

Policy recommendations  
of the European project  
"Youth in transition"

NEET<sub>s</sub>

FOR CHANGE

March 2021  
PUBLISHED MAY 2021



Enhed for uddannelses- og  
erhvervsvejledning i kommunerne



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**CPI**  
SLOVENIAN INSTITUTE  
FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION  
AND TRAINING



Youth in transition 



Erasmus+

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# Youth in transition

In the framework of the European Erasmus+ KA2 project “Youth in transition” (YIT), Oct. 2018 – March 2021, organizations in Denmark, Iceland and Slovenia, and with research support from Hamburg Universität, have been working to create:

- common pedagogical approaches and guidance methods across the national, local ecosystems of the social sector, employment sector and education sector
- supportive methods and concrete interactive tools for the professionals

in order to create coherence in the efforts of the so-called NEET group (neither in job nor in employment).

Seven intellectual outputs (IOs) have been developed, covering:

*Analysis* - [“The needs of the NEETs and the needs of the professionals.”](#) Data was collected and analyzed: Quantitative and qualitative data from each of the partner countries, related to existing European core studies (OECD, 2015; Eurofound, 2016) and national reports. (IO1)

*Method* - for [identifying vocational maturity](#) understood as the readiness to complete an educational program in VET. The method - in the format of a web based assessment tool - will be applied to practice by counselling practitioners/teachers. (IO2).

[Trial runs of the assessment tool for vocational maturity](#) in practice, have been applied in Slovenia, Denmark and Iceland, adapted to the local processes. (IO3).

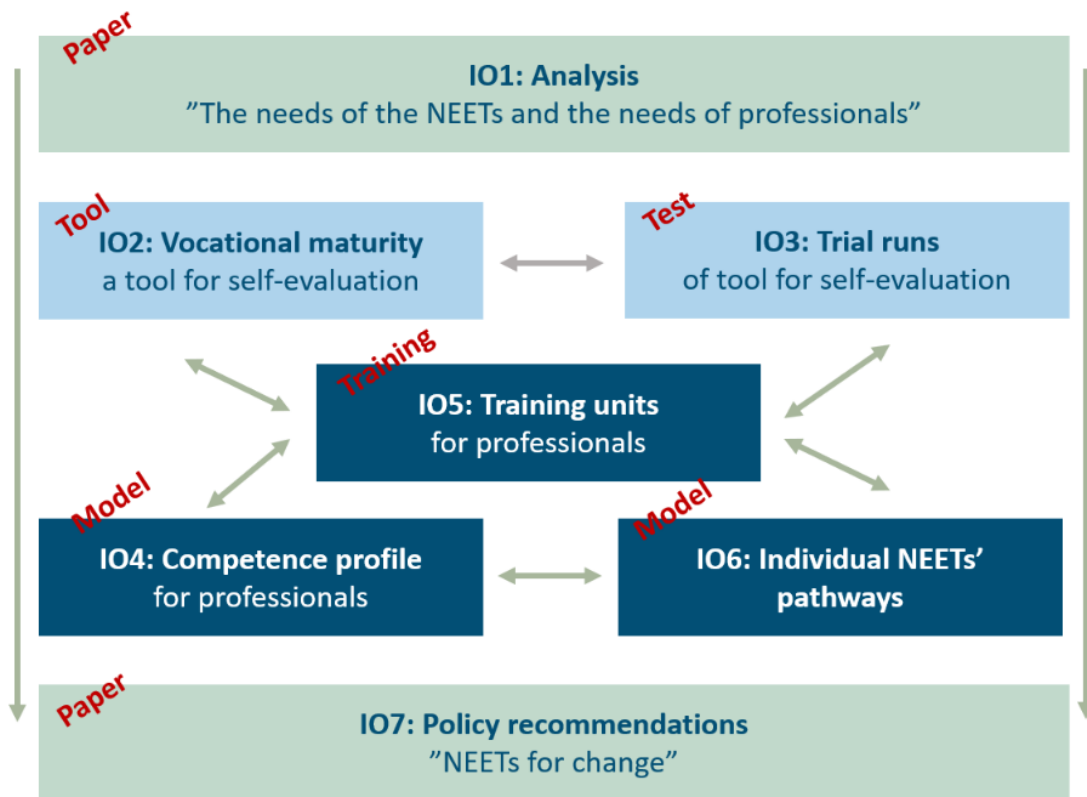
[Competence profile of ‘Scout function’](#) understood as a close and consistent contact person for the young person in transition; counselling and scaffolding personally from principles of ‘career learning’, as well as coordinating supportive initiatives across sectors. (IO4).

[Training units](#) with researched-based supportive methods for counsellors/teachers in their work with NEETs. (IO5).

[Individual NEETs’ pathways](#) - in practice facilitating the ‘individual development pathways’ of NEETs by the scouts and team, supported by all involved professionals. (IO6).

*Policy recommendations* referring to topical political contexts, reforming work processes and legislation in the three countries. (IO7).

See also a [brochure](#): presenting the seven intellectual outputs.



The intellectual outputs form a coherent concept, containing findings from empirical data and desk research, as well as models, methods and tools emerging out of practice-based work with NEETs and professionals in Denmark, Iceland, and Slovenia. The learning outputs of the entire project has been co-created by all the national partners in YIT.

The present paper constitutes IO7, the final output of "Youth in transition," and it refers within the framework of IO1 and directly to IO4, IO5 and IO6.

Unit for Educational and Vocational Guidance in the Municipalities (EUK) in Denmark has been lead partner of the entire project and of IO7. Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training (CPI) and Directorate of Labour in Iceland (VMST) have each contributed directly to this final publication, and also Cene Štupar Public Institution - Center for Education Ljubljana have provided significant contribution. Quality assurance have been provided by Hamburg University.

The Danish versions of the outputs have been qualified and completed with contributions from EUK's overall program "Unge med kant" (<https://ungemedkant.dk>).

Icelandic versions of the outputs will be available on VMST webpage during spring 2021.

The Slovenian versions of the YIT results have been prepared, qualified and completed with the contributions, first, of the Slovenian partners CPI and Cene Štupar, second, the mentors and participants of the Project Learning for Young Adults Programme (PUM-0),

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and thirdly, with YIT associated partners, Employment Service of Slovenia, Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, and the Social Chamber of Slovenia.

This paper as well as all intellectual outputs are published online and freely available. Read more and download here: <https://youth-it.cool/>

Copenhagen, Denmark, March 2021

Pia Vigh,

Unit for Educational and Vocational Guidance in the Municipalities (EUK).

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# Approach

Most often policy recommendations are based on advice and negotiations by political decision makers, including the ministry of finances.

In the context of YIT, conclusions are made from concrete results achieved in an appreciative and resource-oriented framework (I04, I05, I06), but still related to identification of vocational maturity and employability (I02, I03). Paired with the initial Analysis (I01), the policy recommendation should provide both an analysis of the situation (the needs of the NEETs and the needs of the professionals) and a policy recommendation for further decision making. The ambition – in short – is to reconstruct from practice to theory.

Here ‘policy recommendation’ is defined as policy advice prepared for decision makers.

Cross-sectoral transferability of methods, models and insight is the basis for YIT, via cross-professional cooperation and capacity building. Transnational transferability on the other hand is not intended in this paper but was intended by inviting decision makers from other countries to the multiplier events. Hence, this paper proposes orientation, not prescription.

Core terms and expressions in YIT used cross nationally as well as across the different sectors such as education, employment, health care and social care are listed and defined in the analysis “The needs of the NEETs and the needs of the professionals,” pp. 5.

## NEETs in numbers

The term NEET is an acronym which refers to young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training.<sup>1</sup> The NEET group is highly diverse, including short- and long-term unemployed people, young people in transition, young people with family responsibilities, people with physical and/or mental disorders among others.

What characterizes this group is first and foremost that they have no education and that at the same time they have difficulty finding work or starting education.

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<sup>1</sup> See OECD (2021), Youth not in employment, education or training (NEET)(indicator). doi: 10.1787/72d1033a-en (Accessed on 05 March 2021) and “The needs of the NEETs and the needs of the professionals.”, p. 5

In addition, it is a group that has different and very complex barriers in relation to getting into employment, and it is therefore a group that is constantly relevant to obtain knowledge about. Eurofound<sup>2</sup> has sought to unravel the heterogeneity of the NEET population. Its 2016 study on the diversity of NEETs provides a new categorization into seven subgroups in order to better understand the composition of this group of young people. The aim is to better assist policymakers in understanding who the NEETs are and to assist the design of adequate support measures to meet a wide variety of needs.

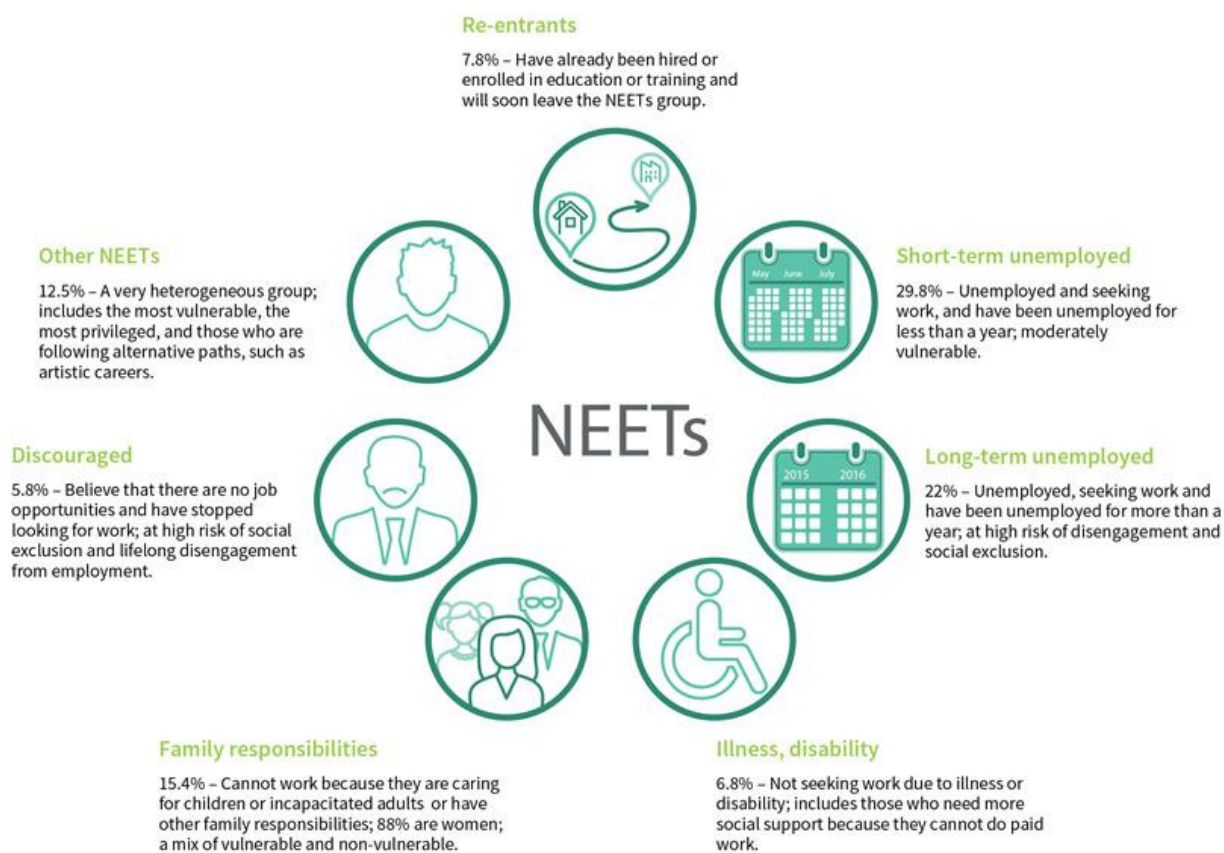


Figure 1: Diversity of NEETs. <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/topic/neets>

Finally, this group of young people is of particular interest, as there is a high risk that it will have negative consequences for the rest of the young people's lives, and that they will find themselves in a form of permanent vulnerability (Andersen, Jensen, Wullum Nielsen

<sup>2</sup> The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) is a tripartite European Union Agency, whose role is to provide knowledge to assist in the development of better social, employment and work-related policies. Eurofound was established in 1975 by Council Regulation (EEC) No. 1365/75 to contribute to the planning and design of better living and working conditions in Europe.

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and Rose Skaksen, 2015). It poses a challenge for the individual, but it is also a considerable current and future socio-economic challenge.

The high number of NEETs has cost the European economies an estimated €142 billion a year (2015) in benefits and forgone earnings and taxes. (Eurofound 2020).

Like the NEET group being highly diverse, the countries in YIT are as well. Each country is built on its own laws, welfare system, culture etc. which also influence how they work with the NEETs group.

The official international NEET indicator covers such a heterogeneous group of young people that it is not ideal to use as an indicator of the extent of vulnerable young people in each of the 'YIT countries.' But it does serve a purpose to have a look at overall statistics:

Country	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Denmark	7.6%	8.1%	8.2%	9.3%	9.2%	9.3%
Iceland	6.5%	5.0%	4.7%	4.1%	5.3%	5.7%
Slovenia	11.9%	11.8%	10.4%	8.9%	7.9%	7.6%
EU28	14,7%	14,2%	13,4%	12,6%	12,2%	11,7%

The indicator measures the share of NEETs. The data is presented by citizenship. Eurostat 2020: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg\\_08\\_20a/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_08_20a/default/table?lang=en)

All YIT countries lie below the EU average, but it is also worth noting, that the share of NEETs in EU28 as total decreases to its lowest point in ten years at the same time as the rate *increases* in Denmark and Iceland.

This is particularly crucial to address, as young people, especially having just left education, could be hit harder economically by the COVID-19 fallout, mainly because they tend to work more in sectors worst affected by the shutdown, on temporary contracts or in other insecure and precarious forms of work. This leaves them more susceptible to layoffs or working time reductions, putting them more at risk of long-term unemployment or hindering entry to the labour market.

It is difficult to make one size recommendations that fits all countries taken the above into consideration. Nevertheless, the common experiences we can learn from has been emphasized in the analysis "The needs of the NEETs and the needs of the professionals," and precedes the recommendations provided in this paper.



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# Current legislation

Even if it falls out of the scope of the YIT project and this paper, it is interesting to briefly pinpoint the timing of relevant national legislation with the increase/decrease of NEETs in numbers. See also Annex: Selective overview of relevant legislation.

## Denmark

Since the cash benefit reform in 2013, there have been increased demands for contact with and activation of the so called 'activity-ready' young people in the Job Centers. This means that the most vulnerable young people, who perhaps before the reform went under the radar, from 2013 make up a larger and larger proportion of the young people under the age of 25 that the Job Centers in the municipalities work with.

In 2014 a major reform of the vocational training system was implemented. The key elements of the reform were to simplify the structure of and the access requirements to vocational training. An immanent element in the VET reform was a significant reallocation of the educational youth guidance system, directing guidance efforts primarily towards youth assessed 'not educational ready'.

As reflected also in the statistic overview provided above, the NEET group nevertheless continued to increase from 2014 and forward.

In 2019 all municipalities each established a so-called coherent municipal youth effort (Den kommunale ungeindsats: KUI) that coordinates the young people's overall course across education, employment, and social efforts. Young people under the age of 25 who are not in the process of or have not completed a vocationally qualifying youth education can receive guidance on education and job from the municipal youth effort. The job center and the municipal youth effort collaborate on young people under the age of 25, when relevant.

The long-term effects of the coherent municipal youth efforts are yet to be tracked and proved.

## Iceland

Emphasis on the NEET group has been in focus for the past years in Iceland and within systems working with the group. Cooperation between systems has been a big focus point and with hard work and participation in projects regarding the NEET group a 'chain

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responsibility' between relevant actors has got stronger. However, this is a long-term process where professionals and systems working with this group have their welfare in focus.

At the Directorate of Labour (VMST), young people in vulnerable situation (NEETs) have been a priority group regarding service and resources. One of the resources VMST offers unemployed people, is the opportunity to seek education alongside unemployment benefits. Since the Covid-19 outbreak the number of unemployed persons increased significantly. General unemployment rate increased by more than 40% between 2020 and 2021 and over 30% within the NEET group. The Government responded to these increased numbers in many ways. One was to expand regulations regarding education while receiving unemployment benefits. Regulations regarding the labour market were also expanded, recruitment support and workplace training for example. (More information below). (Reglugerð um þátttöku atvinnuleitenda sem tryggðir eru innan atvinnuleysistryggingakerfisins í vinnumarkaðsaðgerðum og um greiðslu styrkja úr Atvinnuleysistryggingasjóði nr.1224/2019).

Stakeholders are concerned about welfare of young people in vulnerable situation and are continuously working on finding effective ways to meet the needs of this group. The expansions of these regulations mentioned above is one way. Long term effects from these expansions are yet to be seen since they were valid only from early 2021.

## Slovenia

Learning from the period of the last economic crisis, during and after which the youth has been hit the most severely, Slovenia has also been ensuring the youth's optimal development and creating better opportunities for them to successfully enter the labour market mostly through a Youth Guarantee program such as one-year program (PUM-0) supporting young (15–26-year-old) at risk of becoming NEET (prolonging initial PUM program). Besides, relevant topical issues are being raised and discussed at different levels by various stakeholders and addressed through collective and single actions, programs and projects.

Staying in education system and keeping on track towards gaining qualifications is well supported by several systemic measures, such as counseling service at schools, integrated career orientation in schools, child support for families of minors, and state scholarship for upper secondary and higher education students (depending on the economic situation of the family), enabled vertical and horizontal transition among educational programs, reintroduction of apprenticeship in 2017, widespread and low-cost formal education for adults, etc.

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The data show that the number of students leaving education and training system early (ELET) is remaining below 5% (Eurostat) although the methodology is not really predicting the future NEETs.<sup>3</sup> The percentage of NEETs in Slovenia has been 6% to 8% and was raised to 13% or 14% in the period after the 2008 economic crisis. A recent study (OECD, 2020) has shown that more than half of all young NEET in Slovenia (2011-2018) were not registered at employment office and were thus not included in the statistics, which calls for further actions.

Apart from that, the public agency Employment Service of Slovenia has 58 offices and 12 Career Centers all around the country where the young people can find support anywhere from job brokerage, active measures referrals, administration of unemployment insurance benefits, counselling and career guidance. Additional career centers are formed at higher education institutions and eight career counseling for all young at adult education institutions. Further, 61 Centers for Social Care around Slovenia administer social benefits and provide material subsistence to families and children in need.

In 2017 legislation on upper secondary education was adopted preventing so called "fictional students" exploiting the social and economic benefits (scholarships, child benefits). It limited the number of repetitions of grades or changing the programs. In theory it could increase the number of ELET and NEETs in the following years, given also the expected consequences of the current epidemic.<sup>4</sup>

Anyhow, there are several issues to be discussed. See chapter below on recommendations.

## Policy briefs: Plug and play policy

The impact of national legislation is most often on systemic level, indirect and entails long term effects, even if Covid-19 in many countries, including Denmark, Iceland and Slovenia, has led to an unprecedented rate at which legislation has sought to address acute problematic issues directly.

Direct impact on individual level and with short term effects call for local initiatives based on concrete recommendations close to practice.

The majority of partners in YIT consist of professional practitioners working directly with NEETs. As such, they are the most knowledgeable and experienced in actual NEET-work

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<sup>3</sup> [https://cpi.si/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Metodologija\\_ZOIU.pdf](https://cpi.si/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Metodologija_ZOIU.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://cpi.si/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Metodologija\\_ZOIU.pdf](https://cpi.si/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Metodologija_ZOIU.pdf)

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and have valuable insights about how policies are implemented and where gaps exist. Hence these partners have been producing *policy briefing notes* throughout their work with the outputs of YIT, and for that reason each brief refers directly to a specific output (IO) in YIT. See Annex: Catalogue of policy briefs.

Briefing notes are simply written policy advice prepared for local low level decision makers; they are more concise and less analytical than traditional policy papers. The policy briefs are produced to be 'standalone' notes, independent of each other, regardless of legislation and aimed for easy installment, direct and immediate local impact. We call it 'plug and play policy'.

Policy recommendations usually must be presented in a standard format, depending on the recipient body. The aim here is a generic format of policy briefs that can be localized to meet the format required by a specific body, be it local, a municipal council or a national ministry. In that sense, the partners CPI, VMST and EUK, can easily continue producing briefs, continue proposing policy aimed at immediate implementation.

The catalogue of briefs is concentrated on the competence profile of the 'Scout function' (IO4) and the individual NEETs – pathways, also referred to as 'chain responsibility' (IO6).

In a cross-national development process a generic competence profile of a 'scout' was outlined. The model is non-normative. It is intended to inspire professionals for considering their competences, respectively to inspire managers in planning employment, allocation of work tasks or empowerment processes. The very outset for developing a competence profile is the joint Danish, Icelandic, German and Slovenian conclusion, that a professional contact person – a 'Scout' – is crucial for a NEET throughout his or her individual pathway. The generic competence profile is generalized and generated from national competence profiles for 'scouts' in Denmark, Slovenia and Iceland.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, a generic model for designing individual pathways for NEETs in a cross-professional context, supported by these close contact persons ('scouts') has been developed. Again, the underlying premise of the work has been that there is need for strong cross-professional work across involved institutions and actors with close communication between the parties. The generic model has inspired the construction of national didactic models in Denmark, Slovenia and Iceland.<sup>6</sup>

Even the national models are generic and aimed for localization within a specific context or even organization.

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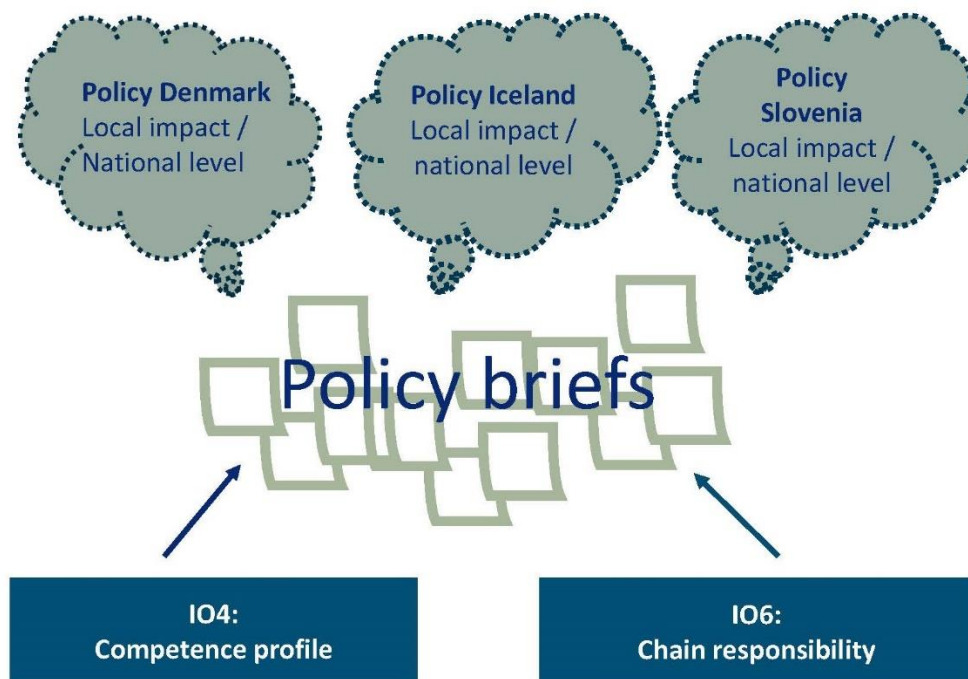
<sup>5</sup> See Youth in transition website: <https://youth-it.cool/2020/11/competence-profile-final/>

<sup>6</sup> See Youth in transition website: <https://youth-it.cool/2020/07/individual-pathways-didactic/>

The recommendations formulated in the briefs can be understood as an even further practical concretization translated into a national or local context. As such, the motivation for and the actual recommendations themselves are easily recognized by the relevant professionals and (local) decision makers, paving the way for easy installment.

## Need for change

The policy briefs can also form a base on which full-scale policy recommendations can be developed in each partner country. Such a process needs to involve a range of relevant stakeholders in each country, including the NEETs, relate to current legislation and political climate and include financial estimates. Elaborating the policy briefs into comprehensive and coherent national policy has not been feasible nor was it the scope within the limited timeframe and resources of YIT.



The briefs nonetheless form a catalogue of disparate suggestions and as such constitutes an implicit outset for formulating national policies to accommodate the needs of the professionals, the needs of societies and – most importantly – the needs of the NEETs.

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## Denmark

As mentioned above, in the last few years, a series of reform initiatives in the areas of education and employment have been implemented in Denmark. These reforms aim to reduce the proportion of NEETs, to mobilize the potential of education, workforce, economy, production, and technology, so that Denmark becomes stronger in the arena of increasing global competition.

It seems proper to ask, then: What are the challenges we face as a society? And who should find the solutions to these challenges? As EUK's field of work and competence is youth guidance, the recommendations here are limited to this domain alone.

The labour market is changing at an increasing speed and predicting the needs of the future is a growing challenge. This tendency is creating growing pressure on competence development, mobility, and flexibility in the labour market and therefore also pressure on the generations now in the educational system and on their way out into the labour market. It is worth noting, that the number of NEETs increase in Denmark these years. One consideration is if the growing pressure on the youth has a co-responsibility for the rise in numbers of NEETs.

This also reinforces the dual aims of guidance as stated in the Danish Act on Guidance; to "help to make educational and career choices benefit the individual as well as society in the most optimal way."

Many young people find it difficult to plan and set goals regarding education, in particular due to the increasing speed of change in the labour market. Especially for young people who are without education and employment, there is a need for clarity as to the purpose of guidance and its role and position. Nonetheless, NEETs need to live in, thrive in and meet the requirements of society in general and the labour market in particular. The NEET group is – all its differences untold – subjected to the same challenges of the future society and labour market as all youth.

In response to structural changes, as well as the labour market's increasing complexity, for example seen in increasing automation and temporary employment, several central actors point to career guidance as an intervention that can help youth develop competencies in managing their own career development, education, and employment, so that their career wishes are fulfilled.

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EU and OECD emphasize career guidance as an important element of competency policy in the future,<sup>7</sup> including, in particular, educational and labour market reforms. Lifelong guidance is seen as a central strategy in competence and career development and as a socioeconomic boost for all members of society. The Reinforced Youth Guarantee<sup>8</sup> recommends cohesive, professional educational and career guidance as important means of ensuring inclusion of youth in the labour force and counteracting marginalization. In the latest report on competencies of the future, OECD stresses the importance of being able to manage tensions and dilemmas that will not disappear, but must be balanced for the individual, as well as for the community.

Career learning and career guidance can also serve as a vehicle for social justice:<sup>9</sup> career learning and guidance activities can help to create opportunities for education and jobs for the young people and for living the life they want in general. When such activities succeed in expanding young people's perceptions of what is possible, the guidance helps to strengthen social mobility and justice. Precisely because it is a step towards creating equal opportunities for all. (Rie Thomsen, et al., 2020).

## Challenges from a youth perspective

The needs of the NEETs are described in the analysis “The needs of the NEETs and the needs of the professionals,” and will not be further investigated or described in this paper. Here the focus is on the fact that challenges for all youth are applicable and particularly important for the subgroup of NEETs.

For young people in primary and secondary education, as well as preparatory education, uncertainty about the future is very real. This uncertainty is aggravated by the fact that the young people have relatively poor knowledge of the educational system's possibilities and requirements. At the same time, the educational system is becoming more complex, with many different paths and rules that can be difficult to understand. This is also the case in the labour market; many young people are unaware of the opportunities it offers, and of the connections between the educational system and the labour market.

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<sup>7</sup> Council of the European Union (2008). Council Resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies. Brussels, EU.

[http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressData/en/educ/104236.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/educ/104236.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> The reinforced Youth Guarantee is a commitment by all EU Member States to ensure that all young people under the age of 30 receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education.

<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1079&langId=en>

<sup>9</sup> The concept of ‘social justice’ covers three specific goals for guidance and career learning activities: increased formal equality, increased equity and increased social inclusion.

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Young people's motivation and well-being is challenged in primary education as well as in secondary education. The aims of courses and learning are not often seen in the perspective of meaning and practical application. School subjects and learning are often more about performance and high marks than a question of education and personal goals in the perspective of the individual youth's future.

Young people feel immensely pressured to make *choices* about education, rather than *learning* about education. There is a much greater focus on what young people *choose* than on how they can learn how to make good, personal, and realistic choices. And youth's access to professional guidance has diminished considerably in the last few years. Also, the pressure on youth to choose vocational training risks becoming counterproductive, because young people feel that it is something others want them to do, rather than something they wish to do themselves.

## Challenges from a societal perspective

The needs of society and the labour market for competence and education are changing more and more rapidly. Globalization, automation, and new technologies exert increasing pressure on the labour force regarding competencies, just as the need for mobility and flexibility is increasing. This increase demands regarding not only level of education, but also personal competencies. The ability to adapt, to continually learn, to adjust and to self-manage is crucial and increasingly important – and poses sincere challenges for NEETs. Unfortunately, this need is not met by clear, cohesive, and professional youth guidance counselling.

The Danish educational system has become an education market, where competition to attract young people is getting more and more fierce. Sales promotion of educational programmes can be quite aggressive. This causes an increase in drop-out and change of study in the educational system, because young people find that what they were told to expect before they chose their study programme does not match their experiences in the programme. There is also seems to be a lack of nuance in the discussion: For example, there is a strong narrative about a general challenge regarding recruitment of students for skilled vocational training programmes. In reality, some vocational domains are experiencing serious shortages, while other will most likely disappear due to technology and automation.

The structure of youth education, with very specific vocational training programmes on the one hand and very broad upper secondary school programmes on the other hand, is an increasing challenge. Young people of 15 or 16 years are not prepared for or ready to make a very specific choice. The strategy of young people is, therefore, to keep many



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possibilities and doors open, and this counteracts the need for more youth to choose vocational education at a very young age.

More and more young people are unhappy and experience stress. There is an increasing focus on education readiness in young people, seen as marks and performance, as well as more and stricter transition requirements between educational programmes. 1/3 of the students in form 8 are assessed “not ready” for youth education and drop-out rates are still relatively high in the educational system, especially in vocational education and training (VET).

It seems we have created an education system that poses flexibility for the resourceful young persons and appears insurmountable and inaccessible for the not so resourceful and for the NEETs.

## **The potential of youth guidance**

During these last years, the potential of youth guidance has been discussed nationally as well as internationally; across Europe the same types of challenges are emerging. For example, the EU recommends that lifelong guidance be integrated to a greater degree in the strategies of lifelong learning, in particular emphasizing the potential of guidance to prepare individuals to a life in a labour market that is rapidly changing.

Regarding the challenges described above, in a national and international context, there are a number of ways in which professional educational and career guidance can contribute to meeting these challenges.

First, guidance is neutral and neither dependent on sector nor educational institution. Youth and their parents can feel secure in the guidance they receive. Guidance can provide factual and up to date information and knowledge about possibilities for education as well as employment. These perspectives are explicitly incorporated in the Danish versions of the competence profile of the scout/contact person (I04) and the didactical model for Individual pathways for NEETs in cross-professional settings (I06).

Second, guidance can challenge the norms and myths embedded in the choices individuals make regarding education and employment. It can broaden their horizons, so that they see themselves and their options in a new light. Guidance is not only about information, but even more, about exploring perspectives on life and relating them to present needs, demands and possibilities.

Third, guidance is seen from the perspective of ‘education’ referring to the German notion of ‘Bildung’ and learning, rather than that of choice. Guidance teaches people about the requirements and possibilities of the educational system and relates this knowledge to personal potential, so that those receiving guidance become aware of their own strengths

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and possibilities. At the same time, guidance can teach young people in particular to be aware of the relationship between education and employment. In this way, guidance can contribute significantly to making young people feel less pressured and stressed about their educational and vocational choices. Guidance brings youth new insight, readiness for action and decision-making competencies from a solid base of knowledge. These perspectives are attempted to be written into the tool for self-evaluation towards vocational maturity (I02).

Fourth, guidance can be a closely accessible and visible help for young people, while also being used as outreach to vulnerable populations and to young people who drop out of study programmes or jobs, or risk of doing so. The guidance counsellor can also work across different systems and structures, in this way acting both as contact person and as the bridge between systems. These perspectives are explicitly incorporated in the Danish versions of the competence profile of the scout/contact person (I04) and the didactical model for Individual pathways for NEETs in cross-professional settings (I06).

Fifth, guidance creates social cohesion between students in primary and secondary school, preparatory programmes, youth education, companies and further and continuing education. Guidance can significantly increase cohesion and quality in the learning and bridge-building processes that should take place between primary and secondary school, higher education institutions, students/course participants and the needs of the labour market. Guidance can take place before, during and after these processes, so that practical application and benefit are as optimal as possible for the individual. This perspective is explicitly incorporated in the Danish version the didactical model for Individual pathways for NEETs in cross-professional settings (I06), also referred to in a Danish context as 'chain responsibility.'

Sixth, youth guidance contributes to equality and to social mobility. Guidance should challenge gender stereotypes in educational decisions and contribute to equality in the labour market. This is also true regarding disability, sexual preference and ethnic background. The Danish version of the competence profile (I04) is based on The UN Sustainable Development Goals, specifically number 1: No poverty and can easily relate to number 5: gender equality.

Social justice has probably always been the implicit *raison d'être* of youth guidance, but without an actual translation into practical action and methods. In Denmark, educational, vocational, and career guidance operates in a systemic field that lacks an actual vision.

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The educational policy goal in Denmark<sup>10</sup> is the quantitative intention that a given part of a youth cohort must choose a given field of education: vocational educational training. It is not a vision, but a direction. For some. A directional vision, in turn, must be an ambition about social justice for all. Youth guidance must fulfill this vision. How else to balance the Guidance Act's initial requirement that "Youth guidance under this Act must contribute to the choice of education and profession being of the greatest possible benefit to the individual and to society equally."

It is crucial for youth guidance as a profession that it is anchored - concretely methodically and action-oriented - in a necessity that goes beyond current trends. Social justice is *the* resonant basis for the purpose of youth guidance as a profession.

The ethical perspectives in youth guidance must be rethought and translated into a guidance practice, which lifts youth guidance beyond the relationship to the individual NEET; guidance has a greater responsibility. Such a guidance practice would provide necessary competencies on guidance and social justice. For counselors in general, as a compulsory element. But especially also for the counselors who must rethink their profession and their practice in the framework of the new municipal youth efforts. A new framework for guidance competencies is needed. The Danish version of the generic didactical model for NEETs pathways (I06) in a cross-professional context, supported by close contact persons/'scouts', and the Danish version of the generic competence profile for the scout (I04), can be understood in this context.

## Recommendations on systemic level

Considering the challenges of today and the future, of the potential and evidence of youth guidance, and the political reforms of recent years, with large cutbacks in educational youth guidance and a focus on youth at risk, it is recommended that youth guidance is repositioned, so that aims and efforts match the challenges of today and the future:<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.uvm.dk/erhvervsuddannelser/skoleudvikling/klare-maal/om-klare-maal>

<sup>11</sup> These recommendations have previously been discussed with the listed key actors:

DUEK

Economic Council of the Labour Movement (Arbejderbevægelsens Erhvervsråd)

Danish Trade Union Confederation (Dansk Industri)

Danish Association of School Heads (Skolelederforeningen)

Danish Union of Teachers (Danmarks Lærereforening)

The Association of Danish Pupils (Danske Skoleelever)

The Danish Vocational and Technical School Students Union (Erhvervsskolernes Elevorganisation)

The National Federation of Business Students in Denmark (Landssammenslutningen af Handelsskoleelever)

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- ! That individuals, young as well as adult, have easy and equal access to professional guidance independent of sector and educational institution.
  - ! That a national research center for guidance is established.
  - ! That cohesive career learning paths throughout the educational system are aimed for: we refer to the Danish version of the didactical model (106) as an outset.
  - ! That guidance can challenge gender stereotypes in choice of education and contribute to equality in the labour market regarding functional disability, sexual preference and ethnic background.
  - ! That guidance can promote social mobility.
  - ! That the changing needs of the labour market are supported by professional guidance.
  - ! That a generic competency profile for professional guidance is created that supports its aims and tasks: we refer to the Danish model (104).



### **! Recommendation for Denmark:**

It is recommended that the Danish government establish a committee, which, involving relevant actors, and users of guidance, formulates a proposal for a national guidance strategy in a lifelong perspective, creating a platform for political discussions regarding a guidance reform.

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The Union of Danish Upper Secondary School Students (Danske Gymnasieelevers Sammenslutning)  
The Danish Association for Guidance Counsellors (Danmarks Vejlederforening)  
Youth Guidance Denmark (UU Danmark)  
Rie Thomsen, associate professor, Aarhus University  
Randi Skovhus, associate professor, VIA University College  
Camilla Hutter, project director, EVA  
Mette Pless, associate professor, CEFU  
Noemi Katznelson, professor, CEFU  
Steffen Jensen, consultant

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## Iceland

For some time, there has been a call for increased cooperation between different parties that provide services to young individuals with multiple problems to improve overview and increase integration. In 2018 the Ministry of Welfare responded to this call by launching a three-year collaborative project. A strategy was formed to work against long term unemployment, to decrease the probability of disability of young people. The emphases are cooperation between all systems working with young vulnerable people (NEETs). All involved has the same goal; to increase cooperation and decrease long term unemployment (Þingskjal nr. 1181 – 750.mál./2018-2019).

Since then, it has been a priority project at The Directorate of Labour (VMST) among other institutions, to put focus on this NEET group. The goal is to decrease the number of young people that have been unemployed for 12 months or more, by offering them counselling and participation in a sustainable activity. This focus is coherent with results of various studies; the importance of intervention for those who are inactive and the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration between groups that work with this group.

In 2018 the VMST took an initiative and made a formal collaboration among the representatives of those who work with young people; VMST, Social Services, VIRK rehabilitation Center, VET schools and Health Care. From this cooperative work another group of cooperation has been formed where one of the goals is to establish a counseling center for young people (One Stop Shop). This cooperation consists of VMST, Bergið headspace (Support and Counselling Center for young people), Virk rehabilitation Center, the Social Services in Reykjavík and the Healthcare System in Reykjavík. This concept, One stop shop, is an independent place where young people can look for support and advice at one place regardless of where they belong in the system. The aim is among others to decrease the chance of young people falling in between systems and to encourage them to seek support through a counselor. This can increase the activity of young people and meet their needs.

In addition to this cooperation between systems, VMST has expanded regulations regarding work and education for unemployed people (Reglugerð um þátttöku atvinnuleitenda sem tryggðir eru innan atvinnuleysistryggingakerfisins í vinnumarkaðsaðgerðum og um greiðslu styrkja úr Atvinnuleysistryggingasjóði nr.1224/2019). Emphasis is also placed on offering education that the labour market demands, where VET education plays an important role. Regulations regarding recruitment support have also been expanded. Unemployed people who have been registered for unemployment benefits for one month are entitled to this grant. This is a grant for the company that hires an unemployed person and stands for six months. With these new regulations more emphasis has also been placed on workplace training. With

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workplace training an unemployed person can have a training at a workplace with a mentor for up to 13 weeks. These expansions in the regulations are an important part of supporting young people and offers more sustainable opportunities (Reglugerð um þátttöku atvinnuleitenda sem tryggðir eru innan atvinnuleysistryggingakerfisins í vinnumarkaðsaðgerðum og um greiðslu styrkja úr Atvinnuleysistryggingasjóði nr.1224/2019).

## Recommendations on systemic level

How can we increase the welfare of young people in vulnerable situation and strengthen the cooperation between systems working with young people? There are many stakeholders working with the NEET group on different levels, various professions, and systems. Therefore it's important to coordinate the approach between systems. It's also important to improve the services for young people and to make sure that a quality service is offered.

We know cooperation, activity and goal setting increases the quality of life of the NEET group and it can also increase the quality of the service. VMST has and will continue to emphasize on activity, increased possibilities in education and work as well as cooperation between systems working with the group. It is recommended to continue and strengthen even further the chain responsibility (I06) between relevant actors, the focus on supporting young people in vulnerable situation, to offer them quality service, to offer more various and sustainable activities regarding education and work, and to expand opportunities for the NEET group. The competency framework for the contact person/the scout (I04) can combine all these aspects that are recommended here and therefore it is recommended that professionals working with the NEET group will work within the framework.



### **! Recommendation for Iceland:**

It is recommended that professionals who are working with NEETs should work within a competency framework to attain the best service for the NEET group. A new competency profile called Scout is recommended as the best suited framework. The profile both includes organizational role and counseling role. Scouts should be able to counsel and support youth personally from principles of career learning, as well as coordinate supportive initiatives across sectors. [The profile is available in Icelandic and is recommended to be used by Scouts.](#)

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## Slovenia

Slovenia has a decentralized support system with resources and personnel spread among different governmental and non-governmental organizations which makes it a challenge in serving the NEET population in a more holistic approach. While the systemic level lacks the formalization of cross-professional and cross-organizational support of NEETs, at the local level some good examples exist especially in the project driven activities where the specific roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders are preassigned. In most cases the good practices are not carried on after the project lifetime, leaving the NEET's support system in dependence of personal connections and resources of professionals.

There is a transparent need for measures that rely on a coordinated level of support and resources offered by a range of professionals from education, social, health, youth, labor-market, and law-enforcement sectors and also from companies, municipalities and NGOs. These systems ought to become open to cooperation and flexible enough to ensure the optimal support for the youth not only during the period of transition but also after. The role of organizations and professionals should be clearly defined, formalized and binding.

Youth Council of Slovenia argues that the youth policies are not founded on adequate analyzes, making the carried activities not being directed at the youth's most problematic areas.<sup>12</sup> These remarks were confirmed by the Court of Audit (2017)<sup>13</sup> adding that the monitoring of NEETs is not sufficiently included in analyses. There is currently no systemic traceability of the youth in transition at individual level once they leave the education system. Practice of traceability that existed in the 1990s discontinued due to the new personal data protection legislation. Options for creating an enduring system of traceability as well as joint databases to better the quality of the support processes and enable the establishment of the "fast response protocol" should be examined. In this way the response time from the detection of potential of one becoming a NEET to the first relevant actions taken could be shorten.

The second issue relating to non-adequate needs of the NEETs analysis (also pointed out by the Court of Audit) was a remark on adopted measures. It was assessed that measures are not permanently solving the problems of young people and not responding to the actual needs of the youth, leaving many of them constantly facing the same problems

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<sup>12</sup> <http://mss.si/novice/racunsko-sodisce-potrdilo-kritikam-mladinskega-sveta-slovenije-napram-drzavi-o-neucinkovitem-izvajanju-ukrepov-mladinske-politike/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.rs-rs.si/revizije-in-revidiranje/arhiv-revizij/revizija/ucinkovitost-mladinske-politike-603/>

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including precariousness of work, working outside their profession, and insufficient national housing policy.<sup>14</sup>

Career guidance services in Slovenia are guaranteed by law/guidelines and pupils in basic education undergo some form of career guidance before they finish basic education provided by teachers and school counsellors also in cooperation with career counsellors from the Employment Service of Slovenia and other organizations. It includes either group activities or/and optional one-on-one conversation. Anyhow, due to career learning skills not being sufficiently included in the basic and upper-secondary curricula, these activities are usually not very extensive.<sup>15</sup>

For students to start developing their career management skills (including vocational maturity) early enough, schools and other organizations should be given enough sustainable resources. This would support a consistent development of career management skills of students while they are in basic school and should continue up through upper secondary schools.

## Recommendations on systemic level

- ! Cross-organizational cooperation and their responsibilities (chain responsibility) in supporting the youth in transition should be addressed.
- ! A one-year preparatory program for the graduates of basic education should be placed within the educational system. Program should aim, considering the didactic principle of individualization, to consolidate and upgrade basic knowledge, career development skills and support students at entering upper-secondary education programs to pursue the vocation or profession of their choice.
- ! The range of lifelong career orientation activities in schools (basic and upper secondary) should be increased and resources secured.
- ! Activities addressing vocational maturity of the youth should be integrated in career management skills learning activities in all levels of education.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/slovenia/slovenia-active-labour-market-policies-to-fight-unemployment.pdf> and <https://www.mladiplus.si/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/RAZISKAVA-mladi-in-dostojno-delo-1-1-popravljena-infografika.pdf>

<sup>15</sup>

[https://adultguidance.eu/images/Reports/Needs\\_Analysis/GOAL\\_Needs\\_Analysis\\_Report\\_Final\\_Version\\_May\\_31.pdf](https://adultguidance.eu/images/Reports/Needs_Analysis/GOAL_Needs_Analysis_Report_Final_Version_May_31.pdf)



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- ! System of student traceability should be established while protecting their privacy. Options for amending the legislation to establish joint databases across sectors should be examined.
  - ! Further methodological development of statistical analysis in the field of young (school dropout, ELET, NEET etc.).
  - ! The NEETs' needs analyses should be more extensive, targeted, and periodical.
  - ! A new YIT competence profile of a Scout is considered when seeking the solutions to organize/formalize chain responsibility.



### **! Recommendation for Slovenia:**

It is recommended that, in order to encourage the development of cross-sectoral cooperation, chain responsibility, and competencies of counselors and to effectively support the young in transition, local coordination bodies are established.

## **Proposals for cross national follow up**

The work in YIT has also given rise to the following insights and suggestions for follow-up in each of the partner countries in YIT, or even as a potential further co-work between the partners:

- ! The term "vocational maturity" has proven useful for the description of a NEET's status and goal and should be used systemically and consistent among youth actors working with NEETs who are inclined towards VET, i.e., a further validation of the tool for self-evaluation of vocational maturity (I02).

Additional research could advantageously be carried out in the following areas:

- ! Longitudinal study of the process of NEETs, beyond the limited timeframe of a project (2½ year in YIT), i.e., a further development of the progression sheets used in working with the individual NEETs' pathways (I06): in more detail and stretched over a longer period of time.
- ! Operationalization of the term "vocational maturity" such as a deeper research of the criteria and indicators of vocational maturity, i.e., to strengthen the validation of the tool for self-evaluation of vocational maturity (I02).

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# The needs of the NEETs and the needs of society

Denmark, Iceland, and Slovenia are all very well-developed welfare states but also very small countries with small populations, which requires that a very high proportion of all youth get educated and contribute as work force. Well-established welfare states ensure (in principle) equal opportunities for all. But equal opportunities do not in themselves create equality. The most vulnerable young still have the poorest access to education and employment. At the same time, a very high employment rate is considered a prerequisite for developed welfare states in which we are all human resources. This 'resource perspective' on young people, incl. NEETs, is paradoxical.

With a reference to the initial analysis "The needs of the NEETs and the needs of the professionals" (IO1) the implicit question behind not only the analysis but also the policy briefs and the national recommendations formulate itself across the partner countries:

To what extent is it realistic, fair and necessary to require NEETs to adapt to the existing educational system (specifically VET), and labour market? And to what extent can and should the educational system (VET) and the labour market be made flexible and inclusive enough to better attract, motivate and retain NEETs?

The question refers not only to the complex structures of the educational system in each of the partner countries and the globalized labor market as such, but also to the perception of the NEET group: as a very diverse group characterized by a high degree of complexity in their challenges, yet with competencies, dreams, goals and potential to meet the given societal settings and requirements. Potential the society is very keen on unlocking. Hence the work with NEETs is intensive, consistent, and insistently targeted towards education and lasting employment in the job market as we know it.

On this route, it seems we – as society, as professionals – ask the most vulnerable young people the most difficult questions on their pathway towards 'vocational maturity'. This dilemma or paradox is immanent in the work with the individual NEETs and throughout the work in "Youth in transition" and the recommendations formulated in its wake.

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☞ *Why the fuck do we have to do this? I'm not gonna have a life like my dad! What if I want a life, you can't even imagine?*<sup>16</sup>

☞ *Hvorfor fuck skal vi det? Jeg skal sgu ikke have et liv som min far! Hvad nu hvis jeg vil have et liv, du slet har ikke har fantasi til?*



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<sup>16</sup> Young male, age 16 at Step10/EUD10 Holstebro, Denmark, November 2019 prior to testing (IO3) the tool for evaluation of vocational maturity (IO2). EUD10 is a vocational class course grade 10th for pupils who want to start a vocational education, but do not meet the entry requirements for VET.

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# References and literature

For an extensive list of literature and references for the entire project as such and including this paper, see: the analysis "The needs of the NEETs and the needs of the professionals." p. 49 ff.

Listed here are *only* sources not already included in the analysis.

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Reglugerð um þátttöku atvinnuleitenda sem tryggðir eru innan atvinnuleysistryggingakerfisins í vinnumarkaðsaðgerðum og um greiðslu styrkja úr Atvinnuleysistryggingasjóði nr.1224/2019.

Þingskjal nr. 1181 – 750.mál./2018-2019. Tillaga til þingsályktunar um fjármálaáætlun fyrir árin 2020-2024.

## Annexes

**Annex 1) Selective overview of relevant legislation**

**Annex 2) Catalogue of policy briefs**