

An analysis in the framework
of the European project
'Youth in transition'

THE NEEDS OF THE NEETS & THE NEEDS OF THE PROFESSIONALS

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The needs of the NEETs and the needs of the professionals

The analysis, “The needs of the NEETs and the needs of the professionals”, was elaborated as one of the intellectual outputs of the European Erasmus KA2 project “Youth in transition” (YIT), October 2018 – March 2021.

By identifying models, methods and new practice, YIT has contributed to scaffolding the most vulnerable sub-group of the NEETs on their pathways. These ‘young people on the edge’ are characterized by a complexity of personal and social problems, caused by psychological or physical diagnoses, socially disadvantaged backgrounds, social dysfunctionalities such as drugs and crime or other obstacles in life.

YIT focused on the cross-professional support before and during the individual pathways of the NEETs, aligning their dreams with vocational maturity, for self-support via job or education as the final goal.

The analysis was coordinated and authored by vocational consultant Regina Lamscheck-Nielsen, Moeve, Denmark, a partnering organization in YIT. The Danish-German author cooperated closely with experts from the YIT partner organizations in Denmark, Slovenia and Iceland in an interactive and agile process. The process and output were quality assured by researchers from the University of Hamburg. For partner organizations, as well as background information, see annex 1 and YIT’s website, youth-it.cool.

The analysis includes findings from empirical data and desk research, collected from January to March 2019, containing descriptive and analytical literature, as well as freely accessible reports and legislation; see list of references. In addition, insights from practice-based work with NEETs in the framework of YIT and from related projects in Denmark (2019-2020) have been taken into consideration.

The analysis is published online and freely available, as one of seven intellectual outputs from the project. Download from youth-it.cool.

Any questions and comments are welcome!

Aarhus, Denmark, August 2020 – Regina Lamscheck-Nielsen, Moeve

Please note: The study was elaborated before COVID-19 and its impact. The very first findings about the influence of COVID-19 on NEETs and professionals are not included.

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(1) Background and terms

The analysis was initiated to ensure that development work in YIT could incorporate, on the one hand, the youth perspective and, on the other hand, the perspective of the professionals working with the NEETs.

Both perspectives should consider the given systemic requirements, limitations and possibilities in the respective countries. Thus, the analysis helped to ensure that the project partners and their experts would address real problems, choosing relevant solutions and relevant methods.

Furthermore, the analysis was not only meant to calibrate the YIT experts' understanding of the needs of the NEETs and the needs of the professionals, but also to align focus and language across the three countries Denmark, Slovenia and Iceland. This alignment became a common basis for cross-national co-creation of new ways to meet the problems faced by guidance counselors and teachers in their support of the NEETs.

The results of the study are taken into account in recommendations made to decision makers and professionals who face the challenge of further developing work with NEETs. The recommendations are published as one of the intellectual outputs of 'Youth in transition'. They refer to current political contexts, reforming work processes and legislation in Denmark, Slovenia, Germany and in Europe.

Terms

☞ *We have different languages. This is the first time, that we exchange on the young people.*

Professional in a cross-professional meeting, Tønder, Denmark, September 2018

The necessity of clarifying terms and expressions arose not only between the different countries, but also locally between different sectors such as education, employment, health care and social care. In daily work life, many terms are practiced with an implicit understanding and can easily be misunderstood across different sectors.

The following core terms of the study are outlined as they were used in YIT. As far as possible, these definitions are aligned with the formal terms in European and national standards.

<i>NEETs</i>	<p>Young people of a given age, who neither are in education nor in training or employment (Eurostat, OECD). In YIT, the age group of 15-29 years was in focus. The country partners addressed different subgroups of the groups of NEETs most at risk, all of them with a complexity and interaction of a number of severe problems in their lives.</p>
<i>Professionals</i>	<p>Qualified professionals work competently with the NEETs, each of them with their own profession and within their own organization, typically from the fields of youth guidance counseling, educational counseling, employment, social work and vocational education and training (VET).</p> <p>Other relevant professionals can be teachers from educational programs or specialists such as therapists, substance abuse counselors or youth crime preventors.</p>
<i>Scout</i>	<p>An artificial term, created for the purposes of YIT. The role of the scout combines different kinds of counseling with organizational tasks within the cross-professional context of the local “chain responsibility” around the NEETs.</p> <p>For role and competence profile of the scout, see youth-it.cool (Scout profile).</p>
<i>Individual pathways, services, activities, transitions</i>	<p>Understood as coherent personal and professional development processes towards education or job, with a sustainable perspective. The development takes place in the framework of individually designed tracks, based on personal goals and with the young person as the co-designer. During these pathways, sense-making activities are initiated in public or private settings. Educational elements can be some of the stepping stones on the pathways. There is heightened focus on and support in the transitions between the phases of the pathways.</p>
<i>Vocational maturity</i>	<p>The project’s own definition of the term in YIT, explored and methodized for implementation in Denmark, Slovenia and Iceland.</p> <p>Vocational maturity is made up of the competences and potentials necessary for starting and retaining a job or internship. This is also the case for the beginning of a vocational program and during its educational processes.</p> <p>For further explanations and access to an interactive online tool for NEETs’ self-evaluation in dialogue with a professional, see youth-it.cool (Vocational maturity).</p>
<i>Cross-professional</i>	<p>The interaction and collaboration across professions for a common purpose, in this case to promote the development of NEETs towards vocational maturity. The different professionals can work in the social sector, in education, health, employment etc. They each bring their approaches and methods.</p> <p>In cross-organizational teams, the professionals come from different institutions such as youth guidance counseling centers, schools, social care centers, employment services etc., and bring different services under different legislations.</p> <p>Other nuances are: cross-competent teams, cross-experienced teams, multi-professional teams and more short-lasting ad hoc teams.</p>

The 'system' Here understood as the context and the overall conditions for professionals, when working with NEETs, and how these conditions are manifested locally. Consisting of rules, regulations and legislation, with all their financial limitations and possibilities, resource allocation, the organizational set-up for cooperation and the logistics concerning each individual young person.

Cross-national or global bodies, such as The United Nations, OECD or CEDEFOP, may influence the 'systems' via overall principles and frameworks for education, training, employment, social work and guidance counselling.

Competence The project YIT and the study at hand refer to the European Reference Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, defining the competences each European citizen needs for personal fulfilment and development, employment, social inclusion and active citizenship.

The key competences are a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Knowledge is composed of the concepts, facts and figures, ideas and theories that are already established, and support the understanding of a certain area or subject. Skills are defined as the ability to carry out processes and use the existing knowledge to achieve results. Attitudes describe the disposition and mindset to act or react to ideas, persons or situations.

This definition differs from some national interpretations. This is taken into regard in YIT's national work processes and products.

(2) Purpose and key questions

The purpose of the analysis is to identify the needs of the NEETs and the needs of the professionals, seen in the context of 'the system' with its requirements, limitations and possibilities.

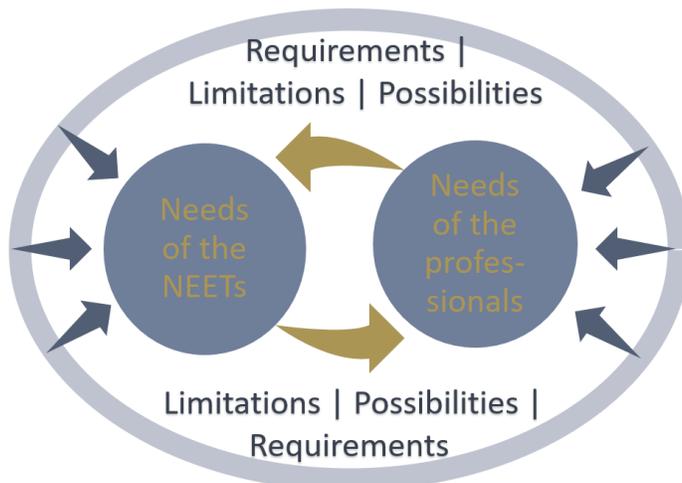


Figure 1: Outline of the analysis, own illustration (2019)

This general purpose has led to the following key questions:

- *What are the core needs of the NEETs, and can we make any general conclusions on needs across sectors and countries?*
- *What are the core needs of the professionals, and can we make any conclusions on how to address methods and conditions for their work with NEETs?*
- *How do requirements, limitations and possibilities from the system influence the needs of the NEETs and the needs of the professionals?*

The character of the analysis is non-comparative between the three countries Denmark, Slovenia and Iceland. Instead, the focus is on best practice, next practice, best fit and dilemmas.

The YIT project team decided to concentrate on finding conclusions that would be in the 'radius for maneuver' for the professionals and their direct managers. It would also have been highly relevant to identify and present political recommendations for improvements on system level. However, this would have exceeded the scope of the analysis at hand. Instead, concrete recommendations directed towards low level decision makers in Denmark, Iceland and Slovenia can be found in YIT's concluding intellectual output, agreed upon by a transnational team of YIT experts (see youth-it.cool).

Data collection had a natural limitation regarding representativity, for qualitative as well as quantitative empirical data. The desk research encompassed European statistics, with exemplification of aspects from Denmark, Slovenia and Iceland. This choice was undertaken consciously, due to the limited resources for the analysis and for the transnational collaboration in this context.

How to read the study

The reader may prioritize section (3) Conclusions and perspectives, in order to approach the field in its complexity. Here, the motivation can be found for the practice-based and practice-directed focus that was chosen in YIT.

Section (4) Theories presents only a few of many theories that would have been worth emphasizing. The selected theories were chosen because of their direct applicability to practice with the NEETs. One of the theories has emerged from practice supported by accompanying researchers. This theory is still under further exploration and evaluation.

The sections (5) Methodology and (6) Data collection, explain the procedures for accumulating the necessary knowledge for the study and also the limitations. The templates for the different types of data collection can be found in the section Annexes.

Section (7) Data results, together with section (8) Analysis, offer the comprehensive, but - because of the extensive and complex field - at the same time, limited foundation for the final conclusions.

All in all, the reader will find figures, facts and qualitative data from Denmark, Iceland and Slovenia, supplemented with wider European perspectives; see also section References.

(3) Conclusions and perspectives

The study analyzed quantitative and qualitative data about the needs of the most at-risk subgroups of the NEETs and the needs of the professionals, when working with these target groups.

These data were reflected on through the lens of statistics, policies and best practice in Denmark, Slovenia and Iceland, as well as on the European level.

The analysis showed findings that emerged transnationally from the above-mentioned countries. However, due to differences between essential parts of the countries' systems, some of the foci differ for the professionals of the countries.

The conclusions summarize the core needs of the NEETs and how to meet them in cross-professional cooperation, under the conditions given by the systems in the countries.

Needs of the NEETs - conclusions

In their essence, the findings confirm many well-known conclusions about NEETs, but also provide new knowledge. Young people with severe complex problems have typically been part of the 'system' for many years and have developed personal approaches to navigating in the system. The problems and their pathways vary widely from each other, but common needs and common motivations could be identified, also across countries.

It was found that all NEETs have dreams that can be transformed into *goals*, which over time can be within realistic reach. The pathways to their goals are to a certain degree unpredictable, but not coincidental. The young people are more likely to accept and engage in elements on their pathways, such as educational courses or individual-specific learning activities, if they make sense for them. Therefore, the NEETs should be involved in co-designing their own pathways. The elements on the pathways must lead to subgoals on their pathways.

The pathways towards their personal final goals reflect the NEETs' progression towards the society-defined goal of self-support. In our given context, self-supply is understood

as engaging sustainably in education or job. Attending to this required goal is part of the vocational maturity they need to achieve.

The NEETs show motivation, or possibly more likely, can become motivated for working towards their goals – if their motivational orientations are triggered. Here, motivation is constructed, dependent on changeable contexts as well as individual preferences and prerequisites.

The analysis also revealed the NEETs' generally high degree of sensitivity to impulses from others (peers, professionals, family members etc.), which affects them emotionally. This sensitivity calls for resilience and its strengthening.

Professionals or other supportive resource persons play important and possibly game-changing roles in their lives – if the NEETs experience, respect, trust and confidentiality. Not unexpectedly, relationships have a fundamental importance for NEETs, for better or worse.

All in all, a condensed picture of the needs of the NEETs has emerged, with many sensitive issues but also remarkable potentials.

To transform this picture into operational personal development, professional approaches and support are required – last but not least to match given societal settings and requirements.



Illustration 1, own, 2020

Needs of the professionals – conclusions

The professionals of this study are frontline practitioners in their work with NEETs as their main professional focus. Their roles cover personal guidance and counseling, teaching, employment counseling, social services and specialized offers such as various therapies.

These practitioners make a personal difference to their clients, when they use their professional methods of guiding, counseling and teaching directed towards the young peoples' efforts and learning processes. Career learning and motivational and relational work are just a part of the total methodology, which can be transformational for the young people.

The roles of the professionals include systemizing and simplifying the complexity of the individuals' problems, helping them to organize, plan and stay on their pathways. In particular, there is increasing attention to supporting transitions of the young peoples'

pathways. The fragile transitions occur between educational and work phases, as well as between phases in the young person's personal life (their first own home, broken or new relationships, bodily changes etc.).

The high complexity of the problems and the needs of the NEETs, leads to the need for an increased interaction between the professionals and other key persons (parents, peers, mentors etc.) that are important for the NEETs during and between the phases on their individual pathways.

Almost always, several public institutions or departments are involved in the complex cases of the NEETs, and not untypically, also the private and the civil sectors. A fundamental, but as yet relatively new principle for working with NEETs is the cross-professional and cross-sectoral outreach and cooperation. In order for this to succeed, professionals must have knowledge of each other's work conditions (procedures, legislation etc.), resources, approaches, language (terms) and methods.

The professionals express a desire for an alignment of approaches and methods. But this is neither realistic nor advantageous for the NEETs in the long run. On the contrary, it can ease the professionals' daily work to focus on the benefits of each other's approaches and accept their diversity.

The approaches obviously clash especially between, on the one hand, work processes with a strong youth perspective (in pedagogical work, guidance counseling etc.) and, on the other hand work processes towards vocation-directed requirements (in VET teaching, employment counseling etc.). Achieving a balance and synergy must be targeted through constant exchange or even negotiations.

But despite all this, a certain kind of alignment among the professionals is possible, when increasing the transparency among the professions regarding their approaches, when negotiating open-mindedly, and when agreeing cross-professionally on terms.

In YIT, the taxonomy for youth progression (see section 4, Theories) has brought a certain value as a commonly created language that eases mutual understanding and agreement on procedures. In any cases, the taxonomy must get adapted to local conditions, local ways of understandings and to the individual.

To navigate in this complex field and to meet the needs of the NEETs, the professionals must be well-qualified. The present study includes data from well-educated, very experienced, committed and ethically well-founded practitioners.

They pointed to a set of necessary competences, consisting of: knowledge, mostly about the youths, the system and its resources; skills, mostly about professional methods, self-insight, documentation and cross-professional cooperation; as well as appreciative and

resource-oriented attitudes to the NEETs. Apart from formal education, most professionals seemed also to favor informal and topic-specific empowerment within the set of competences, through short-term courses, internships, peer-learning, etc.

Finally, in spite of the fact that the professionals' work conditions and work load seem to create a pressure for many of them, they experience their work as very meaningful and express their personal dedication.

Influence from the system - conclusions

The desk research has shown that there is increasing attention regarding the NEETs-problem in the societies, including awareness of these problems seen from the perspective of the individuals.

A wide range of initiatives have been taken through recent decades, so far without any major or broad positive impacts on the percentage of NEETs in the different countries, or for the long-term perspectives for NEETs.

Many of these initiatives have been intensive activities focusing on one of the elements of the individual NEET's complex portfolio of problems, treated as serial measurements. New approaches are required, building on learning from the many previous initiatives with NEETs. Vital findings (such as by the official Danish "expert panel", 2017) point at a need for more coherent initiatives, based on long-term thinking and planning, well-coordinated across relevant sectors. Important stakeholders such as the private, cultural and civil sectors should also be taken into account. The NEETs themselves as the owners of their own pathways must be encouraged to play a far more active and decisive role.

People do not develop uniformly but can normally participate in the common settings of ordinary education, training and jobs. NEETs, with their extraordinary life conditions and fragmentary pathways, develop less like their peers. Usually, the systems offer very few criteria and methods for evaluating and planning NEETs' individual progression towards their vocational maturity. There is a need for a more fine-meshed and NEETs-relevant taxonomy: operational for the professionals to support the young people in their needs at given stages of their development and motivating them to progress.

Perspectives – new methods and practice

The alarming prognoses for the future of NEETs (OECD, 2020) can and must be addressed, especially in the light of tendencies that point towards increasing societal inequalities (Anner, 2019, with reference to Piketty and the World Inequality Database) and even higher requirements as to peoples' key competences in the future. NEETs are in great danger of social exclusion, and the earlier these threats are met, the better.

In YIT, the project partners have met the challenge by developing new models, methods and tools, involving NEETs and professionals practically. The results from YIT presented below may serve as inspiration, or they may be transferred directly to new settings and countries.

Professional practitioners outlined a taxonomy for *youth progression* towards vocational maturity. Each of the phases was provided with indicators.

Vocational maturity, the final phase of the taxonomy for youth progression, has been described as action-oriented competences. These competences have been transferred to an interactive online tool for self-evaluation, to be undertaken by NEETs in dialogue with a relevant professional contact person.

Trial runs of the tool in practice have been undertaken with a total of 173 NEETs in different settings in Denmark, Slovenia and Iceland, in the period from August 2019 until September 2020. The tool was adjusted according to the results from these trial runs, and, in addition, pedagogical recommendations were identified.

The tool is now ready for implementation in the three countries, as well as for transfer to other countries.

The design and course of individual pathways for NEETs towards vocational maturity was outlined via a generic action-oriented didactic model. The model illustrates the necessary dimensions for alignment in cross-professional cooperation, interaction with the individual NEETs and the tasks of a coordinating contact person ('scout'). A crucial element of the model is the NEET's co-design of their pathways.

The model describes a taxonomy for the individual development of NEETs. The taxonomy was applied for monitoring a total of 192 NEETs, divided among the three countries from September 2019 until February 2021.

The model was transformed to locally sense-making models in Denmark, Slovenia and Iceland, with regard to their national conditions. The generic model is freely available for other countries.

A competence profile of the contact person ('scout') has been elaborated, outlining competences as knowledge, skills and attitudes for counselors and their extended role as a close and supportive contact person for NEETs during their pathways towards self-support. The profile was adapted to national legislation and practice in Denmark, Slovenia and Iceland.

It is accessible as an interactive online version in English, where professionals or managers can create own profiles from the generic model.

Four training modules have been developed as a coherent concept, with operational learning outcomes and a practice-directed methodology. The target groups are professionals and managers from different sectors, with the joint task of improving the situations of the NEETs. During the modules, the target groups achieve competencies regarding youth progression, the NEETs' self-evaluation of vocational maturity, the design of individual pathways, the role of the contact person and cross-professional cooperation.

The core curriculum and methodology are freely available in English. Adjusted national versions have been implemented in Denmark, Slovenia and Iceland.

Policy recommendations based on the above-mentioned outputs are available as short policy briefs that have emerged from the work done by the practitioners in YIT.

(4) Theories

Recognized theories including a new research-monitored framework were selected for the study. The theories (a) "Dilemmas in cross-professional cooperation", (b) "Career Learning", (c) "Youth progression – a taxonomy" and (d) "Motivational Orientations" were chosen for their practice orientation. The theories can provide professionals with knowledge and methods to support their ability to make an impact on NEETs, within the given systemic requirements, limitations and possibilities. In addition, career learning, which is a recognized approach in many European countries, has also become recognized in several countries' formal systems, as recommendations or even in regulations for counseling and youth education.

Other theories could have been relevant to apply. Regarding NEETs, theories about relationship management, learning processes or psychological approaches could have added valuable aspects.

Regarding the professionals, methods with systemic approaches could enrich further work. For example, "Relational coordination" (Gittell, 2016) has proven its value in many municipalities and major companies, and Tøfting Kongsgaard (2014) offers a range of concrete tools for multi-theoretical practice in social work.

A relevant didactic model for designing pathways as individual development processes for NEETs could not be found, as classic didactic models treat the design of teaching processes or counseling processes more narrowly (Plant et al, ed., 2020).

In spite the limitations mentioned, the below-chosen theoretical approaches seemed applicable.

Due to the extent of this study, the presented theories are only outlined briefly. References for further studies can be found in the List of references.

(a) Dilemmas in cross-professional cooperation

To analyze the needs of the professionals, theory developed by the Danish sociologist, prof. Nanna Mik-Meyer and her British co-researchers (2017 and 2018), was applied. Mik-Meyer's conclusions are based on various studies of professionals' encounters and their work with socially disadvantaged clients.

The studies led to the identification of some fundamental and insolvable dilemmas, which the professionals experience in their daily work. The following dilemmas are presented in detail in Mik-Meyer (2018, p. 197-249, own translation and summary by Lamscheck-Nielsen, 2019).

Mik-Meyer identifies three important rationales in welfare work, which coexist side-by-side, but very often clash and cause difficulties in professional work.

3 RATIONALES

Mik-Meyer explains these rationales as *"a bureaucratic context corresponding to an administrator-client relation, a market context corresponding to a service-provider-customer relation, and a context conditioned by psychology, or in more general terms, by the psy-sciences, which takes the form of a coach-coachee relation."*

The bureaucracy rationale is about procedures and rules, carried out under a given financial budget and focusing on involving the client, creating activities with the client and making him/her responsible and self-determined. Bureaucracy with all its standards and generalizations also ensures fundamental rights for the individual citizen for the same reason. This insight may ease the professionals' acceptance of working within demanding bureaucratic limitations and requirements.

The market rationale is about the fact that modern welfare work must be professional and at the same time financially efficient. It must consider the individual's unique situation, assuring a consistent and fair treatment, based on an impartial relationship to the client.

The psy-sciences rationale points to the importance of the relationship between professional and client, referring to "psychological/ pedagogical/ guidance/ coaching" methods. This relationship is based on trust, with the professional as a loyal promoter of the client's development. The client is in the center as a self-determined person. At the same time, the client can also be perceived as lacking personal resources and making contra-productive choices.

According to Mik-Meyer, all three rationales are necessary and interrelate to some extent. They also provide a certain balance between the needs of the society, the needs of the professionals and the needs of the clients.

Firstly, bureaucracy promotes fairness and equal treatment of the clients according to neutral legislation, independent of professionals' personal preferences, prejudices, or professionalism. Secondly, as welfare systems are driven by tax revenues, there is a need for efficient and reasonable procedures, to avoid misuse and prodigality of public money. And finally, human rights emphasize the rights and the potentials of each individual, even when they are in major personal difficulties or when there is doubt about the rationality of their personal decision-making.

These rationales are valued differently and prioritized differently in the various welfare institutions and by the professionals. The rationales appear distinctly and mutually opposing, in particular when working with clients who have multiple and highly complex problems. The clients can be caught between several systems, dependent on the systems' and the professionals' approaches and views.

DILEMMAS

In this stressful field of the three rationales, dilemmas emerge (annex 2, examples). A dilemma is understood as a necessary choice or problem offering two possibilities, neither of which is unambiguously acceptable or preferable (Neergaard-Dibbern, 2006, own translation, 2020).

Some of the crucial dilemmas relate to the professionals' possibly unrealistic resource-orientation, with too high expectations as to the clients' ability to make rational decisions and take responsibility for their own lives. Expectations of the clients' own motivation can in some cases block rather than promote developmental processes. This is also the case for an idealistic belief in 'hope for each individual', which can obscure insights about the clients' realistic potential and limitations.

Other typical stumbling blocks in cross-professional cooperation are sanctions and opinions on whether, where and how to apply them.

Finally, the professionals' views of quality of life represent a dilemma that must be balanced, on the one hand setting goals for mental, physical and financial health on behalf of the client, and, on the other hand, respecting the clients' possibly more short-term and self-centered needs.

These dilemmas and many more do not necessarily arise in all professionals' areas of work. But they illustrate that the same situation can be seen in different ways, and all perspectives can at the same time make sense and conflict for the professionals.

DEALING WITH DILEMMAS

The professionals are caught in a 'dilemma-ridden practice'. The organizational and legal frameworks for their work appeal to clients who are far more resourceful and rational than the clients in the daily practice of the professionals. Sharing experiences about dilemmas is not a problem per se, on the contrary. Discussions identify and illustrate the different professionals' fields of expertise.

These discussions can be experienced as difficult by the professionals because principles for their work are questioned, and limitations become even clearer. Different professionals do not necessarily interpret dilemmas in the same way, and this can cause frustration. The different rationales can be experienced as quite dominant and stressful. Some professionals experience this as "*working in different realities*", where policies and even their own decisions are seen as unrealistic by themselves.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mik-Meyer and her research team recommend a focus change; from a problem-directed view towards an acceptance-seeking view.

The dilemmas cannot be simply dissolved, and the rationales cannot conquer each other. Mik-Meyer suggests making the different rationales explicit and visible, to bridge across misunderstandings and to become a basis for creating new shared solutions in daily work. In their dialogues, the professionals should turn the focus from their own goals towards accepting their shared dilemmas and identifying acceptable solutions together.

Professionals can consider identifying their 'sweet spot' regarding the 3 rationales - bureaucracy, market conditions and the psy-approach: Where and how is it possible to do their job in a satisfying way and, at the same time, in a way that actually empowers the NEETs.

(b) Career Learning

CAREER COMPETENCIES AND CAREER MANAGEMENT SKILLS

The meaning of the term "career"¹ has evolved throughout time. Until now, career has mainly been associated with striving for success in life, ultimately connected to the

¹ Originally, the word "career" derives from Latin "carrus", referring to a chariot (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2019). The semantic extension whereby "career" came to mean "*course of one's public or professional life*", appears first from 1803.

achievement of a high position via degrees, power, financial income or possessions. But while the well-known occupations previously were rather predictable and could be achieved via ditto predictable career pathways, policy makers and education professionals must now respond to an increasingly unpredictable labor market in a globalized and digitalized world (World Bank report, 2019).

The needs of the trades and the markets are emerging and changing at such a high speed that educational institutions cannot deliver an accordingly competent workforce fast enough. At the same time, the complexity of choosing an educational and occupational pathway has increased tremendously for the individual.

In recent years, the understanding of “career” has changed again. According to the Danish prof. Rie Thomsen, career competences encompass:

☞ *“... competence to understand and develop oneself, to explore life, learning and work, as well as to manage life, learning and work during changes and transitions.”*
“... an awareness of, how to do, but also what is possible to do, and that the individual forms his/her life and actions and at the same time influences his/her own chances for the future.”

Prof. Rie Thomsen, Denmark: 2014, p. 4, own translation, 2019

In an international context, “career management skills” are emphasized (Haug et. al., 2018), referring *“... to a whole range of competences which provide structured ways for individuals and groups to gather, analyze, synthesize and organize self, educational and occupational information, as well as the skills to make and implement decisions and transitions.”* This understanding was also the basis for the work undertaken in the EU commission (EU, 2004 and 2008) and ELGPN (2012).

The concept of career management skills has largely been built upon the theoretical discourse of social learning and career learning. The common premises are that it is important to go beyond actual decision-making and to focus on career development as a *learning process* where knowledge, skills and competences on managing a career have been acquired.

Career learning and career guidance have become a part of guidance and education in several countries, and during the last decade also a part of some of the national and European policies. Career learning as a method and as an approach has recently been added explicitly to regulations in youth education in Denmark. In Slovenia, career learning is daily practice, realized as career centers’ initiatives and in legislation (employment plans). In Iceland, as well, career learning is part of daily guidance counseling processes.

Career management skills may be even more relevant for NEETs, who very rarely follow traditional educational. But making appropriate career choices must be learned, and this process requires professional support. The previous approach to education counseling as more or less a process of providing information is no longer sufficient. There is a need for new methods for achieving career-development skills.

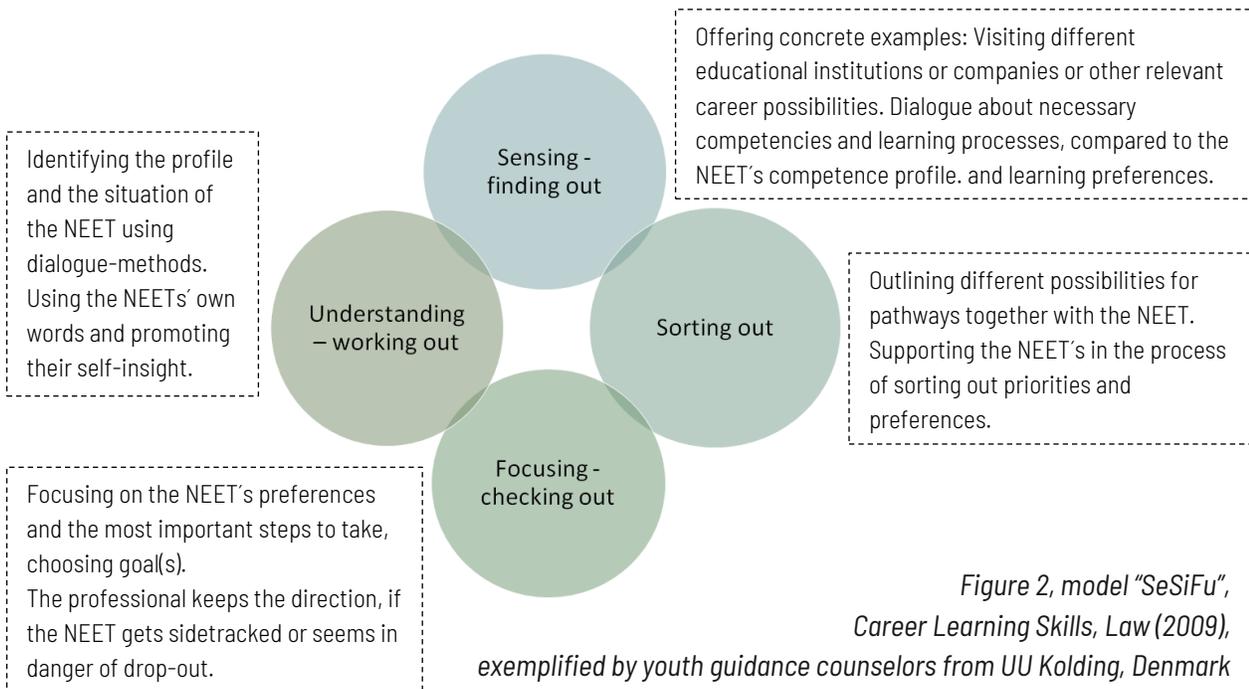
CAREER DEVELOPMENT SKILLS FOR NEETS

The English career learning researcher Bill Law saw at career development as consisting of learning processes.

🔗 *It is not about what people learn, but how they learn.*
Bill Law (2011)

Competent choices build on a range of skills that people are capable of achieving. Career-developing skills are partly intrinsic skills, partly developed skills.

The following career development skills model (fig. 2) outlines the necessary skills that each person must have and reflect on in order to assess possibilities and make relevant choices. The professionals must support this process by planning that the young people can experience the different phases at different periods of their career learning process.



It must be taken into account that learning processes usually do not take place linearly in a logical order. Neither do learners develop at the same pace. Thus, the model must be adapted individually and with flexibility, according to the individual's needs and pace.

Law's DOTS model (Law & Watts, 2003, 1977) can be considered for work with NEETs:

Decision learning in order to understand the many ways decisions can be made including pressures, expectations and cues. This implies methods of decision-making, prioritization, organization of information and self-knowledge, learning to balance risks against likely reward, and taking responsibility for impact and outcomes.

Opportunity awareness in order to experience and understand the world of work, potential opportunities, requirements and responsibilities to be met, and satisfaction and rewards you are likely to achieve.

Transition learning in order to achieve self-awareness and skills, and manage transitions into adulthood and into adult decisions, such as 'knowing' the reality of the differences between school and work. This implies applying and linking learning to the workplace and building soft skills for navigating in the world of work.

Self-awareness in order to sense oneself clearly, knowing your similarities and differences to others, understanding your own personality and its impact on opportunities. This implies exploring actual and potential qualifications, skills, qualities, physical strengths, and all their limitations. Personal needs, interests and values must be explored, including influential views from the outside.

Figure 3 outlines the combination of the two models, SeSiFu and DOTS:

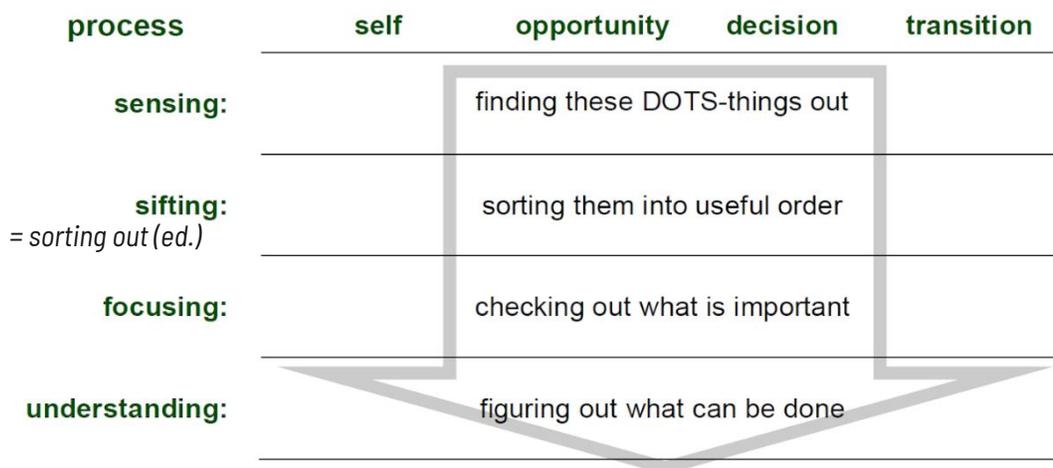


Fig. 3, SeSiFu and DOTS Law (2010)

When the SeSIFU model is combined with the DOTS model (Law, 2011), the more organizational phases of the SeSiFu model can be applied to facilitate DOTS' self-development elements concretely for the individual.

Career learning methods can also be used to support group counseling or counseling in collective settings, still with a focus on the individual.

THROUGH A CRITICAL LENS

Critical voices also point out the limitations of the career learning approach. It must be emphasized that the career learning models do not specifically address aspects other than the individual's development.

Young people are expected to take full responsibility for their own processes. The realism and reasonability of these expectations can be doubted, especially for regarding the most at-risk subgroups of the NEETs. More sociologically inspired research and models could contribute by including environmental aspects².

The fundamental principle of career guidance is the absence of normativity and a direction-guiding approach. This principle strengthens the youth perspective. But this can at the same time be unrealistic and obscure, because that there are given goals and requirements to follow by the young people. Each system – the society, the school, the workplace or other social bodies – sets conditions that simply must be lived by. The professionals represent these systems. They must be normative regarding the goal of their guidance and counseling, as the outcome of their work with NEETs is employment or education. In other words, and as a step towards this goal: vocational maturity.

☞ *Precautionary initiatives are never non-normative. We are caught in the dilemma that we want a strong welfare state to 'catch' the disadvantaged, but at the same time we do not want the welfare state to impose its will on us.*

Mik-Meyer, in Vejleder Forum Magasinet (2017), own translation

(c) Youth in progression – a taxonomy

The professionals' work with NEETs has as its final goal to bring the NEETs closer to education and employment, as a way to achieve self-support in society. This final goal is fixed, even when focusing on the individual's potentials and dreams as much as possible.

² Examples: Research regarding social heritage and social mobility (as referred to by Csonka, 2017, p. 25-44); example of model including environmental aspects in Denmark "Everyday pedagogy" (Henriksen et al., 2011, p. 140).

In YIT and other related projects, the educational pathway includes in most cases vocational education and training.

In these projects³, there was a need to outline clear criteria and indicators for identifying the progression of the young people towards the pre-given goal of education/job – in other words: vocational maturity.

TOWARDS VOCATIONAL MATURITY

The taxonomy outlined below, which describes the progression towards vocational maturity, was developed by professional practitioners and managers (2018-2020) during several Danish innovation projects, which are closely related to YIT.

The taxonomy was used for monitoring the young persons' development. Researchers (VIA University College and VIVE) quality assured the work with the taxonomy and analyzed the data about the NEETs. In addition, it happened that the terminology of the taxonomy was applied as a common language among the professionals. At the time of writing, a study is in action (VIVE, 2019-2022), analyzing which professional methods are applied to support and promote during different phases and transitions of the taxonomy.

Individual progression does not necessarily occur linearly, not necessarily distinctly in its separate phases, and not necessarily simultaneously with that of other young people. In spite of this unpredictability, five criteria could be outlined:

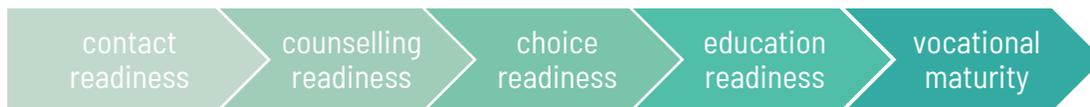


Fig. 4, Taxonomy for youth progression, vs. March 2020,

©EUK/KL & Moeve - Unge med kant Syddanmark, Unge med kant Hovedstaden, Youth in transition

Important: There can be skips, detours or overlaps, and the development pace will vary for each individual young person.

Each of the five phases is described using action-based indicators (“Youth progression”, Yit website, youth-it.cool). It is emphasized that both the phases and the indicators must be adapted nationally and to a certain degree also locally, as they depend strongly on the conditions of the system in which they are applied.

³ Unge med kant, Denmark: Unge med kant Syddanmark (2018-2020), Unge med kant Hovedstaden (2019-2022).

In YIT, the taxonomy was used by Hamburg University to monitor and analyze NEETs' progression in Denmark, Iceland and Slovenia during their individual pathways (IO6). The final results will be available in March 2021.

“Vocational maturity” was agreed upon as the general criterion for the goal. Vocational maturity reflects the competencies and potentials that are necessary for starting in and retaining a job or internship. This can also be true for the beginning of a vocational program and during its educational processes.

VOCATIONAL MATURITY

There was a need to investigate “vocational maturity” more deeply. In a cross-national desktop process, the YIT experts identified 6 “*universal parameters*” (review by The University of Hamburg, 2019-2020):

Motivation | Setting goals | Flexibility | Resilience | Social settings | Professional skills (outlined in Youth in transition, youth-it.cool, 2019). Visualized in Danish in fig. 5.

The indicators behind the parameters are formulated as action-oriented competencies, and aspects of “Bildung” (common literacy) were added. The tool attempts to balance the ‘youth perspective’ and expectations from the world of work.

The interactive online tool for NEETs' self-evaluation of vocational maturity was developed in a cross-national and cross-professional process. The tool offers the possibility to create individual profiles (fig. 5).

The practice-based development of the tool was undertaken as an iterative agile process in each of the countries Denmark, Slovenia and Iceland and also between the countries, with trial runs in practice and several adjustments.

Sources for inspiration had been a research paper on the elaboration of a criteria catalogue in Hamburg (work paper, prof. Kuhlmeier), criteria for work with vocational maturity in education and job counseling at German employment centers, as agreed upon by the national German stakeholders (2006), as well as a PhD-study about the discourse on vocational maturity in Germany (Schulte, 2017).

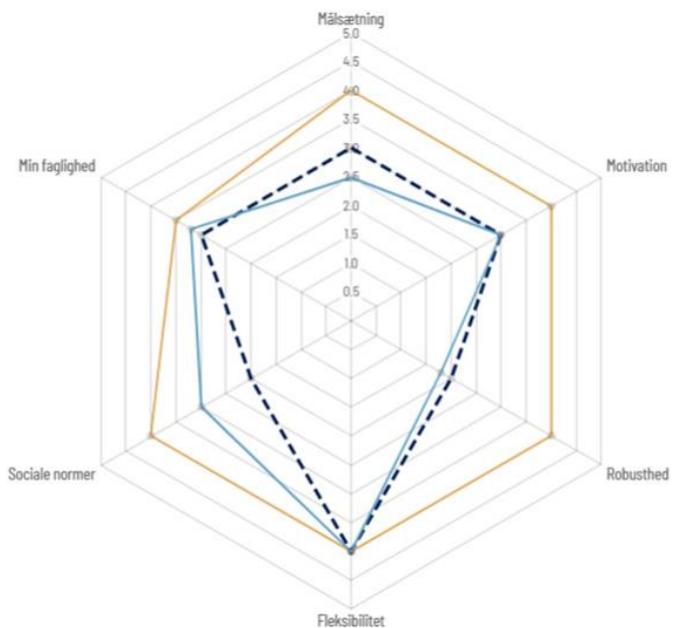


Figure 5: Danish example of individual profile, anonymous (2020)

(d) Motivational Orientations

This approach to motivation is described in a framework elaborated by researchers from The Danish Center for Youth Research (cefu), Aalborg University (2017). Their model “The 5 Motivational Orientations” is based on a major research study on unemployed young people’s pathways to work. Education was a stepping stone on these pathways.

The model (fig. 6, Katznelson, cefu) presents five non-prioritized and mutually interacting dimensions: Relationship motivation, Mastering motivation, Perspective motivation, Practice motivation and Necessity motivation. The final goal is bringing the young people closer to entering and completing an educational or training program.

The different approaches to scaffolding motivation match different learner’s potentials and preferences. None of the motivational orientations can be applied alone or will dominate over time, and all of them also contain challenges that should be met.

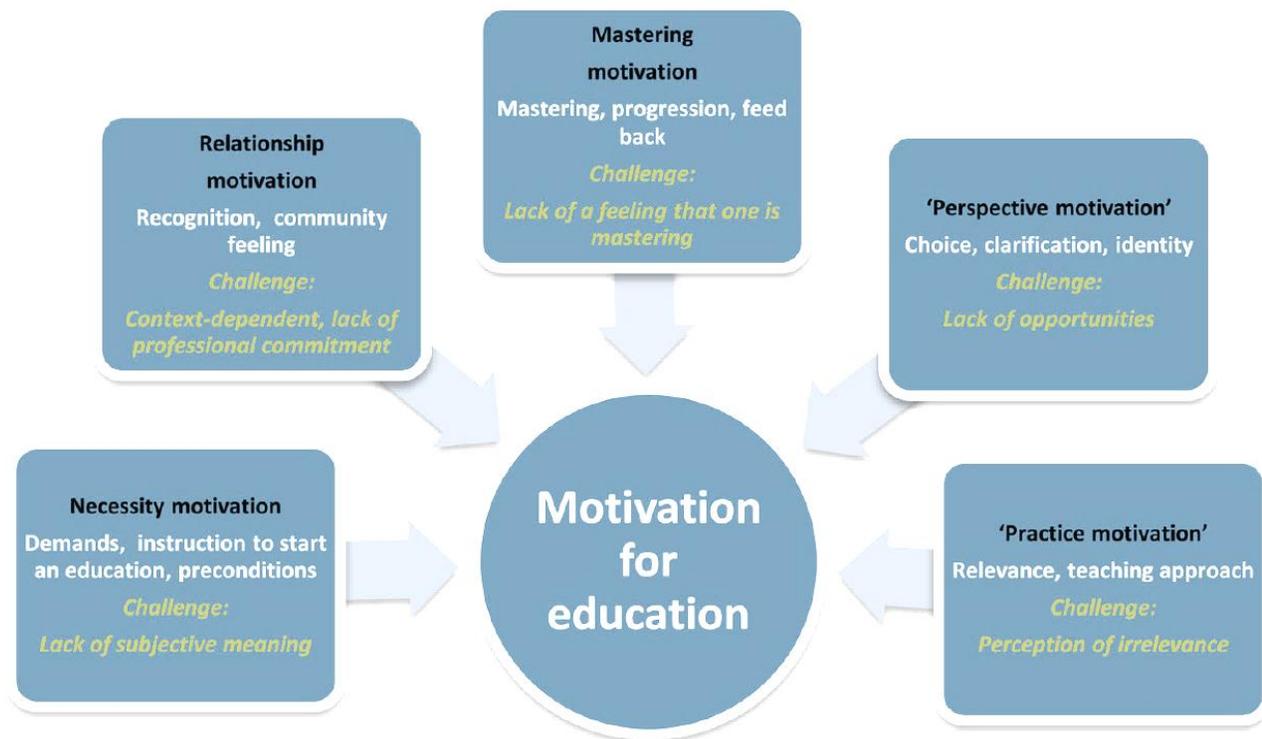


Figure 6: Model of Motivational Orientations, Katznelson (2017)

The 5 motivational orientations make differentiation of guidance activities directable to each young person's needs: Which kind of learning activity to offer to whom, when and how? The professionals can systematically and practically choose methods and tools, depending on the possibilities and limitations in their daily work.

THROUGH A CRITICAL LENS

Katznelson herself mentions that this approach to a certain degree also promotes a kind of behavioristic change process (2017). This implies that the authenticity and the sustainability of the individual's motivation possibly can be doubted.

But under the given circumstances, the professionals usually have neither sufficient competencies nor sufficient resources to support long-lasting inner development processes towards personal growth.

(5) Methodology

This section describes methods for data collection and for analyzing the data.

Triangulation

Data collection was undertaken by method triangulation (fig. 7), encompassing both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Focus group interviews of NEETs were conducted in national languages in Jan.-Feb. 2019, with a duration of approx. 45-60 min. per interview. The same concept was applied in all of the countries but was adapted as far as necessary to local circumstances. For concept and questionnaire, see annex 3.

Online surveys with professionals were completed in national languages by professionals (Jan.-Feb. 2019), consisting of cross-sectoral samples in Denmark, Slovenia, and Iceland, respectively. The survey was created for quantitative results and for qualitative answers. Duration for completion was approx. 30 min. For questionnaire, see annex 3.

In Denmark, data collection was extended with *video recordings of encounters* between professionals and NEETs in March 2019, with a duration of 45-60 min. each. There were no instructions for the encounters themselves. Explicit and written permission was required from all participants. The videos were recorded without photographer and with the camera placed where it did not disturb the meeting.

The desk research (Feb.-April 2019) encompassed the screening of statistics, policies, literature, and practice-based results. Notable projects and initiatives with a sustainable impact on NEETs were examined by the YIT country partners as to their significance for YIT. The analysis has as its reference formally acknowledged facts and statistics that are used in public debates and decision-making processes regarding conditions for NEETs, professionals and their organizations.

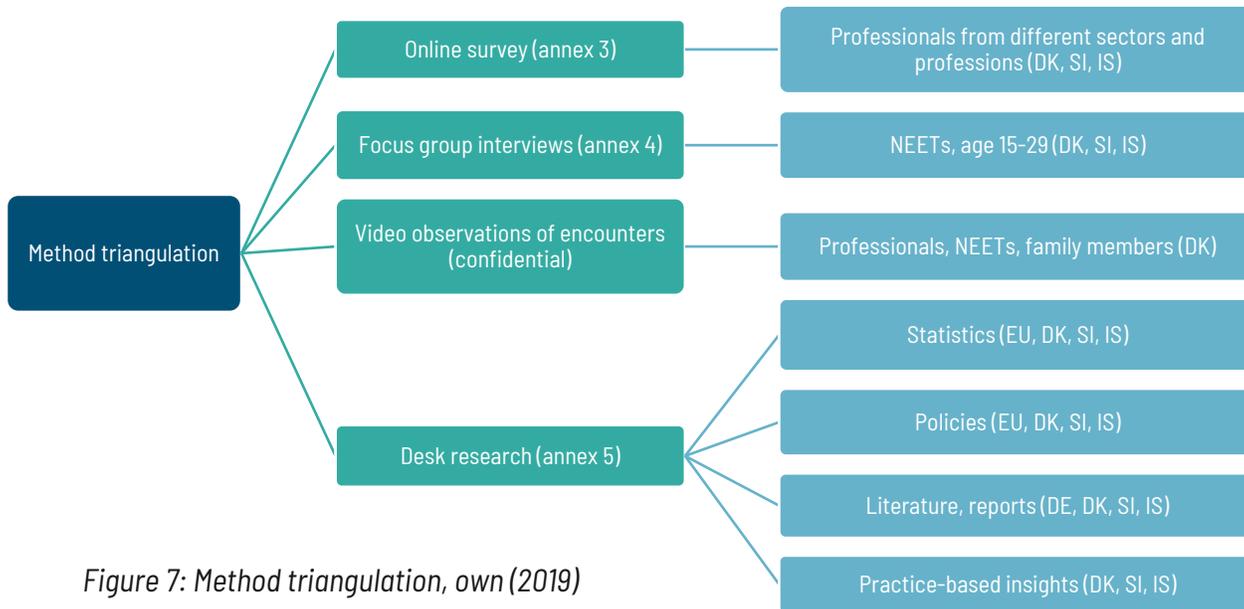


Figure 7: Method triangulation, own (2019)

Approaches

The desk research represents the typical thinking and language on system level, valuing figures, facts, rules and legislation. It reflects the bureaucracy and market mechanisms.

The empirical data were collected using a hermeneutic approach, respecting the young peoples' own understandings and interpretations of their life situations. Thus, verifications of their statements were not required, which should be kept in mind when reading. The more constructivist approach of the empirical data collection reflects the typical thinking and language on a certain practitioner level, valuing personal engagement and individual understandings. It represents psychological and pedagogical processes.

Both data collection approaches are necessary, and an interaction between these paradigms is possible as well as recommendable (Mik-Meyer, 2017).

Coding of data

The experts undertook a coding of the qualitative data (Kvale, 2004). By reading and re-reading the material, in the light of the above-outlined theoretical approaches (section 4), several topics emerged as clearly important and recurrent themes. These themes were categorized and generalized.

The categories were presented and verified in the YIT partnership, as well as by researchers from Hamburg University responsible for quality assurance.

Overview on data collection

This section offers an overview of the data collected from each of the surveys, as mentioned in section 5) Methods for data collection.

All project partners were actively involved in data collection. They agreed locally on summaries of qualitative data, which were translated into English.

Data for European desk research was collected cross-nationally by a Slovenian and two Danish experts, verified by the partnership.

	DK	IS	SI	IN TOTAL
EMPIRICAL DATA COLLECTION				
Focus group interviews with NEETs	2 interviews = 10 interviewees	7 interviewees	9 interviewees	26 NEETs
Online survey with professionals	16 professionals	20 professionals	25 professionals	61 professionals
Video observations of cross-sectoral encounters	2 encounters: - 1 NEET, 3 professionals, 1 family member - 4 professionals	-	-	7 professionals across sectors, 1 NEET, 1 family member
DESK RESEARCH: EUROPE + PARTNER COUNTRIES ICELAND, DENMARK AND SLOVENIA				
Policies EU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - European 2020 strategy (EU commission, 2013) - Eurofund report 			
Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - VET reform 2014 - New legislation: Kommunal Ungeindsats, 2019 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ministry of Welfare, strategy - Directorate of Labor, plan 2019 - Ministry of Education, initiative 2016-18 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National Program for Youth 2013-2020 - Adult Education Master Plan 2013-2020 	
Statistics EU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Eurostat - OECD - Specific reports from the European Commission/Parliament 			
Statistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ministry of Education - KORA/VIVE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NOSOSCO (Nordic Statistic Bureau) - Sector-specific statistics 	Statistical Office of Republic of Slovenia	

	DK	IS	SI	IN TOTAL
Case	Cost benefit, case Odsherred	Cost benefit, case Reykjavik	-	
Projects EU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mobile learning in VET towards 2020 - School & Work - NEW-D 			
Outstanding projects and practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unge med kant Syddanmark - Unge med kant Hovedstaden 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Atvinnutorg/Job-torg 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PUM-0 - Production School 	
Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Criteria catalogue on educational maturity (Germany, 2006) - Assessment of the construct educational maturity (Germany, 2017) - Research Youth development (SI) - Research about professionals working with NEETs (2015, IS) 			

Table 1, own overview (2019)

(6) Data results

This section summarizes results from the surveys, as outlined in section (5) Data collection. Data from each of the surveys were summarized across Denmark, Iceland and Slovenia. Differences between the participating countries are indicated.

The partner countries in YIT had chosen different target groups within the NEET group of 15-29 years old youths:

- Denmark: ages 15-17 years, all of them in a 10th grade course preparing for “educational readiness” (see Youth progression, Youth in transition, youth-it.cool)
- Iceland: ages 23-29 years, all of them in individually designed processes, with individual and group counseling for job readiness (vocational maturity)
- Slovenia: ages 17-24 years, all of them in the supportive program “Project learning for young adults” (PUM-0)

a) Empirical data: focus group interviews with NEETs

The following topics emerged out off a total of 26 young persons’ contributions during focus group interviews, based on a semi-structured questionnaire (annex 4). The answers were categorized and thematized across the countries. When reflecting on the themes, it must be kept in mind, that the interviewees belonged to different age groups in different settings.

Note: Some of the following quotations are delivered as descriptions of the NEETs by the professionals, while others are direct quotations from the NEETs.

AMBIGUENCE TO THE CURRENT SITUATION

On the one hand, the NEETs communicated negatively: *“School is shit, boring”. “They feel that society in general and formal schooling in particular is not for them”.*

On the other hand, the NEETs expressed positive reflections and emotions: *“I have made friends at school, have a new best friend”. “They catch up on preparing for completed high school classes and finishing high-school, are in upper secondary school or vocational college” (interviewers). “They have more free time to find out what they want to do in life” (interviewers).*

The ‘free time factor’ seemed to be positive as well as negative: On the one hand *“They have more time to do other things, take care of their kids, spend time on hobbies and such. They feel that they have room to make an informed decision about their future [...]. Two had recently become sober and use the time for self-development” (interviewers).* On the other hand *“Too much time, too much boredom, do not know what to do”.*

SOCIAL COMPONENT AND SOCIAL SETTINGS

The “others” seemed to be significant for the NEETs’ self-motivation: *“The group, the others” and “Previously, because I had to [go to school, ed.]. It’s nicer her” [at the 10th grade school, ed.]. “Family – but not all, some have had bad family situations, and friends”.*

Some of the interviewees underlined that they *“missed the social aspect of work”.* *“Most said friends and family”,* when asked for well-functioning kinds of support. In this light, negative social experiences may have caused a major negative impact: *“Some [VET teachers, ed.] are really good, some are assholes. They treat us like small children. Look down on us. The other students there say that we don’t have a future.”*

RESPECT, CONFIDENTIALITY, TRUST, CONFIDENCE

Being met with respect in their social settings, plays an essential role for the NEETs: *“They were nice, showed interest, wanted to talk. It is important to be recognized by the teachers (in VET and high schools, ed.). They are not better than us.” “[...] mentors and NEETs build trust and connection over time” (in a supportive program, ed.).*

A no-go is *“that they make you feel like you are just a number, unimportant, or that they are unnecessarily judging you and not ready to listen”.*

Respect also means confidentiality regarding personal issues, which seems to be very important to the NEETs. Respect is the precondition for achieving trust and confidence from the NEETs and is identified in real attitudes and activities from the professionals:

☞ *The counselor helped everyone the class with problems, he involved the teacher also. He helps to fix things and problems, helped me stop taking drugs.*

Interviewee (2019)

SUPPORT AND UNDERSTANDING

The different roles of the professionals were not very clear to the NEETs, but the professionals' support and understanding were described as being important:

- *“Some of them (the NEETs, ed.) talked about help where they do not have to take responsibility for themselves, i.e. support, where a professional does things for them”.*
- *“They mention people who are willing to do things for them, find jobs for them and go the extra mile to spot opportunities for them [...]”.*
- *“Some teachers are better than others. A good teacher understands me” and “It is nicer here at school, because the teachers talk to me”.*

The personal demeanor of the professionals seems to have significance also: *“He [teacher, ed.] is in a good mood, not angry or mad or unfair”.*

In Slovenia, the interviewers summarized the NEETs' statements about the professionals' support: *“Listening to them, understanding their current situation and giving them realistic advice, not pushing them to do something they do not want, able to motivate them and analyze the situation so they can all understand what the next steps are”.* Practical support was also outlined here: *“Teaching them new skills of how to present themselves, how to fill out a job application, how to cook a meal, how to organize their daily schedules”.*

No-gos are *“judgmental, controlling, authoritarian behavior”* from the professionals. NEETs appreciate straight-forward feedback: *“They (teachers, ed.) must not be unrealistic regarding competencies. Must be honest”.*

INTRINSIC MOTIVATION AND EMPOWERMENT

Along with the motivating support from social relationships and professionals, the NEETs spoke of their own intrinsic motivation and empowerment as important for their positive development: *“It's me who has helped myself. It's about what you do yourself. Not the persons here at school. They tell you what you can and what you cannot do” and “Do something you're good at”.*

The NEETs emphasized support for 'self-help' *"in the area of setting goals and being self-motivated", "in the area of helping themselves being in control of their lives, [...] to achieve a long-term goal", "self-confidence, self-esteem, and how to not give up easily", "how do develop positive habits and reduce the negative, destructive habits"*.

A GOOD FUTURE

A good future is hard to imagine for many NEETs: *"They had a difficult time imagining the future, but even an even harder time explaining how they would get there"*. But when expressing their dreams, these seem to be quite ordinary and reasonable: *"House, children, job", "Thinking less of money", "To get up in the morning, happy to go to job. Being able to do the job", "Do something you like to do", "I like children and being with my loved ones"*.

The way to get there was seen as being through their own effort, imagination and actions, supported by friends and professionals:

☞ *You need teachers who believe in you.*

Interviewee Denmark, (2019)

At the same time, they recognized their own limitations such as *"afraid of new things"* and milestones to achieve, such as *"a better economy"*.

b) Empirical data: online surveys with professionals

The following topics are linked to the fully structured online survey for professionals working with NEETs. The answers of a total of 61 professionals were grouped across countries. At the same time, it must be kept in mind, that the conditions for working with NEETs differ from country to country.

Not all professions exist in the three respondent countries (such as "pedagogue"), and not all countries offer a system for cross-professional activities for NEETs, as implemented in Danish municipalities since August 2019. Accordingly, some countries have built up a more supportive infrastructure for NEETs, such as specific educational pathways.

In general, the responses cannot be compared across countries, but reflect mutually supplementing elements of the whole picture.

ABOUT THE PROFESSIONALS

All in all, the professionals can be summarized as experienced, well-educated and well-qualified for their work with NEETs. In all countries, the responses were based on rich

experiences in the professions⁴. The absolute majority were female (90+ %) and mature of age (40+). Across the 3 countries and all respondents, a lack of profiles or backgrounds within VET was seen (apart from 2 Danish respondents).

In Slovenia, most of the professionals held a relevant academic degree, many of them came from social sciences such as social care, educational fields, psychology etc. In Denmark, the respondents were mainly youth guidance counselors, student counselors or social workers, typically on the bachelor level. In Iceland, the social worker and counselor were dominant professions in survey answers. In all countries, specialists were also involved, such as psychologists, physiotherapists etc. Managers and a few career changers completed the questionnaire.

The sectors that the respondents work in, varied widely in and between the countries. The Slovenian professionals belonged mainly to the employment sector (60 %), while in Denmark they came from educational guidance counseling (56.3 %). In Iceland, 30 % worked in the social sector and 20 % in educational counseling.

THE PROFESSIONALS ON COUNSELING

The professionals were asked to freely “describe a good counselor”. Their answers could be divided into knowledge, skills and attitudes (European Commission, 2018):

Knowledge	Skills	Attitudes
About the ‘system’ and its educational possibilities, rules and legislation, the labor market, educational institutions.	Systematic work, analyzing, profound, information gathering, communicative skills (listening techniques, also non-verbal),	Empathy, a humanistic approach to life, committed to all NEETs, caring, honest, appreciative approach, equality.
About the youths, their problems (diagnoses etc) and youth culture (media, multi-cultural, etc).	Group counseling and individual counseling.	Trustworthy, open-minded, friendly, positive, curious, “heart at right place”, patient, responsible.
About possibilities of support and specialists for young people.	Insights regarding limitations, normativity and normality. Assessing realism of plans, identifying steps towards the goal. Promoting self-insight of young people.	Young person in the center, include NEETs’ dreams and interests, resource-orientation, respect.
Searching knowledge about new topics.	Cross-sectoral or cross-professional cooperation, networking, relational skills, involving special support.	Firm, sets limits, resilient. Persistent, tolerating critic and rejection, goal- and action-oriented, solution-seeking, thinking “out-of-the-box”.

⁴ Iceland with 50 % of the professionals more than 11 years and 30 % between 6-10 years. Slovenia with 56 % between 6 and >20 years, while 44 % came with 1-5 years of experience. In Denmark, 56.3 % had >11 years of experience and 31.6 % between 6-10 years.

The professionals are aware of an ongoing need to *“update on tendencies”* and follow up on *“method development”* in order to strengthen their professionalism. According to the professionals, methods be applied *“consciously”*. Examples mentioned were *“early involvement”*, *“promoting the young person’s self-responsibility for their own path”*, *“identification of resources”*, *“relational work”*.

When asked for *“relevant formal qualifications for a good counselor”*, only 19 of 61 answers referred to a range of different formal educational programs, such as: *“Some may have a formal education, can be social worker, communicator, pedagogue, teacher, psychologist or further education in these fields”*. 70 % pointed to informal empowerment or further education matching the categories above.

☞ *Education is not always the key to competencies.*

Respondent, Slovenia (2019)

A professional explained the need for a broader view: *“No specific education. It is about the roles that are around the NEETs.”* Other respondents pointed to *“parents of these young people”* respectively *“employers”* as important, but yet not realized collaboration partners.

Answers to *“Other professional needs?”* were typically related to work conditions created by their ‘systems’: *“Common coordination, time, resources, finances, flexible legislation”*, *“higher monthly income”* and *“less bureaucratic work”*.

THE PROFESSIONALS ABOUT THE NEETS

The professionals work broadly with all subgroups of the NEETs group. Within the total age range of 15-29 years, the respondents mentioned numerous categories, encompassing mental diagnoses and diseases, criminal behavior and prison stays, homelessness, drug abuse, dysfunctional or absent family backgrounds, etc. The common denominator was the complexity and severity of the youths’ problems.

There was no conformity among the professionals on which subgroups they considered *“most difficult to work with”*. But *“low motivation”*, *“lack of will”*, *“apathy”* and *“indecisiveness”* were especially highlighted. *“Irresponsibility”* was also prominent, as well as *“a lack of flexibility”*, *“not recognizing their own needs and desires”*, *“no goals”* and *“no accept of support”*. *“Lack of identity”* was also mentioned as a striking characterization.

Respondents in each country referred to *“social hindrances”* with a negative impact on the NEETs; as from the *“system”*, at *“school”*, from *“parents”* or *“lack of housing”* for NEETs.

THE PROFESSIONALS ABOUT CROSS-PROFESSIONAL WORK

The respondents described the quality of their *“very important”* cross-professional cooperation as *“high and good”* for close collaboration partners. But *“as soon as the radius*

widens, it becomes more difficult, partly because of logistics, but also because of a lack of mutual understanding of our roles and approaches”.

The importance of a “*common language*” and “*common methods*” was highlighted, for bridging “*different worlds*”, as well as a focus on “*common goals*” and prioritization from the management. Many of the professionals want even more cross-professional cooperation.

Barriers were experienced as “*a lack of time*”, or when “*systems are too closed and do not work together*”, have “*complicated bureaucratic procedures*”, and it can be “*hard to get information or to contact other specialists*”.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PROFESSIONALS

In the survey section for “*best practice and next steps*”, the professionals underlined good practice in different perspectives:

- *Cross-professional teams* with guidance and practical actions together with the NEETs; joint platform for the professionals; smooth transitions of youth cases between municipal departments and between municipalities; cooperation also with companies
- *Holistic approaches* to the young people; resource-based approaches with a focus on strengths
- *Methods* with a variety of learning opportunities; combining study and work; individual and group counseling; extensive continuous support; role models and mentors; inclusion and participatory methods
- *Eliminating systemic hindrances* in order to make new types of support possible or find new ways to combine existing possibilities; exploration of different types of workplace learning and internships; implementation of guidance counseling at many different levels
- *Work conditions* for counselors with sufficient resources for the specific target group; possibility of exemption from too rigid rules

c) Empirical data: video observations (DK)

The following three topics emerged from categorizing impressions during two observed encounters via video recording. The encounters involved dialogues and decision-making among a) 1 NEET, 3 professionals, 1 family member and b) 4 professionals.

The impressions encompassed verbal content, actions, silence, facial expressions, gestures, use of spoken language, body language and artifacts such as clothing and

furniture. These impressions gave rise to statements and questions by the observers of the videos.

THE YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

Essential professional discourses and policies address the youth perspective, seeing young persons in the center of their own cases as competent decision makers, or at least with potential for competent decision-making. Thus, many encounters are about *solution analysis and solution finding* for or with the young persons. This leads to the question of which approaches and methods the involved parties (professionals, scout and NEET) master and choose; are the approaches explicit or implicit, and do they clash or create synergy.

NATURE OF THE ENCOUNTER

All involved participants must somehow refer to the nature of the encounter; to which degree does the encounter act as a developmental space for the NEET or is it an assessment procedure. If reflection is desirable, do the atmosphere and the room promote reflection? Does the encounter balance the different professional approaches, such as pedagogical insight, administrative rules and employment conditions?

MANAGEMENT OF AN ENCOUNTER

The management of an encounter is an important factor regarding all of the above-mentioned questions, and includes aspects such as the following: the structure of the meeting, the clarification of the different expectations in the beginning of the encounter and a clear and explicit allocation of the professionals' roles, among them the role of the contact person/scout.

Professional meeting management can counteract open or hidden power positions and create a cross-professional team spirit for the benefit of the NEET. Non-professionals, such as relatives and friends, can be involved in a constructive way. Problems or results should be summed up and possibly visualized, with realistic cross-professional references to the bureaucratic and financial framework.

d) Desk research: International, Denmark, Slovenia & Iceland

This section presents an overview on the results from the desktop data collection.

OECD (2020, NEET indicator) defines NEETs as

“the share of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET), as a percentage of the total number of young people in the

corresponding age group, by gender. Young people in education include those attending part-time or full-time education but exclude those in non-formal education and in educational activities of very short duration. Employment is defined according to the OECD/ILO Guidelines and covers all those who have been in paid work for at least one hour in the reference week of the survey or were temporarily absent from such work. Therefore, NEET youth can be either unemployed or inactive and not involved in education or training.”

This definition is consistent with the definition of NEETs on European level (Eurostat). However, on the national levels, the methods of identifying NEETs and the age ranges that define NEETs, can differ. National figures on proportion of NEETs are not necessarily comparable. But there is no doubt that in all countries there is an awareness of the fact that there are alarming prognoses for NEETs, as stated by OECD:

 *Young people who are neither in employment nor in education or training are at risk of becoming socially excluded – individuals with income below the poverty-line and lacking the skills to improve their economic situation.”*

OECD (2020), Youth not in employment, education or training (NEET)(indicator). doi: 10.1787/72d1033a-en [accessed 15th July 2020]

During the spring of 2019, a cross-national team of YIT experts collected quantitative data about NEETs and the costs of their situations for themselves, as well as the costs for the societies. International differences in defining and measuring NEETs were found, which limits a cross-national understanding and the validity of the conclusions.

EUROPEAN FACTS, FIGURES AND COST

The total number of NEETs in Europe is high and has been relatively stable over the recent decade, even when measured for different age groups.

Approximately 15.8 million young people between the ages 20-34 years were neither employed nor in education or training according to Eurostat (2018). The percentage of NEETs in the 28 European member states aged 15-24 years was 10.9 % according to Eurostat (2018), while OECD calculated the percentage 13.3 %, including the age range of 24-29 years, but excluding Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia (2018).

In total, the percentage of NEET's increased from 11 % in 2007 to 13.2 % in 2012, and decreased to 10.9 % in 2017 (Eurostat, 2017).

For changes in the partner countries of YIT in the same period, see fig. 8:

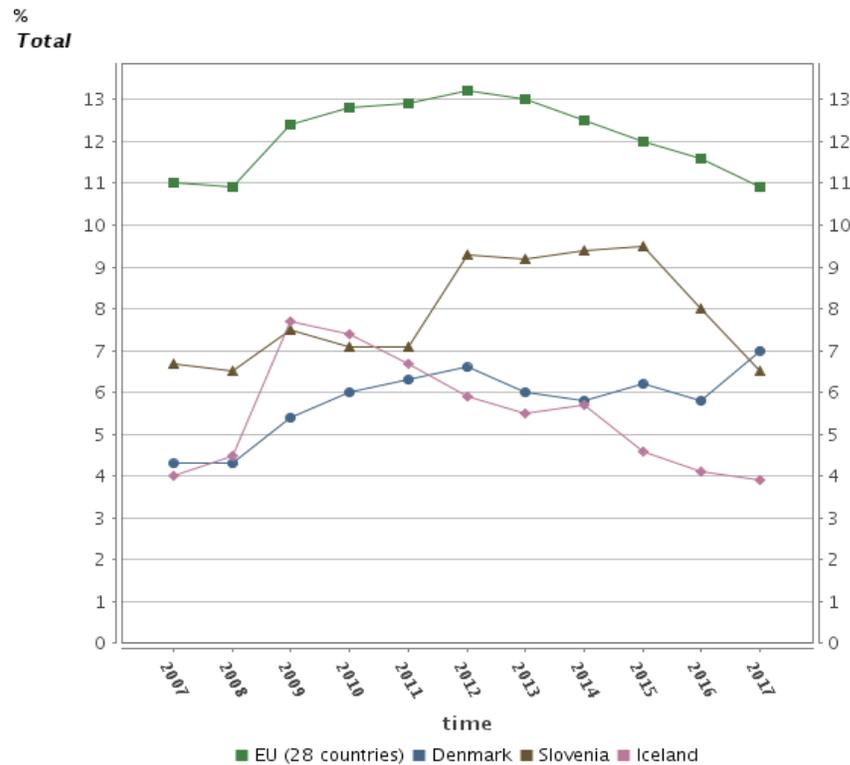


Figure 8 Total share of NEETs from 2007 to 2017 (Eurostat, 2018)

Eurostat has also found gender-specific differences, most pronounced within the countries.

Coming from a migrant background or being a descendant can also play a role (OECD), and urbanization seems to have an impact on achieving a NEET position (Eurostat, 2018). Young people in the EU who live in cities were least likely to be out of employment and education and training (average 15.6 %), while young people in rural areas had a higher risk of unemployment and without education and training (average 18.4 %).

An average of 10.6 % of young people (aged 18-24) in the EU were early leavers from education and training (Nevala, 2011). In other words, they had completed, at the most, a lower secondary education and were not in further education or training during the four weeks preceding the survey (Eurostat, 2018).

NEETs entail tremendous costs for their societies. Even when international and national statistics on expenses for NEETs exist, clear and accessible cost-benefit analyses and models are hard to find for local calculations. In the framework of the present study, some efforts were made to acquire models on cost-benefit analyses and data:

- *Professionals in the Danish municipality Odsherred tried to track the expenses for local NEETs, compared to the effects of working cross-professionally with the young peoples' pathways. It was impossible to collect all the cross-sectoral data and to draw clear conclusions. One of the hindrances was that data are needed over a period of many years to identify long-term impacts of the highly coordinated work with individual pathways.*
- *A rather new socio-economic investment model, "SØM" (2015, Socialstyrelsen - National Board of Social Services), is freely available in Denmark. Socialstyrelsen owns, further develops and distributes the tool, also offering courses to users from municipalities and other relevant bodies. The validated tool draws data from a database covering effects of previous social initiatives. So far, the tool cannot fully calculate the cost-benefit of pathways for NEETs, as the complexity is too high and the duration mostly too long.*
- *In Iceland, costs were summed according to Reykjavík city's financial assistance of NEETS in the job center service (VMST/Atvinnutorg), compared to when they had a job or returned to education. It was possible to ascertain the amount of money saved for Reykjavik city, as financial assistances were not necessary for the persons any longer. Thus, the success rate for that group could be calculated. Unfortunately, the specific formula is not freely accessible.*

DENMARK

In 2015, Denmark found that there were approx. 70,000 NEETs = approx. 6 % of young people aged 15-29 (Danish Ministry of Education), while Eurostat figures show 8.4 % NEETs in Denmark (2017). In both sets of figures, a gender-specific tendency is shown, where more boys/young men belong to the NEETs, with 58 % compared to 51 % in the non-NEETs population. Other notable parameters seem to relate to the risk of being a NEET:

- *not having passed the final examinations in Danish and mathematics in upper primary school: 52 %, compared to 15 % for non-NEETs*
- *parents without education: 29 %, compared to 12 % for non-NEETs*
- *descendants of immigrants: 16 %, compared to 10 % for non-NEETs*

KORA estimated the cost per NEET per year to be DKK 91,400 (2016), approx. 12,300 €.

Figures from Statistics Denmark (Danmarks Statistik) showed that more Danes completed an upper secondary education in 2019 than 10 years ago. The proportion of young people completing a secondary education had increased with 12 % since 2009.

But, more specifically, the figures for VET are worrying. In spite of intensive efforts over the last decades, Danish VET struggles with a tremendous drop-out rate from VET, with approx. 20 % already dropping out during the introductory "basic course". Overall, only 53 % of the students who started a vocational program in 2017 are expected to complete the

program. At the same time, one should be aware of the fact that the drop-out rates vary considerable among vocational programs and that drop-out rates also apply to new educational choices.

There are no formal measurements of young people with NEET-indicators in VET. Nevertheless, informal estimations and public discourses indicate that quite a high percentage of young people with severe problems enter VET, even after stricter admission requirements were introduced in 2015 (Danish VET reform, 2014).

Many of the initiatives for improving the situation of NEETs have been activities focusing on one of the elements of the individual NEET's complex portfolio of problems.

Over the last decades, a broad political agreement on reducing the number of NEETs has been achieved, expressed and integrated in several reforms of VET and of the social sector. In August 2019, a new legislation took effect: the "Danish Consolidation Act on Municipal Provision for Young People under 25". The Act targets young persons who, without specific guidance, will have difficulties regarding choice and completion of education or training. This legislation supports the Danish Government's declared goal that by 2030 *"90 % of all young people must complete a youth education program before their 25th birthday"*.

SLOVENIA

The NEET group in Slovenia includes persons aged 15-24 who are neither in employment nor involved in any kind of formal or informal education. They represent 6.5 % of the population of the same age (2017, SURS), which over the years has risen up to 9.5 %. All in all, the proportion of the NEETs among these youths has been rather stable (6 % - 8 %).

Not many analyses were carried out and not much data exists about NEETs in Slovenia. This has started a discourse initiated by the Youth Council of Slovenia, stressing that youth policies are not based on adequate analyses, which lead to measures that are not addressing the right issues and not permanently solving the issues of young NEETs.

OECD-figures for Slovenia show no correlation between living in urban or sub-urban areas and belonging to NEETs group, 15-29 years old. The figures show gender specific differences where 13 % of all females aged 15-29 belong to the NEET group as opposed to 8.95 % of males (2017, OECD). A migrant background and the age of arrival to the country play a significant role: 9.9 % of those who were born in Slovenia (aged 15-29) belong to the NEETs group, compared to 23.8 %, when were not born in Slovenia (2017, OECD).

Recent Slovenian youth research has brought insight into transitions into adulthood, and the necessity of awareness about these phases. Phd Mirjana Ule, University of Ljubljana, points to transitions as *"periods of becoming"*, which can start over many times (Ule, 2018).

Slovenian biographies have evolved from “*normative*” into “*individual choice*” and “*marginal*” biographies. The latter reflect a highly precarious socio-economic situation especially for youths with only few stable jobs, indicated by an increase of young people employed for indeterminate periods (Employment Relationships Act, 2013; Mladi in dostojno delo, 2018).

All this calls for a focus on “*identity development*”. While successful individuals seem to choose “*developmental strategies for addressing identity issues*”, NEETs typically practice “*avoiding or evasive strategies for addressing identity issues*”. At the same time, Slovenian young people, 25-34 years old, have never been more well-educated, while paradoxically being undervalued on the labor market.

Ule calls for a focus on “*safeguarding transitions*” rather than a focus on status, positions and life situations. In this context, soft skills and non-economic indicators have become more and more important, also for economic success. Thus, young people are dependent on professionals in institutions to ensure their inclusion into education or work.

Two noteworthy programs for NEETs have been active for more than 20 years in Slovenia: Project Learning for Young Adults (PUM-0) and Production School. Both provide guidance and support to young people on their way to the labor market or an educational program. The services and activities are free of charge, traditionally provided by the regional career centers of the Employment Service of Slovenia. Recently, career centers have also been established at universities, as well as in organizations for adult education and in VET colleges throughout the country.

ICELAND

The NEET group in Iceland consists of “*young people between the ages 16-29 years, who are not working, studying or training*”. Statistics about NEETs are not easily accessible, but statistics on disability⁵ (individuals with a reduced work capacity), dropout and unemployment exist. The share of NEETs was shown to be 6.2 %, with 4,100 individuals in 2015. 42 % of them received unemployment benefits, 20 % received disability support, 19 % received benefits from a municipality, and 19 % had no subsistence.

5 % of the age group 16-39 receives disability benefits (Nordic Statistic Bureau, NOSOSCO). Iceland offers permanent disability or rehabilitation benefits from the age of 18.

⁵ The term “disability” refers in the above-described Icelandic context to individuals who are considered to have a reduced work capacity. These individuals often apply for rehabilitation pension or disability benefits. They can possibly work a certain amount but need rehabilitation or other intervention for returning to the labor market. “Disability” is not (necessarily) physical disability but can be mental illness and inaction that can be caused by problems such as addiction e.g. due to drugs or computer use.

An Icelandic study (Guðmundsdóttir, 2015) showed that diagnoses such as ADHD, dyslexia and autism are relatively common among the youth. Many have left primary education with identity issues, have dealt with abuse and thrive poorly in the educational system. Professionals recommended providing differentiated services, improving the educational system, to meet the needs of the youth to a higher degree, as well as allocating more resources to the young people. In addition, the government was criticized for their “lack of direction, being too short-sighted and offering too few resources”.

Recently, the Icelandic Ministry of Welfare has initiated a major cross-professional initiative (2019) to meet the alarming increase of young people on disability provision, of 3.3 % in 2010 up to 3.9 % in 2016, with mental diseases predominating. In addition, the dropout rates from youth education are among the highest in Western Europe (30 % after 4 years in education).

Hence, the Directorate of Labor has effectuated intensified counseling and sustainable activities for “inactive young people”. A formal collaboration has been established among professionals relevant for NEETs; including professionals from job centers, social services, rehabilitation centers, VET colleges, health services and innovation projects. The Ministry of Education has implemented a program for preventing dropout. One of the initiatives is a screening tool for identifying students in risk for dropping-out.

Innovative and successful projects have promoted personalized counselling, support of job seekers and individual plans in co-design with the NEET (“Atvinnutorg/Job-torg”, 2013). Students in VET or temporary employment are supported by their advisors and provided with follow-up. The personal counselor is in regular dialogue with the workplace. There is great emphasis on co-operation with providers of individual programs, such as lifelong learning centers, school therapists, vocational rehabilitation etc.

The counselors are organized in cross-professional teams, consisting of social workers, educational and guidance counselors, alcohol and drug advisors, human resources consultants and psychologists. In collaborative meetings, the needs of the NEETs are discussed and advice is shared.

OTHER INNOVATIVE INITIATIVES ON THE SYSTEM LEVEL

There is a great deal of focus all over Europe on NEETs. Among many other initiatives, European innovation projects are also trying to meet the challenges⁶.

⁶ Some of the successful projects worked on:

Necessary system changes are under implementation in several European cities and countries, as a result of learning gained from the above-mentioned statistics, research-based findings and conclusions from boards of experts.

Notably, the state of Hamburg, Germany, has throughout the last years ago converted their work with NEETs into well-coordinated cross-professional and cross-sectoral administration and guidance counseling service. According to the officials and professionals, the first effects seem to be promising.

(7) Analysis

The following analysis addresses the needs of the NEETs and the needs of the professionals. The influential 'systems' in each country are considered as given conditions that must be dealt with (see also section 2, Purpose of the study).

The proportion of NEETs in their comparable age cohorts are defined and measured differently across the countries. But with an average in EU of 11-13 % (see section (6), European data), the rate should be seen as alarming. Even worse, the numbers have been more or less stable over time, despite a wide range of initiatives, in at least some of the countries. Other countries do not even seem to have given full attention to this problem yet. This is indicated by inconsistent measures, a lack of political awareness and - if there is political awareness - still a lack of transformation into legislation, organizational changes, and initiatives in practice.

It is well-known that the NEET groups entail a disproportionately high share of the costs in their societies, and only national policies can determine whether their shares of these costs are experienced as reasonable or not in their countries.

Tragically for themselves, the NEETs generally have very few perspectives for their futures. Prognoses for their mental and physical health are pessimistic, and life expectation is low for some of the NEETs subgroups. As a common denominator, their individual problems reinforce each other. Once the NEETs are caught up in their complex

-
- erasing the mismatch between the skills achieved in education and the needs of the labor market, via learner-centered teaching and implementing mobile learning ("Mobile Learning in VET towards 2020", 2012-2014)
 - involving the labor market in supporting students' motivation and advising teachers and counselors to focus on students' aptitudes and skills ("School & work", 2014-2016)
 - developing principles for a new didactic approach in dealing with young disadvantaged learners ("NEW-D", 2014-2016)

problem portfolios, they are also highly in risk of poverty and without chances of improving their economic situation.

To lighten this this dark and threatening horizon slightly, there are some remarkable tendencies and initiatives in several countries, counties and cities (Iceland, Denmark, Hamburg). Politicians and experts listened to research and practice-directed stakeholders when new legislation was designed and implemented. These new tendencies can be summarized as a more holistic principle than existed previously: Cross-professional and cross-organizational responsibility for coherent individual pathways for NEETs, with well-defined and competent ‘scouts’ (contact persons) as the coordinators.

When it comes to implementation, there are yet very few cost-benefit models for local societies, if any are accessible at all. Partly there still is a lack of data, especially longitudinal data. Thus, it is hard to answer the question of whether expenses were sufficient for performing the professional work as expected and how the initiatives have brought return on investment. Some interesting attempts have been found, but as of yet no broadly implementable models. All in all, the responsibility and practical possibilities for socio-economic planning are still rather far away from practice.

(a) Needs of the NEETs

The qualitative data from the focus group interviews could be grouped across age groups, different life stages and across the countries Denmark, Slovenia and Iceland. Overall, the young people expressed a number of fundamental needs.

GOALS AND THE WAY TO THE GOAL

Almost all of the interviewed young people expressed personal dreams for their future, in some cases easier than in other cases. These dreams seemed to be reasonable and rather realistic to transform into goals and active steps towards the goals (Law, 2009, 2011).

Whatever the elements of their complex problems, NEETs obviously also have dreams for their futures, which for some is easier than for others. But when they are expressed, these dreams seem to be quite ordinary, reasonable, and possibly within reach on the shorter or longer term.

Illustration 2, Peanuts Cartoon



In brief, the dreams point to 'happiness' in life, typically expressed through family, ordinary jobs and stable social settings.

Identifying your dreams and getting closer to them as goals is a cornerstone in career learning. Professionals can support the exploration of dreams and their concretization through activities according to the stages in the SeSiFu model. Combined with a self-development process (DOTS model), the NEETs can achieve the necessary self-awareness and realism, regarding the steps towards their goal (Law, 2010).

Sooner or later, the dreams must be aligned with the requirements surrounding the NEETs, which point at basic competencies and potentials for vocational maturity. Working with these competences and potentials can become a part of the development process. The taxonomy for youth progression offers a framework for understanding and monitoring the phases towards vocational maturity, as well as the interactive online tool for self-evaluation of the NEETs.

In general, there seems to be an ambivalence towards the different activities and settings they were in (school, counseling, course) at the given time.

A clear overview of the young persons' pathways towards these goals, divided into manageable subgoals with suitable steps and actions, is needed.

TOWARDS VOCATIONAL MATURITY

In a different way than young people in stable personal situations and with supportive backgrounds, the NEETs seem to have developed a very high degree of sensitivity. Their perceptions are strong regarding what they experience as adversities, barriers, conflicts, loss, damages etc. This sensitivity can demand resilience, which is crucial for vocational maturity. As only one of the criteria for vocational maturity, resilience cannot stand alone and is linked closely to being able to adapt to social settings, to practice motivation and goal setting, as well to achieving the necessary professional skills.

Vocational maturity represents two aspects: Firstly, the requirements to the NEETs from the 'system', as the societies expect and promote individuals' self-supporting. Secondly, vocational maturity as a goal itself can be a key to the – also for NEETs – attractive world of work, including educational pathways needed to enter this world. Thus, the individual potentials of the young person must be identified when working towards vocational maturity.

MOTIVATION

The young persons also expressed motivation. Their motivation is typically related to activities in more physical settings and in social settings where they can feel safe and

experience new friendships. They also point to inner motivation, when they achieve new skills or meet formal demands.

Generally, there is a need for settings, where the NEETs can thrive with their different motivational orientations (Katznelson, 2017).

FUNDAMENTAL CONDITIONS: RESPECT AND TRUST

The NEETs emphasized their need for being respected as the persons they are. They expect respect from their primary professional contact persons (counselors, pedagogues, teachers or others), as well as from the people in the settings of their activities (at school, in companies, courses, from other young people / students, etc.).

Trust, confidence and confidentiality from the professionals are mentioned in relation to respect. They go hand in hand for the NEETs. But while trust and confidence seem to be the result of the professionals' relational work and an appreciative approach, confidentiality is or should be part of their professionalism regarding data flow and information handling.

All of these needs correspond with the professional and ethical standards in the different professions. But not all professions prioritize the "youth perspective" highest. Dependent on the purpose of the professions, their first priorities can, for example, be to supply the demand of the trades or workplaces (VET, employment centers).

In any case, sharing on experiences about the needs of the NEETs and the youth perspective should be part of the cross-professional and cross-sectoral collaboration (Mik-Meyer).

The young people themselves also express a need for clearness and realism about their competences. This includes honesty from their professional contact persons.

The individual profiles for vocational maturity (taxonomy, tool for self-evaluation) can at a given time be the basis of a dialogue between the NEET and the professional, offering different perspectives (results from trial runs of the tool, YIT, autumn/winter 2019).

The interviewees typically also point to specific professionals, who have helped them enormously, as well as some who have disappointed them heavily. Stable and enduring relationships are very important.

This calls for a close contact person, who can support, challenge, and guide the young person, and furthermore, coordinate with the many 'necessary others' around the NEET. Concrete practical help from the professionals is part of this relationship, along with promotion of the NEETs' empowerment.

THE OTHERS

The NEETs from the interviews highlighted what they experienced as negative signals from their surroundings. These signals could be spoken language, use of humor or words, but also body language or other expressions, such as positive inclusion in work situations. The interviewers observed a high degree of alertness from the NEETs to these signals.

This sensitivity seems to be quite high and higher than that of other young people. It can be considered whether this sensitivity corresponds with the NEETs' vulnerability to changes and transitions in their lives, which is a typical common denominator for people with complex problems.

In relation to the criteria for vocational maturity (taxonomy), the NEETs seem to struggle with the criterion resilience. In recent years, there has been general concern about children's *rigidness* or *resilience*, with the intention of strengthening their personal growth towards mastering barriers and resistance (Tidmand, 2018). The German Institute for Resilience suggests that resilience is experienced as a skill that can be learned and trained in (2019). This includes learning to take criticism, reaching out for help and persevering.

(b) Needs of the professionals

With the differences between the Danish, Slovenian and Icelandic systems and situations in mind, there can still be common characteristics and needs for professionals, who work with NEETs and try to further develop their work.

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND, COMPETENCIES AND EMPOWERMENT

The professionals who contributed to the surveys in YIT were all well-qualified with many years of experience, clearly committed and with strong opinions about their work with NEETs. They identified a clear set of competences that describe "a good counselor", which fall into knowledge, skills and attitudes:

- *Knowledge, primarily about the system, the youths and resources*
- *Skills, primarily about basic counseling methods, communication/relationship work, self-insight, documentation, planning and cooperation with other professionals*
- *Attitudes, primarily about appreciative and resource-oriented approaches to the NEETs*

Although the respondents' formal professional educational backgrounds varied widely, there was a high degree of congruence regarding their views on competencies in and across the countries. Only 31 % of the professionals saw formal education as essential. Informal and more topic-specific empowerment within the described set of competences

for “a good counselor”, was deemed as more relevant; conducted as courses, internships, peer-learning, literature studies etc.

Other needs refer to the experienced pressure of requirements and restrictions in the ‘systems’, often related to time and resources. At the same time, the need for competences in cost-benefit calculations was not expressed. One might wonder about this, as the desk research states that finances have a great impact on policies and thus, resources.

DIFFERENT APPROACHES, COMMON LANGUAGE, COMMON FOCUS

The professionals express a general need for aligning their practice with each other and other professionals; their language, their methods and their approaches.

However, seen through the lens of sociological research (Mik-Meyer, 2017), this seems neither realistic nor preferable. All typical approaches in the system around the NEETs – the bureaucratic, the market-directed and the pedagogical/guidance approach (“psy-sciences”) – are desirable and each of them are beneficial for the NEETs.

As a consequence, a balance is needed, with ongoing exchange or even negotiations between, on the one hand, development processes with a strong youth perspective and, on the other hand, vocational requirements from the ‘world of work’.

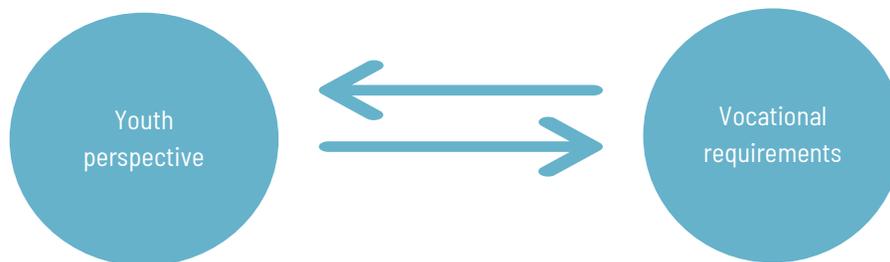


Illustration 3, Approaches to the work with NEETs, Lamscheck-Nielsen, 2020

In the YIT context, the youth perspective is typically practiced by guidance counselors, social workers and pedagogues, while the vocational perspective typically is practiced by the employment sector, the VET-colleges, as well as other professionals who navigate in this field.

A certain kind of alignment among the professionals is possible, in the sense of a) increasing the transparency among the professions regarding their approaches, b) continuous open-minded negotiations, and c) agreeing cross-professionally on terms.

Typical dilemmas can emerge when cooperating in this field of opposing interests, and frustrations can arise for the professionals. Outlining approaches for each other and

mutual accept cannot erase the dilemmas but can ease the process of finding a common focus. Among other things, a “*common language*” and common procedures can be created or decided upon in a cross-professional setting, when mutual accept exists.

☞ *“It is not about being right. Neither is it about coming first or having the ‘best methods’. It is about being able to identify the possibilities in each other’s positions related to the individual young person.”*

Pia Vigh, chief consultant, EUK/KL, Denmark (2019)

The Taxonomy for Youth Progression with its flexibility and practice-based indicators (see section 4c), seems to have the potential of an applicable framework for an alignment of the approaches outlined above. It can offer a framework for *why* and *where* different approaches and methods make sense and are applicable. The limited resources of YIT did not allow a consistent and monitored testing of different methods in different phases of the taxonomy. Research on this subject is on its way in Denmark (project ‘Unge med kant Hovedstaden’, VIVE, 2019-2022).

CROSS-SECTORAL COORDINATION AND PERSONAL GUIDANCE (‘SCOUT’)

Among all the roles and tasks of the professionals, there is also the role of a close contact person for the NEET (‘scout’), seen as necessary when coordination and personal guidance are needed in longer term individual pathways. In some countries (Denmark) and some local settings (Hamburg/Germany), this role is now formally implemented.

However, there can still be unclear task allocation, vagueness about competencies and authority, insufficient resources, and inadequate support from management; all of which are seen as contra-productive.

METHODS FOR WORKING WITH NEETS

No clear conclusions could be drawn regard common methods for working with NEETs. However, the study focused on some of the methods that match basic needs of the NEETs and that can bridge organizational differences among the professionals surrounding the NEETs.

Career learning (Law, 2009, 2011) has been promoted strongly in recent years and is a growing trend in guidance counseling and education in Europe. Parts of this concept are directly applicable to the work with NEETs. Career guidance is cross-professionally applicable and offers a framework for applying suitable activities to making career choices (“SeSiFu”, Law). This framework can benefit NEETs especially when combined with steps for personal development (“DOTS”, Law, Watts).

Katznelson's "Motivational orientations" offers an action-oriented understanding of how motivation can be created with the help of stimuli from the outside.

These two methods represent a 'youth perspective', centered on the young person. But as the analysis of the cross-professional theme and the desk study show, other perspectives must be added. There is a normativity in the system(s), with requirements and pre-given goals from the society, from the 'world of work' or from other crucial players.

The "Taxonomy for youth progression" offers a way of understanding how activities can be directed towards the goal of vocational maturity. At the same time, the terminology of the taxonomy is practicable across professions and sectors and can contribute to the desired "common language". The tangible indicators of the taxonomy can suggest which activities can be applied at which phases of the NEETs' pathways, underlining the fact that timing is of great importance; right methods at the right time in the respective phase of the individual NEET's progression.

Apart from these methods, one important principle was concluded: the methods must follow the needs of the individual NEETs, the possibilities of the professionals and the conditions of the system. This brought up the need for a new model: a didactic for the design and conduction of individual pathways towards vocational maturity, based on active co-design with the NEETs.

THE ENCOUNTER AS A SETTING

The video observations led to an awareness of and conclusions about cross-professional work with NEETs in encounters, seen as system-defined and rather narrow settings.

The observations confirmed how essential it is to ensure the youth perspective in encounters, to meet the needs of the NEETs and to realize the institutional ambitions of clients as competent and self-determining individuals (Mik-Meyer, 2017). On the other hand, the given requirements, limitations and rules from the system must be communicated or negotiated reasonably.

Transparency must be a premise in regards to the roles, approaches and methods of the participating professionals. From this condition as a starting point, the nature and the purpose of the specific meeting must be clear for everyone. The concept for the encounters, including management, must be a well-prepared task and allocated to designated professionals.

Finally, the settings of encounters for guidance counselling have some general limitations. This leads attention to the fact that guidance counseling of NEETs also can take place as "situated counseling" in more informal settings or as "group counseling" (Wenger, 2004; Thomsen et al, 2013).

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Annexes

Annex 1) Partnership Youth in transition: The organizations

See also website Youth in transition <https://youth-it.cool/partners/> [accessed 28th Aug. 2020]

Denmark

- UU DANMARK, since Jan. 2020 EUK/KL, as a unit for educational and vocational guidance in the Danish municipalities
- Moeve aps – Vocational expertise and project management
- UU Kolding – Youth Guidance Counseling Centre of Kolding Municipality

Slovenia

- Slovenian Institute for Vocational Education and Training
- Cene Štupar - Ljubljana Public Education Centre

Iceland

- Vinnumálastofnun - The Directorate of Labour (VMST)

Germany

- Universität Hamburg - The Institute of Vocational and Business Education (IBW)

Annex 2) Examples of dilemmas according to Mik-Meyer

Extracted from Mik-Meyer (2018), own translation by Lamscheck-Nielsen (2019)

Resource-orientation	Generally and across all welfare institutions there is a perception of clients as persons with resources and potentials, even when these resources might be hidden in periods of their lives. Whereas in daily practice, the professionals experience their clients as resource-weak persons, who have huge difficulties in taking care of their own lives.
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	<p>Typical the positive resource-orientation is used when organising the work, while the resource-weak view appears in the description of concrete persons. Professionals are often in doubt, how far their clients will be able to manage their lives.</p>
Rational decision-making	<p>Many rules and legislation refer to the assumption that clients can overview their complex problems and make rational choices and decisions to the best for themselves, for their surroundings and for the society.</p> <p>In real life, professionals see their clients very often as not being able to act rationally and according to rules and requirements. This is especially the case when alcoholism or drug abuse is part of the problem.</p>
Responsibility for own life and expert role	<p>One of the usual principles is that clients must take responsibility for their own life, with independent decisions and reflections about consequences.</p> <p>But this can be unrealistic, and clients may tend to leave responsibility to their professionals. Thus, professionals can find it more realistic and even easier to serve and solve problems for their clients. They can tend to be more experts in the lives of their clients than the clients themselves.</p>
Motivation	<p>In the systems, there exist an approach that the client must “want” to undertake positive changes. Many types of activities are used to be included in motivational work, such as practicing routines in daily life.</p> <p>But the high complexity of the clients’ problems often blocks for an authentic and self-driven involvement in these activities. Furthermore, motivation work is a long-term process, and exceeds the time limitation of many of the formal activities with the clients.</p>
Hope for each individual	<p>Another narration is about that “nobody is lost” and every individual can improve his/her life. In contradiction to that approach the professionals experience that their clients over the years have become stuck in highly complex life situations, adhered to a combination of physical, mental, financial and social problems.</p> <p>The professionals experience even a need of being suspicious or critical to clients’ statements, as these simply can be untrue or completely unrealistic or very shortsighted.</p>
Sanctions	<p>The professionals know when and where to use sanctions, according to the rules, regulations and legislation that are valid for their work. These can be financial shortenings, the exclusion from certain privileges or similar. But these sanctions can seem highly irrelevant or destructive for their clients’ personal situation and possible development.</p> <p>In their eyes, the requirements of the system do not match the abilities of their clients. The regulations for professional work are based on the presumption about a typical welfare</p>

	client. This picture is incompatible with the actual persons that the professionals meet in their work.
Life quality	<p>Controlled allocation of drugs is a classic dilemma, when taking the clients' experience of their life quality into account. The clients may make a short-sighted choice of drugs as their interpretation of "life quality", while the professionals will interpret "life quality" as becoming drug-free.</p> <p>The question seems to be: "Whose premises do we relate to - the clients' or the professionals'?"</p> <p>The professionals are challenged when having to balance on the one hand their preferences for mental and physical health versus their clients' short-term view on life quality.</p>

Annex 3) Online survey with professionals (master in English)

Carried out Iceland, Denmark and Slovenia in the national languages, Jan.-Feb. 2019.

A pdf of the template can be downloaded from Youth in transition's website youth-it.cool (2020).

Annex 4) Concept and questionnaire for focus group interviews of NEETs

Carried out in Iceland, Denmark and Slovenia in national languages, Jan.-Feb. 2019.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the focus group interviews is to deliver data from a youth perspective. Research on the needs of NEETs exist (see list of references), but mostly *about* the NEETs, very rarely with contributions from themselves and even more rarely from the most endangered subgroup of the NEETs.

Principle: The focus group interview is neither a counselling session nor therapy, teaching or social assessment. The young persons are experts, whom we want to learn from, not vice versa.

CONCEPT

To be conducted from mid January 2019 - mid February with a group of approx. 5 NEETs. Age: 15-29 (can vary from country to country, depending on local choice of target group). Describe the target group and choice. If possible, mix gender, age and place of origin. 2 researchers: 1 interviewer, 1 observer & taking notes, keeping time and pace.

Ethic approach

- Recording and/or photos desirable, if allowed by the interviewees. In that case, a GDPR permission to be signed. Duration: Approx. 1 hour, without break.
- Confidentiality
- Personal sensitive issues: Inform the interviewees on their right to refuse answering

- A professional person of confidence for the interviewees stays near to the interview, but outside; ready to catch-up if necessary

Semi-structured form, to be followed all-in-all, but not necessarily strictly. Multimodal questioning can be applied, if supportive and relevant. Suggestions are given in the questionnaire. Adapt to your culture and media.

The order of the questions need not be followed, but all in all, the topics should be covered.

Agreement: All young persons should have the possibility to contribute at each question. It is “allowed” / desirable to react on each others’ contributions. A decent communication level should be kept, and conflicts should be avoided.

The interviewers should not intervene with their own opinions, knowledge or feelings.

AFTER THE INTERVIEWS

Report in English, according to the questionnaire. Need not be a transcription of the interview, but the main points to be filled in there. Furthermore:

- Add your additional observations, if any
- How did the group dynamic influence the answers?
- How did you deal with the trustworthiness of the answers of the interviewees, if relevant?

QUESTIONNAIRE

Introduction for interviewees:

- Presentation of interviewers, purpose and concept of the interview.
- Confidentiality and data protection (GDPR)
- Personal right to refuse answering

Locally additional questions or adaptations possible. Add at the end, if time enough and relevant: “Is there anything, you see as important and would like to add?”

Question	Remarks
1. Warm up and “check-in” <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Who are you: First name, age, place of origin, do you know each other One specific thing we should know about you on this specific day (such as the mood, something happened in the morning, a new spontaneous idea, etc.)? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> To be anonymised afterwards, register also gender. Choose among 15 different things, spread out on a table
	Check group dynamic: mutual confidence, dominans, body language
2. Think of education or job: How would you describe your situation right now?	Supported by a imagination tool, such as photo cards

3. Give us a few pro´s and con´s regarding your situation	Visualised via post-its, to be placed right and left
4. Regarding your situation: a. What kind of support is working good for you? b. In which areas do you need some more support?	Imagine: “You are the expert, who can support this person, mentioned above” (question 3)
5. Your experiences with professionals a. Do you know their professions and roles? b. Who has been able to help you and how? c. Mention “no-gos”, mention “must-haves”	Associate a car type to different professionals
	Imagine: “You are the expert, who can support the professionals, you mention”
6. Imagine you are in the future: You are employed and like your job. You earn enough money for your everyday life. Describe the way, how you got there: a. Who helped you? b. Where were you? c. Who joined you? d. How were you?	Silence: individual considerations, after that building a scenery together (painting on a big screen, if suitable)
	Take care, not to create too high expectations!
“Check-out”: Thank you and information on the publication of the results. Pictures to be sent to you, if desirable.	A small gift like chocolate to all of them.

Annex 5) Template for data collection as desk research

Carried out by experts from Denmark and Slovenia, Feb.- April 2019, supplemented with facts from Iceland.

	DK	IS	SI	EU
Policies Max. 1-2 pages	<p>Topical (= what's going on right now) influential policies about approaches to the work with NEETs: Abstract, date, link.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> How does this policy influence your work with NEETs ? Barriers, paradoxes, supportiveness, new partners, extra ressources, etc. Can you identify the rationale behind this policy. (Can be quality assurance or increase efficiency or restructuring of the public sector or other major rationales.) Are there major discourses in your country about NEETs? Add a few words. 			

	4. Implemented in legislation?			
	UUDK:	VMST:	CPI:	CPI, Moeve, UUDK
Statistics Briefly!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Translate the formal definition of NEETs in your country. Add age group(s). Valid figures, as topical as possible: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> How many NEETs per year? In percentage as well as figures. How is the development over the years (such as a 10 year period): Decreasing, increasing, stable? If the NEETs are categorised, add figures (such as figures for gender, age, geography or social background) Percentage of NEETs in VET (can be estimated by local VET partner, if no national figures are available) Dropout rate from VET The cost of the society for the NEETs - if available 			
	UUDK: Official figures from ministry	VMST:	CPI:	CPI, Moeve, UUDK: See also application
Projects Max. 1 page	Point out 1 or 2 outstanding project(s) in your country, with interesting findings in our context in YIT. Can be in local language. Summarize in English: Abstract and crucial findings.			
	UUDK:	VMST:	CPI:	CPI, Moeve, UUDK: See also application
Literature Crucial literature, evt. in local language	Check list of references from the application. Update and add, if necessary. Bring in literature from your country on the topic of NEETs and methods to meet the needs of the NEETs.			
	Moeve, UUDK	VMST:	CPI:	CPI, Moeve, UUDK: See also application, Experts working in EU
Professionals Max. ½-1 page	Which professionals are involved in the work with NEETs? Outline very shortly an overview on the professions, involved. Point out the main key person for the NEETs (possibly varying in various contexts).			
	UUDK	VMST:	CPI:	CPI, Moeve, UUDK: Terms/vocabulary to be defined