stakeholders and policymakers. These stakeholders are for example ministries of education, labour and social affairs as well as representatives from the labour market.

4.1.3 The Role and Importance of adults

The project has identified the acknowledgement from adults as an important factor in preventing early school leaving. This is essentially about giving young people good role models with whom they can identify as well as getting acknowledgement and recognition on their achievements. Through this, positive contact with adults can work as a motivating factor that helps prevent early school-leaving.

One important preventing measure is to involve the parents in their children's education. This can be done by strengthening the communication between schools and parents through greater parental involvement and including parents in activities. A closer parental involvement can be used to reduce school failure by establishing partnerships between parents and teachers in the interest of the children's learning. Another measure is to educate parents in the importance of education by involving them in local programmes and activities (Eurofound, 2012).

The project identified the importance of establishing a good relationship between teachers and other personnel who work closely with the young person and their parents. This can be especially important in relation to young people who are at risk of dropping out of school. The relationship between the teacher/personnel and the parents needs to be one of mutual trust and respect. A social bond can be created through organised social activities. Bridging activities should be created at an early stage for supporting children and their parents.

Further, the project also recognised the need of parental education and counselling for those parents who are struggling to motivate their children to attend school.

The project acknowledges that in some cases the young individuals do not have parents who offer them acknowledgement and encouragement to pursue their education. For these youngsters it becomes more important that the schools or other organisations can through their personnel offer the acknowledgement and encouragement that is needed for them to continue with their education.

4.1.4 Second chance opportunities

To leave school and no longer pursue one's education should not be the end of a young person's path to employment. One way of bringing young people back into the educational system is by offering them a second chance to acquire the skills and qualifications needed for sustainable employment (Eurofound, 2012). These reintegrating measures should be flexible instead of rigid and thus tailored according to the needs of the young persons. This can be achieved by creating a more motivating environment through activities that are more practically orientated rather than theoretical and include elements of non-formal learning (Eurofound, 2012). When planning second chance opportunities, it is important to keep in mind that the young person for whom the activities are developed may have problems with mainstream education, teaching formats and methods. Second chance opportunities must thus take an alternative approach to learning in line with the specific situation and need of the participants. Further, creating learning environments with small groups of students enables more individual attention from the teachers (Eurofound, 2012).

For some young persons the reasons to why they have left the educational system is due to more complex personal issues and not only based upon their direct problems with mainstream education. For them, reintegration measures and second chance opportunities should be combined with support from educational, social and health professionals. These measures should start at a basic level by helping the young person to re-discover an interest in learning and give structure to their lives by introducing boundaries and routines (Eurofound, 2012).

4.2 Part 2: Outreach Work

4.2.1 How to identify NEETs

The very definition of NEET – not in education, employment or training, suggests that these individuals are difficult to identify since they are not participating in education or other activities provided by local authorities. It is easier for local authorities to keep track of young people who drop out of education rather than those who no longer are bound by compulsory education.

One way of working with identifying NEETs is to develop different types of tracking services in order to support and monitor inactive young people. These services can include keeping record of young people who do not have basic qualifications and ensure that those who are inactive are contacted and supported in their efforts to find a training place or a job (Eurofound, 2012).

4.2.2 How to find NEETs

It can be difficult to find young people identified as NEETs since they quite often choose not to have contact with local authorities. The outreach work then becomes an important way of finding young people in need of support and activities in order to obtain a sustainable employment.

The outreach work can at this stage involve activities like:

- Sending out information by post
- Using social networks on internet to reach out with information
- Contacting parents with information about services offered
- Contacting early school-leavers to ask what they are doing now that they no longer are in education

- Contacting local clubs and other organisation that may be in contact with NEETs and ask them to pass on information to their members
- Participate in local events that attract young people in order to spread information

4.2.3 Collaborative work – working together

Working together with others is essential in order to be successful with outreach work. The project identified that collaboration between local authorities, organisations and other institutions who meet NEETs in their daily work is essential. Further, it is important that all stakeholders are informed about each other's work to avoid repetitive activities and not become rivals. Stakeholders should, in other words, complement each other and offer complementing activities and support to NEETs.

4.2.4 Local presence

To have a local presence in the areas where young people live and socialise is an important part of successful outreach work. One way of doing this is to employ local young people as local mentors who can easily integrate with groups of young people in the area. These young mentors can be mediators between NEETs and local authorities. The mentors' main task could be to circulate and be physically present in public areas where many young people gather. Further, this type of initiative can also have positive effects on anti-social behaviour such as damage of public and private property and violence. The local young mentors can also be responsible for coordinating contacts between NEETs and the appropriate institution. This requires that they build up a broad local network.

4.3 Part 3: How to Work with NEETs

4.3.1 Right Mind-set

When working with young people and those who fall in the NEET category, it is important to consider how you as a professional treat the young individual. The attitude of the professional towards the young person is paramount to the result. Experiences from the participants of the project are that NEETs often have adverse feelings toward officials. It is not uncommon that these young people have negative experiences from dealing with teachers, social workers and other professionals in the past. Reasons for why the young individual is not in education, employment or training can often derive from the feeling that they have been let down by adults in the past. Therefore, the way one acts and treats the young individual is crucial if one is to build a lasting connection and gain their trust. In short, the importance of committed staff with the right mind-set cannot be emphasised enough.

Successful examples from the project show that the professional must treat the young individual with respect. The young individual must feel like they are being seen and heard. The young individual must also feel like they own their own situation, meaning that decisions that are made should feel like they are made by them and not only for them. It is therefore important for professionals to encourage the young individual to want change and to feel motivated to join an activity.

The project found that it is not possible to make a young person participate in activities, education or training if they do not trust the professionals. One way in gaining this trust is to cooperate with NGOs or other organisations that have already gained the trust of the young person. Further, a possible solution to low level of participation of young people is to first offer them an activity or

task in which they can easily be successful. It is important that the work is focusing on how to gain the trust of the young individual in a practical way – both a trust in themselves and in the professional. By choosing activities that enables this, their trust and will to continue will grow.

Another success factor as a professional is to follow the motto “acting not waiting” – meaning that the young individual should be activated directly when coming in contact with the local administration and not held waiting. An example of a good first activity is to help the young individual to design a plan or a set of targets for themselves. This will help them to more clearly see what they want to gain from their participation and also see the path that they have in front of them. This activity should be closely linked to the guidance process.

4.3.2 Right person for the job

Most participants of the project agree that one crucial success factor when working with NEETs is that the professional is the right person for the job. As mentioned in *4.3.1 Right Mind-set* the way in which the professional acts towards the young individual is crucial in building trust and later lasting participation in the activities offered by the local administration.

Being the right person for the job means firstly that you as a professional feel motivated and want to work with NEETs and young people. Your professional approach to the job should be that you want to enable NEETs to join education or training or gain a sustainable employment. The professional work becomes a balance between supporting and encouraging at the same time as you are helping the young person progress. However, it is important to note that this does not mean that you as a professional should do everything for the young person. On the contrary, the professional’s job is to enable the young person to find courage and motivation to do things for themselves that in time will help them reach their own goals.

4.3.3 Integrated approach – multi-professional teams

As mentioned earlier, the likelihood that young people who find themselves in the situation of not being in education, employment or training, have had previous experiences with local administrations through teachers, social workers and other professionals is high. It is quite often the case that different institutions such as schools, social services and job centres to mention a few, have the charge to work with NEETs.

The experience of the participants in the project is that an integrated approach is the most successful one. This means that different stakeholders work together instead of separately. The benefits of collaboration are far greater than the disadvantages. One way of structuring the integrated approach is to create so called multi-functional teams. These teams consist of those professionals from each stakeholder that work with the young individual. The aim of the team is to share experiences and to have an integrated approach towards the young individual. This will ensure that repetitive activities are avoided and that there is no competitiveness among stakeholders.

Experiences from the participants of the project are that an integrated approach will also lend greater trust for local administrations and its staff. Further, if the young individual gains more trust to some professionals and not others they can help as mediators and facilitate dialogue.

4.3.4 Soft skills

During the course of the project it has become clear that “soft skills” mean different things in different countries and social settings. In this Toolkit, soft skills encompass the ability to

communicate, relationships, interpersonal skills, problem solving, time management, team work, leadership, taking responsibility and working individually. All these skills are often included in what is called general employability on the labour market. They are often seen as essential and inherent whereby employees are required to at least embody some if not all of them.

Ballyrunners Programme, Ireland (Soft Skills)

Target Group: young people who are at risk of engaging in anti-social activities.

Aims and objectives: The main aim of the programme is to engage young people who are at risk of engaging in anti-social activities and help them to alleviate their boredom and promote life skills, pro-social attitudes and activities. It was envisaged that this in turn would lead to a reduction in anti-social and criminal behaviours, decreased drug use, increased engagement with local services, improved self-worth and greater chances of employment. The main objectives of the programme are as follows:

- Achieve the Bronze Gaisce (President's Award)
- Promotion of routine and stability
- Increase civic responsibility
- Enrich existing relationships with services
- Promote positive mental well-being
- Build positive relationships with young people
- Promote peer support
- Improved self confidence

Description: The core framework for the programme has been the Bronze Gaisce Award. The Bronze Gaisce Award has 4 main components;

- Physical Recreation- Young people engage in physical activity and participate in a Fun Run for the Simon community.
- Personal Skill- Young people take modules in drama, dance and film making.
- Community Involvement- Young people restore the community gardens for the senior citizens in the area
- Participation in an Adventure Journey

One of the key features of the Ballyrunners Programme is that the young people are not paid for their participation. Their engagement is voluntary but retention of the young people is very high, thus demonstrating their motivation to engage in something meaningful. The Ballyrunners Programme works as the facilitators from each agency actively participate in the programme, so if young people are dancing, they are dancing, if young people are digging in the gardens, so are they. Not only is this pro-social modelling, but it also shows the investment the facilitators in the young people and the programme.

Effectiveness: To date 45 young people have completed the Ballyrunners Programme. 32 have gone onto further training and 13 have gone straight into employment.

Soft skills are rarely included in a normal educational curriculum but many young people do gain soft skills by attending school and other activities. Soft skills are thus a part of the socialisation process in society. According to the participants of the project, soft skills are often learnt outside of schools; within the family; at sports clubs; youth clubs; or other informal settings.

Since soft skills are not taught officially, in school or by other institutions, not all young people learn them. The experience from the participants of the project is that many young people categorised as NEET lack these soft skills. In some cases it can be the reason as to why a young person is not in education, employment or training.

According to the participants of the project, soft skills are closely connected with the life experiences of young people. Therefore, attention must be paid to ensure that the experience, relationships and environment for young people in schools are positive.

The project identifies informal learning situations as means by which soft skills can increase among NEETs. Some of the participating stakeholders integrate soft skills in personal development modules that are offered to young people who do not want to attend school. However, the ideal would be that soft skills are integrated into the educational curriculum and thus transversal in all school subjects rather than as courses only offered to unemployed youth who do not attend school.

4.3.5 Flexible toolbox

As discussed earlier in the paper, young people that can be identified as NEETs have diverse needs and wishes. It is therefore important to try and cater to their requirements. This essentially means that an effort will not be successful if it relies on the conviction that one solution fits all. Being able to choose among different options can be a motivational factor that creates incentive to participate in the activity of choice.

The local authority must thus create a variety of activities that can be offered to young people. These activities can be seen as a Swedish smorgasbord (buffet table) with a variety of choices that all complement each other and can be combined in different ways to fit the individual needs of the young person. This smorgasbord can be seen as a flexible toolbox. Examples of tools or activities can be career guidance, personal development modules, workplace training, flexible education, coaching, practical training, internships or supported employment/education, to name a few. It is the task of the professional to together in dialogue with the young person to combine these to a chain of activities that eventually will lead them to their goal. Further, many of these activities then have to be individually adapted to fit the need of the young individual. For example, some young individuals may need motivational interview sessions while others are more in need of using the professional as a sounding board.

An important factor to consider is that all the activities that are chosen to make up the chain of activities for the young individual must make sense. The meaning and purpose of each activity must be clear to the young individual to ensure that motivation remains high throughout its duration. Individual adaptation of activities is often necessary. It is also important that the activities have a clear connection to the labour market or education.

The Stockholm Model, Sweden (Flexible toolbox, Jobbtorg Stockholm)

Target Group: Young people between the age of 16 and 29. Stockholm municipality offer young people who are not in education or employment activities, training and education through Jobbtorg Stockholm – a municipal labour market initiative.

Aims and objectives: The overall aim of the Stockholm Model is to enable young people to go from unemployment and inactivity to employment or further education.

Description: The success factors of the Stockholm Model are the on-going development of methods and activities, the close cooperation between different initiatives and the focus on the young person's needs. In addition to that, the importance of committed staff members cannot be emphasised enough. Within Jobbtorg Stockholm, young people receive the support of job coaches, job matchers, IT educationalists and career advisors. They are offered various activities such as internships and short vocational courses. For many, this is enough, but not for everyone. For those young people who need more support, the initiatives are intensified and adapted according to needs. Examples of this are the city's youth employment schemes as well as the Merit and Filur that are directed at different target groups, but, if necessary, can also link up in a chain of initiatives. The core of Filur is a self-strengthening programme in order to give the group better conditions to hold on to a job. The main objective of Filur is to help young people mature, teach them to follow routines and strengthen their self-esteem. Through Merit young people receive a merit. Besides preparatory initiatives for young people going into work placement, internships, employment or education, Merit also includes outreach work in the area Järvafältet, where youth unemployment is particularly high.

The Stockholm Model also includes a youth employment scheme which aims at opening the doors to the labour market by giving young people their first job within the municipality. This tool is used to reduce long-term unemployment among young people. Each year 400 positions are offered to young people in various work places within the municipality.

Furthermore, the Labour Market Administration coordinates the municipal monitoring responsibilities via coordinators at all the local 'jobbtorgs' and, through an open activity on Södermalm, we strive to reach out to all the 16-19 year olds who neither work nor go to school. The work is carried out in close cooperation with Arbetsförmedlingen (the Swedish Public Employment Service), the Stockholm Education Administration and other administrations in the City of Stockholm. The personal meeting is crucial in all forms of support for young Stockholmers.

Effectiveness: On average, young people aged 16-24 years obtain an employment or start studying after approximately five months of participation within the Stockholm Model. Further, in 2014 87 % of young people aged 16-24 years were self-sufficient six months after they had left the programme. To date, approximately 1 300 young people have been offered an employment through the youth employment scheme since the start in 2010. On average, 77,5 % of these young people are self-sufficient after completing their youth employment.

4.3.6 Sustainability – it may take time

When working with young people identified as NEETs it is important to achieve sustainability. This is often difficult as these young people often are used to giving up and dropping out of school and also other activities. The experience of the participants in the project is that NEETs often have a lower level of endurance than their peers who are still in the educational system. It is therefore a challenge for the professionals to ensure sustainability within the programme or activities.

One experience from the project on how to achieve this is through giving the young individual enhanced support for a longer time. This means that the professional does not end their contact with the young individual when they are placed in an activity, return to school or obtain an employment. Offering enhanced support during the initial period of regular studies or employment can increase the chances of a young person fulfilling their studies or holding on to their job.

To help a young person identified as NEET often takes time and must take time. The reasons why a young individual has left school and is not in education, employment or training are often many and stem from many different issues. It is not unusual that most of these issues have to be confronted and solved before the young individual can return to education or gain a sustainable employment. Therefore, time must be allowed to work with NEETs.

4.4 The Opinions of NEETs in Europe

In this section of the report the opinions of young people that participated in the project will be presented. This is a summary of the topics discussed during the so called *Laboratories of Dialogue* that took place in Italy, Spain, Ireland, Romania, Turkey and Greece in 2014. The complete minutes from these sessions can be found on the projects website: www.netnotneet.eu.

4.4.1 School and Education

4.4.1.1 Italy

The young people who participated in the laboratory of dialogue in Italy thought that the skills that are taught in school do not relate to the labour market. They saw that there is a lack of communication between teachers and students. Further, many of the participants did not see the benefit of higher education since they saw it as far from the labour market and post degree training expensive and not so useful to find a job.

4.4.1.2 Spain

The young people who attended the session in Spain stressed the problem of classroom overcrowding. They also saw that there is difficult in Spain to re-join the educational system after having dropped-out. Half of participants say: “To study is not worth it”. “Many bachelors are working in fast food restaurants”. The other half says: “if you are skilled, you have more job opportunities”. There is a high unemployment rate so companies look for those “well trained”. It is difficult to get a grant for studying. Rate students/teacher is high. The young people felt that there is not a clear connection between the educational system and the labour market. According to them the educational system “produces those things” that the labour market does not demand.

4.4.1.3 Ireland

The young people who participated in the session in Ireland identified a number of factors as to why it is difficult for young people like themselves to obtain a job. Some of these factors were; Lack of experience; The economic recession; Family background; Being too choosy; Laziness; Lack of confidence; Criminal background; and Substance abuse. The same group of you people identified that these factors would increase their chances of getting a job; Going Abroad; Getting more information on the job; Getting feedback from companies on application and interview; More jobs being available; More internships; Companies having more connections with job centres; and Training/ Higher education.

4.4.1.4 Romania

The young people that participated in the sessions in Romania felt that the curriculum in schools is too demanding and therefore many young people choose to leave school without completing their studies. Further, there was a general feeling that young people are not supported enough by the state. They also felt that teachers do not empathise with young people and do not get involved in their development. The young people identified following reasons as to why young people choose to leave school early: weak social situation; having been abandoned by parents or parents leave abroad and leave the children in the care of different relatives or even on their own; lack of involvement of parents; marginalization; and the idea of immediate financial gains.

4.4.1.5 Turkey

During the sessions in Turkey the young people said that the schools must improve on the way they prepare youths for life outside of school. Young people in Turkey do not know how to find a job, they do not know about PES and they have learnt nothing on entrepreneurship and work experience. In Turkey the participants of the Laboratories of dialogue felt that one of the schools most important tasks is to help young people improve their self-esteem and self-confidence. Building self-esteem is the first step towards happiness and a better life. If you have self-esteem you will respect yourself and then you will respect others.

The participants also talked about the importance to provide vocational opportunities for early school leavers in a trade of their interest.. These courses should facilitate the transition back to school or into an employment.

4.4.1.6 Greece

During the session in Greece the main issue discussed in the group was the lack of vocational guidance during school years. Even though vocational guidance is a part of compulsory education in Greece, it seems that it is delivered ineffectively. As a result, students lack the opportunity to recognize and promote their talents and capacities. Furthermore, there is no connection between the educational system and the labour market. Another issue addressed by the NEETs had to do with the lack of a supportive family environment. In most cases, school leavers come from families with low socioeconomic status that can't support them financially or even psychologically. Based on the above negative experiences, participants made the following suggestions:

- On-going teachers training: School staff should be trained in a regular basis in order to be kept up-to-date.
- Change of pedagogical methodology: They suggest the implementation of effective pedagogical practices and use the example of second chance schools as a good practice. They highlight the importance of cooperative learning and suggest that it should be implemented in all educational levels.
- Change of learning material.
- Psychological support to all students by experts.
- Relationship between teaching theory and practice: Schools must find the right balance between theory and practice.
- Vocational guidance: Vocational guidance must be delivered more effectively by experts, vocational counsellors.

4.4.2 Labour Market

4.4.2.1 Italy

The young people stressed a difficulty to access the labour market. A reason for this was the amount of experience requested and that companies are taxed too much when hiring new workers. Further, they felt that employers do not have an open mind when it comes to hiring young people. The young people who participated in the session wanted to enhance the cooperation among local stakeholders, promoting internship to let the young unemployed people entering into the labour market.

4.4.2.2 Spain

The young people at the sessions in Spain felt that there is a overcrowding of applications for every job that is advertised. Further, the level of qualifications required by the employer is often too high and the job is thus unattainable.

4.4.2.3 Ireland

When asked why they think that young people leave school early the young people in the session gave these explanations; People get fed up with school - 'Not going to get anything out of it'; Money issues, cost of going to college; Lack of job opportunities; Bullying/ Stress; Teachers not supportive if you don't have academic ability; Lack of motivation: belief that they're not going to get anything out of school; Lack of understanding of the value or benefits of school/education; and Rote learning: not being taught to think independently. When the same group of young people were asked what they wanted to change with the Irish educational system they answered; Guidance Counselling should be made mandatory; Be more sensitive to foreign nationals; More variety of subjects should be available to give students more choice; Teachers need to be able to relate to the young people; Rote learning: more focus on learning, independent thinking, experience and continuous assessment; Smaller class sizes as students with difficulties are being left behind; and More opportunities for work experience and being exposed to different jobs/careers. Get companies to go into schools and explain what they as companies want.

4.4.2.4 Romania

When the young participants asked about the situation on the labour market for young people in Romania answered that they have great difficulty establishing themselves on the labour market. This due to insufficient training and professional development; Lack of information; Too few jobs at national level; Not having graduated school; and that the employers take advantage of this situation and exploit young people.

4.4.2.5 Turkey

In Turkey the young people felt that the main difficulties in finding a job is the lack of information, experience, career guidance and level of education asked for. They also talked about the questions concerning minimum wages, which is a complex issue. Minimum wages at this point are too low to make a living from but at the same time minimum wages helps in creating or keeping job opportunities. Also many employers do not pay the insurance fee for the workers.

4.4.2.6 Greece

When discussing the labour market in Greece the young participants stated that there are job positions that require basic job qualifications. However, NEETSs do not meet these qualifications

and they remain out of the labour market. They did not understand why a secondary school diploma or IT skills are needed in order to work as an agricultural worker or in cleaning services?

The selection for jobs in Greece follows certain social criteria for a job position includes maternity, number of children etc. Young NEETs don't meet these criteria resulting in a social bias in election decisions. The young people present stressed the need to make young NEETs a distinctive social phenomenon that should be taken into account in job selection decisions.

4.4.3 Public Employment Services (PES)

4.4.3.1 Italy

The young people who participated in the session in Italy felt that there are too many channels for job searching (i.e. internet websites) in the country. They also saw a limitation in the training offered by the public and private agencies as the training most requested and useful are not for free and also limited to a small number of candidates. Further, internships should be more used to bring young people to the labour market,

4.4.3.2 Spain

In Spain, the main issue identified in terms of PES was the lack of public job search resources and tools.

4.4.3.3 Ireland

The young participants in the session have had experiences with one or more of the following: Job Centre, social welfare, and steps ahead, youth guarantee scheme. Their general opinion on these services was "Not a bad experience but we are still unemployed..!" The young people thought that they need to have more information about the schemes available. "All I know is I am part of a scheme. That's all." Some young people had received different information from different professionals working at the Public Employment Services.

4.4.3.4 Romania

The young people at the sessions stressed that there are not enough information points or activities for promoting the services that PES offer. Further, the young people felt that the public servants working in these offices are not always very kind and supportive. The general opinion of the young people was that the public employment services are non-attractive as an institution.

4.4.3.5 Turkey

The young people in Turkey addressed the importance of effective and professional career guidance in order to avoid the skills mismatch. The youths in Turkey need support to find pathways into employment. This could be done by providing the NEETs with suitable job skills and work experience.

4.4.3.6 Greece

The young people participating in the dialogue sessions in Greece felt that employment counsellors should have a personal contact with the unemployed and shape the qualifications and profile of the unemployed by frequent monitoring.

V. Conclusions

In conclusion, this toolkit shows that flexible education with early guidance interventions are key factors in the prevention of young people becoming NEET. However the approach taken with NEET young people must recognise that there are various categories of NEET, i.e. youth unemployed, lone parents, carers, young people involved in crime etc. and that “one size does not fit all”. There is also the importance of adult(s) whether it be a parent, mentor or teacher as role models. Activities must include this person to the greatest extent possible for it to be successful. And when the young person is offered a second chance either through education or training, there must be a recognition that for some reason, formal education previously failed that person. There is a need to recognise that some young people may thrive in an alternative structure of education or training that are not just a series of non-linked interventions.

By their very definition, NEET young people may be hard to reach due to a gap between them and the educational system, public employment services or labour market. Therefore the role of outreach work is a key tool to find and engage with NEET young people. Services need to co-operate and network in order that young people are not bombarded with duplicated services offering a myriad of interventions. This can lead to confusion on what is being offered and is an unnecessary waste of finite resources. Local knowledge is key to finding and engaging with NEET. And throughout this project, lessons have been learnt on how to work with NEET young people. The attitude of the professional or service is paramount to the successful outcome of the engagement. And what defines success needs to be as flexible as possible and not just measured by a return to formal education which may never suit that person. It is about finding out what motivates the young person to engage with society and slowly helping them achieve their full potential. There must be a variety of activities available to that young person.

On a final note, a key innovative element to the NNN Project was the involvement of NEET young people participating through Laboratories of Dialogue (workshops), Dueling Focus sessions with policy makers and attendance at a Transnational Conference. Through these forums, the opinions of the young people from 6 European countries were heard and listened to by policy makers. It is hoped that this toolkit will aid professional and services dealing with NEET young people to hear their voices more clearly.